

Eric Laffery Harvie; The Flamboyant Philanthropist

By Geraldine Efobi

Let us take a trip down memory lane to the year 2017. A simpler time when not wearing a face-covering did not feel like an awkward thing to do. It was a mild spring day, and I sat in the middle row with my best friend, eyes darting excitedly at the glistening towers of downtown Calgary. Our destination? The Glenbow Museum. The field trip was memorable, one of the best so far. I spent the morning touring the museum with classmates, learning about Calgary's history and gaining a new respect for the First Nations people through artworks, artifacts, and statues. In the afternoon, we wandered the downtown streets gawking at the big city and eating lunch at the majestic Olympic Plaza. Later that year, we went to heritage park, and in grade 5, the Calgary Zoo, but what do all these destinations have in common? One man, Eric Lafferty Harvie, a man who vigorously preserved the past and made way for the future so kids like me could feel proud to call ourselves Calgarians.

I feel immensely grateful to Mr. Harvie for these experiences. As a token of my gratitude, I come to you today to uncover why he truly is a Champion.

Mr. Harvie was born in Orillia, Ontario, on the 2nd of April 1892, to Elizabeth Cecile Lafferty and William McLeod Harvie. In his early teens, the family moved west to Calgary. By 23, he was fresh out of the University of Alberta with a law degree and passed the bar exam. It seemed his future was complete, but even with the relief of graduating, something was off. He wanted to contribute to his country, make a lasting impact, and the Canadian army was an alluring opportunity to fulfill this desire. He soon volunteered to fight in WW1.

Eric would endure rancid smelling trenches and ear-shattering bombardments for four years in service of Canada. With his faithful leadership and tenacious bravery, Mr. Harvie claimed the rank of Captain. He later would be appointed Honorary Colonel of the Calgary Highlanders. Alas, during his service, he was injured in France and was unable to fight much longer.

Returning from the war, Eric and his fellow soldiers found themselves in Hamilton, Ontario, exploring the city and looking for potential dates. One of his buddies was going to hang out with his girlfriend and (presumably) her sister. The friend invited Mr. Harvie to tag along, and that is how he met his future wife, Dorothy Jean Southam. The two would have a very successful marriage lasting over 50 years with three children Joy, Donald, and Neil Harvie.

Eric began to settle into a post-war lifestyle focusing on his law career. Life was going smoothly, and clients were rolling in. He started multiple firms with coworkers and chose to practice solitarily in between. He racked up a considerable fortune, but the best was yet to come. While

he represented some oilmen in court, Mr. Harvie developed an unshakeable interest in the Oil Industry. He studied the workers carefully, investing and toiling alongside them. He looked into industries that helped him with his pursuit of oil, like real estate, mining, and the production of industrial chemicals. Eric went from a citizen without any know-how in the Oil Industry to an expert in a few years. Mr. Harvie hit the jackpot when an oil company was going bankrupt. With his savings, he bought the mineral rights to that company and earned a fortune. With his newfound wealth, he started oil exploration companies and built pipelines and roads to his properties to set himself up for success. His company was the second-largest oil producer in Canada at the time. A man interviewed in the Canadian petroleum hall of fame said, "In one year, he made more money than the Government of Alberta."

Now what? Eric had a loving relationship with kids and a multimillion-dollar company. What more could he want? He was back to where he felt after graduating, longing for something greater. Then it hit him, how did he not see this earlier? Through conservation and philanthropy, he could leave his mark on his beloved city, one that would enrich the lives of many. In 1955 at sixty-three, he began his righteous endeavors. While little is known about the order or quantity of his donations, they had a tremendous influence on Calgary. He formed the Glenbow Foundation, preserving and protecting artifacts belonging to pioneers and indigenous people. This Glenbow foundation would become the Glenbow Museum, offering historical insight to Calgarians in the foreseeable future. He also helped found the Devon Foundation, a group of philanthropists looking to fund the improvement of communities. Eric sponsored the creation of the Calgary Zoo, Heritage Park, Luxton Museum of Banff, and Banff School of fine arts. Mr. Harvie also strongly believed in the importance of creativity, becoming a founding officer of the Canada Council for the Fine Arts. Though Eric kept to himself about his contributions, that didn't stop his kindness from catching up to him. In 1967 He was appointed an officer of the order of Canada. An exemplary award for those who've made substantial contributions to the betterment of Canada.

My principal said something that stuck with me at the back-to-school assembly. "You'll only get what you put in. Invest nothing, get nothing, give it your all, and you will find fulfillment." His words were inspiring, but I still felt discouraged. I live far from my school, so transportation and commitment would be an issue. After sulking for half of the school year, I read about Eric Harvie and his contributions to his community. Now more than ever, I was determined to follow in the footsteps of Mr. Harvie.

Around late February, the SCC (student community of caring) asked for more students to get involved. That's when I had a Eureka moment. I was tunnel visioning on sports so much that I'd never considered this option staring right at me. That week I went to the meeting where they'd discussed getting more people to join and planning fundraising events. The wars in Ukraine had

come up. Teachers and students were brainstorming ways to help raise money for Ukrainians. They decided to sell donated books and suggested students also pitch in and sell hand-made goods. The idea made me perk up because I was obsessed with designing terrariums. It would be a great opportunity to test my skills and potentially help people in need.

I told the teacher my idea, and she was fully supportive and offered me materials. The market will take place this May, so I've been spending my free time collecting moss and hardscaping elements. In the meantime, I volunteered to play the cello and take pictures during my school's open house. It's surprising how enjoyable talking to new people in the strings and band program was. I later volunteered to be a science tutor with a friend. So far, no one has visited, but they'll come rolling in during unit exams and finals. I'm writing rigorous notes and making practice tests for those who turn up eventually. My church has been looking for more volunteers since Covid-19 died down. I've had bad experiences with alter serving, so I chose to join the choir and play the cello. Since the previous week, I've been going to choir practice with my mom, picking out songs, and adapting them to suit my instrument. It will take weeks before I learn enough songs to play at church, yet I'm looking forward to it.

All these things were out of my comfort zone, but I owe it to Eric Harvie for showing me how fulfilling it can be. He helped me to break free of my shell, and explore possibilities I never considered. I want to thank him for my experiences, from field trips to helping me realize my worth in this community and continue on this path of leadership. Like Mr. Harvie before us, it's time to discover the richness we can bring to the lives of others.

Sources:

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