

The Spirit of Giving
My Father Robert McGillivray
by Valerie McGillivray

GLOUCESTER
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OUR PEOPLE, OUR STORIES

1623 | 2023



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FOREWORD

Robert E. McGillivray was born in 1930 and was a lifelong resident of Gloucester, MA. Born to an Irish mother (Helen Crowley) and a Nova Scotian (Scottish) father (Joseph Anthony McGillivray), he was a man committed to his country, community, and family. Robert was father to Valerie, Robert, Cynthia, and Christopher; grandfather to eight; and great-grandfather to eight at the time of his death in 2019.

A NOTE FROM THE GLOUCESTER400+

We wish Bob were here today to contribute to the Gloucester400+ Stories Project, as he was a lover of history and storytelling. We remember him fondly and are grateful for his service.

The Spirit of Giving

My Father Robert E. McGillivray

BY VALERIE MCGILLIVRAY

My father, Robert McGillivray, was a man who truly cared about Gloucester. He knew the city's history and his thirst for learning more about its people was unquenchable. As an unofficial historian of Gloucester, he could recall amazing details on how the small town grew and the people who made it such a special place. Within a few minutes of conversing with him (and most conversations could go on forever), you realized you knew many of the same people. And, my dad enthusiastically provided every detail of these connections - you know, six degrees of separation!

But before I tell you more about my dad's life, I would like to share a few of my earliest memories of him. Being a savvy businessman, he owned several properties in town including the Knights of Pythias Hall in Lanesville. In the summer, we often stayed overnight in the rooms off the grand ballroom. I remember the days of swimming at Lanes Cove, basking on the breakwater in the sun, and then in the afternoons, we'd make it to the quarries to swim some more. My father also used the Hall as a warehouse for his moving company (Noyes the Mover) and my mother had an antique shop on the main level. As you can see, my family was very resourceful in managing their properties.

My dad was a devoted family man to all his blood ran through. He never hesitated to gather the cousins, aunts, and uncles together for parties and outings and tried to keep us very connected to Gloucester and each other. We could count on my dad to include any cousins he could fit in his station wagon to go to places like Benson's Wild Animal Farm, Pleasure Island, and other outings. Most of my cousins recall those days and always cherish those memories when we speak of them.

Roger Lawson recalls, "I knew my cousin Bob quite well. We were friendly and spent time together as boys in Gloucester. We had the same grandmother, and her home was always open to us. Our parents were great friends. Bob was an energetic kid and a good athlete. He was outgoing, fun, and quite a character. He was a tough kid, sometimes a wise guy, but he and his

brothers were always friendly to me and my brothers. We were family.”

Thank you, Dad, for those wonderful times in our lives!

Veteran and Charitable Works

My father was drafted into the US Army during the Korean War. Cousin Roger Lawson also recalls that my father had much experience as a lumper (unloading fish and cargo from boats) and working in warehouses on the Gloucester waterfront. “Since he was skilled with everything related to boats,” said Roger, “The army sent him to Germany to work with the engineers as a boat operator constructing bridges during the Cold War.”

Dad’s commitment to veterans was always top of his list. As a veteran himself, he received excellent care with a lot of help from the Veteran’s office in Gloucester. He also was helpful to real estate developer Mac Bell in securing the long-term lease with the VA at the former Goldman’s building on Main Street. This location would go on to serve countless local veterans. My dad is buried in the veterans’ section of the Beechbrook Cemetery in Gloucester. He wouldn’t have wanted to be buried anywhere else.

Another of my dad’s passions was the Open Door Pantry; he supported the staff and other volunteers with his assistance at fundraisers and at the pantry itself when he could. His spirit of giving was evident in how he chose to use his free time, by helping others.

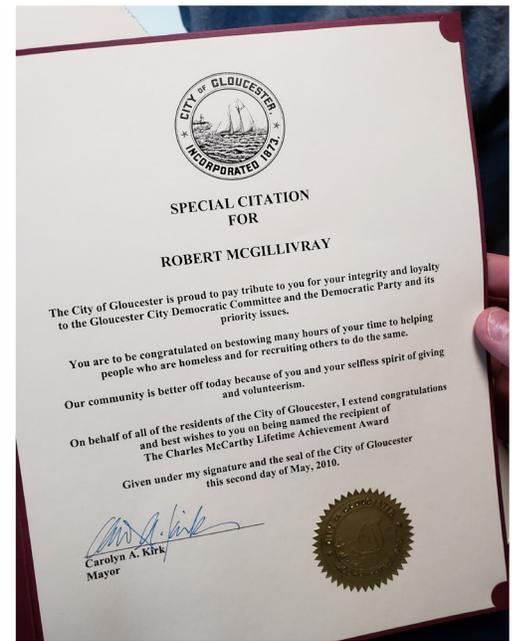
Democratic Activities & Award

My dad made his name known through his businesses, charitable work, and political beliefs. As a devout Democrat, he supported local politicians who he felt would help the people and the city of Gloucester. He befriended many of Gloucester’s mayors and helped campaign for many, attending conventions and sometimes serving as a delegate. Dating back to the ‘50s and ‘60s, he campaigned for President John F. Kennedy and others.

One of the highlights of my dad’s life was when he received the Charles J. McCarthy Life-time Achievement Award from the Gloucester Democratic Committee in 2010. The award is



Former MA Attorney General Martha Coakley at one of many Democratic events with my dad, circa 2014.



The Charles McCarthy Lifetime Achievement Award in May, 2010.

given to someone of exemplary character who works for the good of the Democratic Party. The awardee actively participates in the political process to uphold the rights of the underrepresented and promotes leadership in others. At my dad's ceremony, he was applauded by former governor Deval Patrick, Victoria Reggie Kennedy, former MA Attorney General Martha Coakley, and former mayor of Gloucester, Carolyn Kirk.

My dad's favorite time of the year was during the Gloucester Horribles' Parade and Fourth of July festivities when he proudly marched with several political representatives and others to show his support. Sometimes he rode in the open top parade cars, waving to everyone with a big smile. Our family loved to gather on the sidewalks and lawns that lined the parade route to cheer him, along with all who knew him in Gloucester.



Riding in the Horribles parade in support of candidate for sheriff, Ed O'Reilly in 2014.



Having fun at another parade!

PHOTO COURTESY OF DRU TARR

Good Humor and Good Fun!

It would seem that my father, who was always busy with family and his political activities, would have no time for fun. But, he was a man of good humor, very sociable, and even a bit mischievous at times. I remember him telling me that as a young boy he and his younger brother Kenny would “borrow” row boats from the harbor and go fishing until they got chased back to shore by some observant adults!

One of my dad’s friends and colleague Dru Tarr recalls, “The first time I met Bob McGillivray was when I worked third shift at Walgreens in Gloucester. As one would expect, retail is not thrilling work, and the third shift is even less so. As I became friends with Bob, I welcomed his presence when he shopped. He was usually looking for good sale items. Bob often came in at what I considered a pretty late hour for someone his age, 12:30 or 1:00 in the morning, and he would sometimes hang around the store for more than an hour. As a child, my own grandparents usually turned in by 7:00 PM. I learned that Bob would stay out late dancing at the Rhumb Line, another shot to my preconceived notions of what a man his age should be up to at night.”

Yes, my dad did love dancing, and he was a popular dance partner to young and old. His nickname was “Dancing Bob!” Even at home you could hear Irish music playing on his radio every Sunday morning without fail and he’d tap his foot and, later, his cane. It’s funny that his grandchildren picked up on this, and they all do the same when they hear the music!

In the later years of his life, my dad also enjoyed walking the boulevard and hanging out at the Dun Fudgin boat ramp. He would often stop, relax, and reminisce about earlier years and how things had changed in town. On these walks, he would chat with anyone along the way. Sometimes he offered advice on where to go and how to enjoy all that his hometown had to offer. His love for his hometown was evident to everyone, strangers and friends alike—a true Gloucesterman always!

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This story represents a thank you to my father, but I would also like to take a moment to appreciate my entire family. A special thank you to my father's brothers, and all earlier family members who were veterans.

Thank you also to cousin Roger Lawson and my father's friend Dru Tarr for contributing memories about my dad. And, last but not least, thank you to the Gloucester400+ Stories Project and to Stories Project Leader, Terry Weber Mangos, for helping me tell my story.