

# Life stories

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## Fiddle champion Arbuckle was devoted husband, father

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Robert Arbuckle was rarely idle.

When daughters Roberta or Adrienne visited their father, he always seemed to be doing something.

He would be practising music, or trying out a new recipe. Robert was always trying to improve — in music, cooking and baking.

He never stopped learning, according to Roberta.

Robert bought a mandolin about two years ago and was teaching himself to play. He loved baking and was forever on the Internet, looking for new recipes. He was continually challenging himself to come up with ways to keep busy, Roberta said. Cooking was definitely one of his passions.

A case in point: He could be out cutting grass or in the middle of gardening. When the Canadian cooking show *Urban Peasant* came on, he would drop whatever he was doing, stop, watch the show, write down the recipe of the day and try it out.

Robert grew up outside of King City. At age 11, he started violin lessons and would later go on to become a renowned fiddler. He learned his first songs from his parents, also fiddle players.

By age 14, he was already playing at square dances around his hometown of Laskay, Ontario.

Robert, or “Bob” as he was also known, played with various groups

over the years, including Art Celsie and the Singing Plainsmen, who had a weekly radio show on CJRH Richmond Hill and later a TV show on CKVR Barrie during the early 1960s.

Robert met his wife Ginny Sherratt while playing with a group in Aurora and they later had their own group from 1965 to 1970.

Ginny was a singer/guitar player from the U.S. She played with singer/accordionist/arranger Joan Fairfax.

Ginny’s parents were both well-known Toronto musicians during the 1930s and ‘40s. In her last year of high school, she joined a local band called The Country Squires, where she met Robert.

The couple would go on to play music for dances at Musselman’s Lake.

The family lived in Oak Ridges for about 20 years. Robert coached for the Oak Ridges Minor Ball Association and also served as president of the association.

The Arbuckle family also lived in Cedar Valley, near Newmarket.

Roberta and Adrienne have happy memories of spending time together as a family tapping syrup from trees and making maple syrup. Their parents flooded the back yard so anyone could skate on the homemade rink. The family also enjoyed cross-country skiing on the property.

Later, Robert and Adrienne ended up performing on the first Friday of every month at a seniors centre in Newmarket, with Robert

playing the fiddle and Adrienne playing the piano.

Robert and Ginny started fiddler and step dancing competitions at Black Creek Pioneer Village and competed at the Royal Winter Fair. The couple ended up competing in step dance and fiddle competitions throughout the province, eventually graduating to judging the competitions.

When Ginny went back to school at age 40 to become a legal secretary, Robert took over duties around the house.

“He was a nice guy and a true gentleman,” Roberta said.



Robert Arbuckle (inset and at right) and beloved wife Ginny were accomplished musicians, making music together throughout York and across Ontario.



Not surprisingly, when Ginny battled cancer for 2-1/2 years, Robert supported her and put his own life on hold to help her.

“It was amazing the time and effort he put in to look after her,” Roberta said. “It was a tireless effort. It was what he wanted to do. He was dedicated and devoted.”

Ginny died in August of 2010. Robert missed her terribly since they had been partners both in love and in song, performing as a duo across York Region and Toronto.

Robert died suddenly of a heart attack Nov. 22, 2015 and funeral services were held at Richmond Hill’s

Marshall Funeral Home.

The weekend he died, he had attended a bluegrass awards event in Huntsville.

“He had a great weekend,” Roberta said. “He was doing something he enjoyed.”

Karen Reed knew Robert through the fiddle contest circuit, posting an online condolence message:

“He leaves behind many memories of kindness, gentleness, wisdom, great tunes and great playing. His life touched hundreds of people in a positive and encouraging way. His contribution to the fiddle world has been highly significant”.

Life stories



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