Submitted to Globe and Mail, Lives Lived

Edgar "Red" Dobie: golfer, volunteer, mechanic

Born January 15, 1922 in Vernon, B.C.
Died October 9, 2006 in Winnipeg, aged 84, of a heart attack.

Edgar Dobie was a man of almost limitless patience. During every get-together at Connie and Edgar's the scene was always the same – Connie feeding four huge sons, later grown men with wives and children, and, off in a corner, Edgar with his own plate of food and one for their eldest son, Don. Don, born in 1952 with cerebral palsy, was not able to feed himself, and so it was mostly Edgar who did the job. At the age of thirty-seven, Don triumphantly moved into a group home, but he returned for every family celebration where he sat as usual beside his dad, drinking rye through the straw his father held for him.

Edgar and his brother George were the third generation of Dobie boys born and raised in Vernon, in the Okanagan; their father owned the town's hotel and bar, where his redheaded sons worked day and night. Edgar left Vernon for an extended period only once, during the war where he served in Europe as an aircraft mechanic in the RCAF. On his return he fell in love with tall, vivacious Constance Smith, also from an old Vernon family, whose sense of humour rivaled his; their grace and exuberance on the dance floor continued, even after the birth of five sons, for more than fifty years. After decades as a skilled mechanic Edgar opened and ran his own gas station, "Red" Dobie Shell. Hardworking sons David, Michael and Roger successfully followed their father into the automotive business; Edgar Jr. became a theatre producer. When four of her sons married, Connie finally had some females around: of nine grandchildren, six are girls. Though Grandpa Dobie loved curling, playing golf and poker, driving his little red truck and volunteering many hours for many causes, he was never happier than when dozing off in his La Z Boy with a mound of sleeping grandchild on his belly.

In his seventies Edgar's heart problems led to open heart surgery, and he was told to take it easy. But taking it easy had to involve family, volunteer work and golf. In September he flew to Winnipeg for the wedding of grandson Cameron, back to Vernon for a week of golf and poker with visiting grandson Sam, then back to Winnipeg for Thanksgiving. On Thanksgiving Monday he golfed with his son David, played pool with two granddaughters, and sat down to a dinner that he enjoyed thoroughly, especially the pumpkin pie. Edgar was still sitting at the table when his steadfast heart gave out.

After a family ceremony in Winnipeg Connie and her four younger sons brought Edgar's ashes back to Vernon, and they all went to Don's group home to tell him. Don wept; when his caregiver came into the room, he told her, more clearly than he had ever spoken, "My dad died." At the memorial event at the Shubert Centre in Vernon, the family prepared for two hundred mourners; nearly four hundred arrived. Granddaughters Anna, Caitlin, Lindsay, Chloe, Meghan and Sara told the crowd that their kind, generous grandfather had shown them what it was to be a good man. They also learned: "A real man isn't afraid to have his hair braided." "Always eat what's on your plate, even if it's chow mein." "The best greeting is a big bear hug." "The best gift is unconditional love that isn't spoken, it's felt." "Dancing is an expression of a lifelong love." And of course, "The best place for a nap is on a big soft tummy."

They finished: "If a man's wealth is judged by the love of his family and friends, then Bill Gates has nothing on our grandpa."

Beth Kaplan is the proud mother of two Dobies.