

ROBB LUCY WAS HERE

Building a legacy can be as simple as putting up a swing set for the neighbourhood kids. The key? Start now.

BY KAITLIN FONTANA

On a hill in France at the height of the Second World War, gunner Robert Lucy crouched next to his best friend, Don McCrea. Not far off, a group of German infantrymen was firing volley after volley in the Canadians' direction. After a solid week of fighting, the two soldiers were exhausted, dirty and sore. Still, Robert and Don held their position. Then the worst possible outcome: A sniper's bullet blasted through Don's skull, killing him instantly.

Fifty years later, Robert, then in his mid-80s, shared this story for the first time with his son, Robb Lucy, who was astonished by the events. Everyone knew Robert had fought in France,



but never before had he depicted his experience in such brutal terms. “They remember the good stuff,” Robb says, referring to his father’s generation of soldiers, “but put the horror down.” Robb realized that unless his father unburdened himself, the truth of his heroic exploits would die with him.

Using skills honed during a stint as a radio journalist for the CBC, Robb prompted his father to supply more details. A compelling account of his father’s combat experience emerged over several years of sessions at the kitchen table. “Fifty stories,” says Robb, “and every one a movie.” Eventually, his father realized the importance of what they were creating. “He

Robert passed on seven years later, in 2009. His son is convinced that the excitement the book generated and its value as a generational memoir were a comfort to his father. “Knowing the effect it had on people while he was still alive,” Robb says, “made a huge difference in my father’s final years.”

Robb is mad for legacies. You could call him a zealot. He wants to hear about your legacy. If you don’t have one, he wants you to create one. He especially wants to change your mind about what a legacy can be. “Most people think their legacies are what they leave behind when they die. I define ‘legacy’ as something I create and enjoy with others now, knowing

A LEGACY IS SOMETHING YOU CREATE AND IT WILL CONTINUE TO ENHANCE THEIR

said, “You know, this could almost be a book.”

And indeed, in 2002 the family self-published 500 copies of *Ubique: A Gunner’s Story*. (“*Ubique*,” Latin for *everywhere*, is the motto of the Canadian and British artillery regiments.) Robert, the proud author, beamed as family and friends lined up for his signature during the launch party, held at a military museum. “That moment,” says Robb, “was worth all the hard work.”



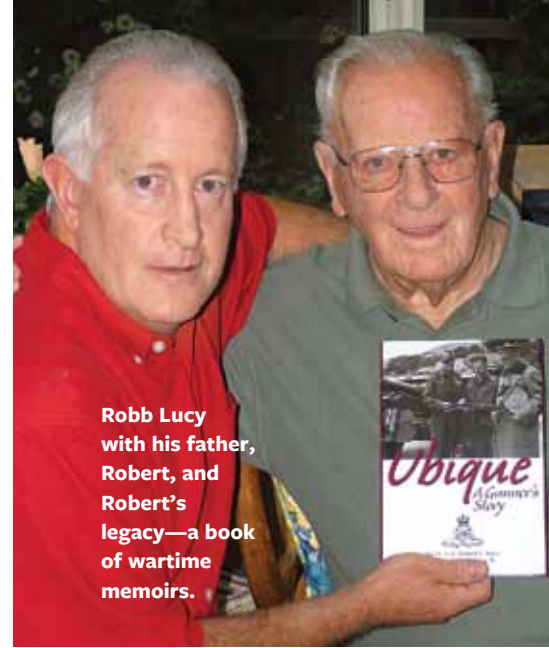
readersdigest.ca/october

Do it Yourself: Learn how to leave a legacy for your loved ones.

it will continue to enhance the lives of others when I’ve passed away.”

Robb first learned about giving back and creating something outside himself from his parents, who were very involved in their Calgary community. His mother, Viola, volunteered at the church and his father chaired the Army Benevolent Fund, an organization that helped Second World War veterans who needed financial aid.

But it wasn’t until Robb met his wife, Kim, that the idea of legacies truly took hold. Soon after marrying, they discovered they were unable to have children. It was a devastating blow. “I wouldn’t have a daughter to protect and spoil, or a son to teach how to pitch a baseball



Robb Lucy with his father, Robert, and Robert’s legacy—a book of wartime memoirs.

his own book.” Robb realized that helping others decide how they wanted to be remembered could become his calling—his own legacy.

Over the last few years, Robb has collected stories on a blog about people whose actions have had a tangible effect on those who need it most. There’s the dentist who organizes trips with his staff to South America, Africa and the Philippines to do dental work on the poor. Another inspiring example involves a tour guide in Cambodia who runs the Angkor Well Project, an organization that digs

ENJOY WITH OTHERS NOW, KNOWING LIVES WHEN YOU’VE PASSED AWAY.

and catch a fish. I wouldn’t be the father I always wanted to be.”

From time to time they considered adoption, but couldn’t come around to the idea. After years of heartbreak, Kim and Robb decided that if parenthood was out of the question, they would find meaning in other ways. “That’s what I thought legacy was: You leave kids behind,” Robb says. “But that’s not it at all. That’s just procreation.”

The idea of a legacy beyond children is what drove Robb to reach out to his father. “People used to come by the house and say, ‘Bob, can you sign my book?’” he says. “That’s when I saw him most happy and proud—signing

quality wells in rural villages at no cost to the inhabitants. The abundance of clean water has slowed the spread of typhoid and helped villagers grow vegetables. “We have only one life,” the tour guide told Robb, “I’m happy; I feel good, helping people.”

Robb concedes these are both ambitious expressions of legacy-building. “Most people think you have to be the Jim Pattisons or the Jack Pooles of the world,” he says, referring to the wealthy Vancouver businessmen known for their charitable donations to hospitals and other organizations. But he stresses that the key to creating something that will outlast your life is not to get hung up on scale. To under-

COURTESY ROBB LUCY

NOW IT'S YOUR TURN

Want to be published in Reader's Digest, or appear in a new anthology edited by Robb Lucy? Follow the links at readersdigest.ca/october to send us your legacy stories and ideas. To get you started, here are three broad categories: what Robb calls "money, stories and stuff."

MONEY

One of your legacies could be a life-insurance policy, on you, with the beneficiary being an organization you love. That stock certificate or piece of art that's appreciated 1,000 percent since you bought it?

Donate it to a charity and receive a tax deduction for the full amount, with no capital gains. The charity can sell it and use the funds to achieve your common goals. Remember that legacies don't need to be large. Even in small amounts, donations to places and people you care about can make a big difference over the long term.

STORIES

A written, audio or video history of Dad, Mom or other family members can inform and entertain future generations. It could be as simple as going through old pictures and jotting down who's in them, or pinning a microphone on Grandma and getting her to talk about

her life. You could also write an "ethical will"—a document of your life, beliefs and hopes, which your children can read now or in the years to come.

STUFF

Anything can be a legacy if you enjoy it now and it continues to benefit others when you're gone—such as planting hundreds of rhododendron bushes up a country road because you love seeing their colours in the spring.

Don't wait. A woman Robb spoke to had the money to install a new swing set in the park, but thought for it to be a legacy, it had to wait until she died. "Do it now," she was advised, and she swung with the kids until she passed on.

score his point, he talks about a mother who regularly cooked for the neighbourhood kids, leaving her children with lifelong pride about her generosity. And the woman who was living in Myanmar (then Burma) with her parents in the early 1960s when her grandfather gave her a unique task: "I will provide the tickets for you to visit us in the United States," he wrote. "In exchange I would like you to write a trip report." Her report inspired others in her family and eventually became a five-decade-long tradition. Family members continue to document their

own travels, adding to a unique—and ongoing—history.

Robb came to understand that any joyful act performed for the benefit of others and enjoyed in the moment could turn into a legacy. "Everywhere you go in life, you leave a trail," he says. "When I gave Dad's eulogy in Calgary, I said he had many legacies: legacies of freeing people in Europe, legacies of his family, his home and things such as the Army Benevolent Fund. Becoming aware of your trail, and trying to make it a positive one, is what counts." ■