

**DRAFT**

## ***Remembering Bob***

It is a distinct honour and privilege to have been asked to share some of my remembrances of our friend, Robert Arthur Stead, best known in this place, and in the town of Wolfville, as well as, in municipal government circles across the country, as just “Bob Stead”. A remarkable individual who lived life with zest and verve, with good humour and keen intelligence, with a joyful spirit and a grateful heart, and with a deeply-felt commitment to serving others. Bob has graced our lives with his presence and we are ever so much the better for it.

It is very fitting that Bob’s memorial service should be held here in University Hall. It is the place where he convoked in the Spring of 1963; one floor down, is the place that housed his office for the 27 years he served as Director of Admissions; and, here, in Convocation Hall, is where he represented the Town of Wolfville at all of the Convocations that took place during his 15 years as Mayor. There is a lot of Bob in these walls and in this place!

I can’t honestly remember when I first met Bob but I do know that it was during the time that he served as Director of Admissions. This was a position that was a ‘natural’ for Bob. He loved Acadia, had had a great student experience himself, had Ruby Mae Thompson as a mentor and friend, and had a genuine interest in people and in the well-being of people. One of the qualities that Bob brought to the position of Director of Admissions was the ability to “look beyond the transcript” in assessing a prospective student’s application for admission. He had an uncanny knack for seeing undocumented potential and, in those cases, was always willing to ‘take a risk’. As a consequence, there are many wonderful stories of Acadia grads with successful careers who attribute their success to Bob’s ability to see that potential and his willingness to ‘take a chance’!

Somewhere along the line, Bob developed an interest in municipal government. To use his own words, it was initially “born of a curiosity”. He wanted to find out “how it worked”. In the fall of 1988, he ran and was elected to Town Council, a position he held for 9 consecutive years. His time on Council whetted his appetite for greater involvement in municipal government and, with his retirement from Acadia in 1996, the stage was set for his consideration of the position of Mayor. In the Municipal Elections of 1997, he was elected to that position and served as Mayor for the next 15 years.

Bob’s career in municipal government is one that includes a long list of significant accomplishments and accolades:

1. first town in Nova Scotia to adopt by-laws for 100% smoke free indoor places (2001)
2. first Fair Trade Town in Canada (2007)
3. first town in Canada to pass legislation prohibiting smoking in cars carrying children (2008)
4. Courage in Public Policy Award from the Canadian Cancer Society (2008)
5. Wolfville Watershed Nature Preserve (2007)
6. Service on the Executives of the Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities.
7. Distinguished Alumni Award from the Associated Alumni of Acadia University (2013)
8. UNSM Ken Simpson Memorial Award for outstanding leadership in municipal governance (2013)

What an amazing legacy! And the list doesn’t end here. Bob was committed to the idea of building healthier communities and provided leadership for a number of initiatives that did just that. He was also an enthusiast for the development of green spaces and for outdoor public art – the Town Clock Mini-Park and the Ruth Abernethy sculpture at the

Waterfront being two notable examples. His enthusiasm was a glorious contagion!

As impressive as is this list of achievements, more remarkable still is the modest and self-effacing manner of this man who has done so much. A discussion of these initiatives would rarely make use of the word, "I". For Bob, it was always a collective effort. We did this and we did that and we made such and such happen! In his typically humble way, Bob would often say of his work as Mayor that he just wanted to help the town be "a little bit better".

Bob loved the town he called home and that was apparent in so many of our conversations. He was proud of Wolfville, proud of its civic-minded citizens; delighted with their willingness to respond to a challenge; and keen to help this small Valley town become all that it could be. He was a visionary and an animateur, a collaborator and a communicator. I think it fair to say that Bob has left the town quite a bit more than "a little bit better"!

Lest you think that Bob was all about business, let me assure you that nothing could be further from the truth. He had a quick wit and a wicked sense of humour! I'm sure he used this to good advantage in his work life but, for me, the memory will always be the banter and repartee of two old friends. As former educators, we shared the joy of convocations but we also looked forward to the opportunity to kibitz before the ceremony would begin. Always a chuckle and a giggle as a start to the day's proceedings.

Bob also loved a good dinner party and he and Danny hosted a good number of them. The food was always superb; the conversation



lively; and the atmosphere upbeat! An invitation to 3 Chestnut Street was always a treat!

Particularly memorable were the “Strawberry Socials” that Bob and Danny hosted during the years of the Atlantic Theatre Festival. Intended as a way to say ‘thank you’ to the performers, directors, staff, and sponsors of the Festival, it quickly became the premier ‘off-stage’ event during the Festival Season!

In reviewing Bob’s two careers – his time at Acadia and his time at the Town – it is apparent that he was a man who gave generously of his time and considerable talents. That generous spirit was also evident in his volunteer activities. Most notable was his long-time interest in and support for the work of L’Arche Homefires. A frequent visitor to Applewicks and an avid promoter of all things L’Arche, Bob was quick to say ‘yes’ to the invitation to Co-Chair the L’Arche “Building Our Dream” Capital Campaign. This was an initiative that was ‘top of mind’ and ‘close to heart’ right to his final days. Bob had a very big heart.

Bob also had a very grateful heart! He never forgot a kindness and he always remembered and gave credit to those people who were positive influences in his life. First and foremost, his family (his Mom and Dad and that full household of adoring sisters); the couple who summered at a neighbouring cottage and who persuaded Bob to pursue post-secondary education; Rupert MacNeil who offered the scholarship that made it possible for Bob to attend Acadia; Ruby Mae Thompson (the Registrar when Bob was a student); Eric Hansen who taught Bob organic chemistry; Helen Beals who introduced him to the world of visual arts and would awaken an interest that would last a lifetime; and Jean Marsh, a fellow visionary and someone who shared his keen interest in municipal

governance and with whom he shared many many long lunches. The list is long; these are but a few.

And then there is Danny, his partner in life and his partner in marriage. This was a relationship that made life more sweet. This was also a relationship that made Bob's life as a public figure ever so much easier. From the juggling of calendars to the fine art and skill of accommodating the impromptu, Danny was always able to 'make it work!' And most important of all, he was the 'listening ear' – Bob's sounding board, his confidant, and his 'go-to-guy' for honest feedback! Bob and Danny shared 17 wonderful years and, for both of them, each day was a joy and a blessing!

Bob once commented that nothing of significance happened in his life but for the influence of people who cared – cared about him, cared about others, cared about the world around them. These were the signposts in his life and, by virtue of his ever-grateful heart and his on-going influence on others, those caring legacies of the past will endure forever.

In keeping with the spirit of Bob and his very grateful heart, I would like to thank all those whose many acts of kindness were such a source of comfort and joy for Bob over the course of this past year. Calls and cards and visits and amazing food and countless offers of help – Bob felt the warm embrace of a very caring community!

And there is also this wonderful gathering of people here today, all of whom have been touched by Bob in some significant way – friend, colleague, co-worker, fellow alum, former student, fellow champion for municipal governance. This is a clearly visible acknowledgement and appreciation of Bob's presence in our lives. He has left us with cherished

memories, a template of what “goodness” looks like, and a clear signpost for going forward. We have much for which to be grateful. Thank you, my friend.