

Stuart McLean tribute (podcast transcript)
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By Martha Attridge Bufton and Bruce Bufton

I can't remember when Stuart first came into my life, except that it would have been my parents who introduced us. CBC Radio, a venue for wonderful storytelling, was a constant in our kitchen radio and on our car radio.

Dave and Morley, the record shop, Toronto (where I was born but did not live after the age of 7), I know these characters well although I can't necessarily give you a list of all the stories that made me laugh so hard. I also love Stuart's voice, so evocative and powerful, especially given that he couldn't use gestures over the airwaves.

I didn't attend one of his live concerts until much later. My husband Ian and I had hoped going to see him at the National Arts Centre (NAC) here in Ottawa would become a family tradition for all three generations: My aunt (who'll be 82 in June), Ian and I and our two sons (Sean and Bruce, who are both in their twenties). My aunt has declared a kind of moratorium on gifts--"I don't need anything" quote unquote--so we've switched to experience gifts. But, wow, it can be hard to find a show that speaks to and engages everybody in the family, from the youngest to the oldest.

But Stuart could do this.

And I really knew it because the evening that we learned he'd died, I got a text from my son Bruce.

[Bruce] "Did you hear about Stuart McLean?"

I texted back. "Yeah, last night. It's so sad."

[Bruce] "Yeah, really sad. We'll have to listen to some of his books."

And just this little text exchange made me realize that he could touch everybody. And so Bruce and I were just chatting a little later on about what we liked about the last concert we attended, which was the Christmas of 2014.

[Bruce] "I love seeing Stuart McLean because he loves performing. He's always really energized and he interacts really well with the crowd. I especially like seeing how he gets children up on to the stage. And he interacts with them and it's often the best part of the show."

[Martha] "They always seem so natural. There was something about him on stage that just seemed to make people relaxed. You'd expect people to be uptight, you know in front of thousands of other folks, but no he made them relaxed."

[Bruce] "He made everyone feel like they're at home."

In a way, Stuart really told folk tales ... tales of Canadian folk ... and then he took these stories out, across the country, to share with all of. My friend Elaine, who spent many years as a travelling sales rep, says, "You can always tell who listens to CBC Radio because they retell the same stories and especially the Stuart McLean stories. And they all love the one about the cat and the toilet."

So, here's to Stuart and the great tradition of Canadian storytelling.