

Derl Roberts--He Was One of a Kind

By Gayle Rich-Boxman

On a typical winter-wet day in December, 2005, I walked into the office at Vernonia Realty. After a couple of brief introductions by Ken and Helen Bateman, I was escorted back to the office of the Principal Broker. I sat down across the desk from a gravelly-voiced man, with oxygen tubing placed lightly in his nostrils, who sat tall and solid in his seat. I had just been introduced to my future mentor in real estate, Mr. Derl Roberts. On the exterior, he presented himself as a sharp, no-nonsense fellow with a nice tailored shirt, backswept silvery hair and somewhat of a gruff manner. It belied the kind-hearted and unselfish man that I grew to know both as the consummate real estate professional and father-like figure that I had the pleasure of knowing for six years.

We interviewed each other. I asked him questions and he would answer, honestly and succinctly. I would stop. He would look at me and ask, "You got any more questions on that paper of yours?" He would then ask me some serious questions, which I answered as honestly as possible. Derl could be



intimidating; I recall that as one of my first impressions. But, soon after, I realized that this was in part due to his voice, and partly just the old logger in him, not the genuine softy that I came

to know. Pretty soon though, it went from a rather formal, stilted interview to a more casual get-to-know you conversation. He was the only Principal Broker I interviewed and the only office I intended to place my license in and I have never looked back or questioned my decision.

Derl never wavered in his ethics and total honesty in real estate. He had a powerful demeanor and forty+



years of knowledge about the industry and because of these qualities, I learned a tremendous amount in a short period of time in a very complicated new career.

One of the benefits I didn't realize at the time was that I would acquire a new friend. Derl and I would sit after hours and talk about the history of Vernonia (as he had been born here), his logging days, his military memories, real estate successes and debacles; you name it. He was a good storyteller, had an incredibly good memory and not only did I learn much about his life, but they were told with humility and laughter at times. He was also unfailingly generous both with his time and his friendship.

Having worked for a respiratory care company for four years, prior to getting into real estate, I was not thwarted by the oxygen that was his constant companion. Instead, I would

periodically ask him some medical questions, worry about him when he would get sick and talk frankly with him at times when we all would think "is this it?" But, he was a tough old poop! He would rally and after we'd see him battle yet another bout of pneumonia or bronchitis, he'd be back in his office dutifully handling all of our real estate matters with professionalism and finesse. We would all breathe a sigh of relief upon his return.

Then, one day, he couldn't physically walk the distance anymore and being a prideful man about how it would look, he couldn't bring himself to use a walker to get in and out of the office. But, just about every day, he'd come see us, drive up in his truck and park in front of the office for a couple of hours. Ken, Helen and I would take turns swapping stories about the daily happenings with him. He would hold court with his cronies who would come and go in the passenger side of his truck and you would see Derl wave at all of the folks he knew who would drive by while he sat there.

Helen took the necessary steps to become our Principal Broker and yet we ALL still asked Derl for his opinions because he had such a plethora of knowledge that we just couldn't help it. AND it made him feel like he was still a vital part of our lives, both personally and professionally.

When we found out that he was on Hospice, we called him at home. He wouldn't be making it out of the house anymore. After a short, heartfelt conversation with him, I said, "Derl, you do what you have to do and if it's time, then it's okay". I was guiding him to give himself permission to leave this earth. In his brusque, but humorous retort, he said, "Well, I'm not ready to go yet—I've got a game to watch!"



That was less than a month ago. He thanked me for being a good friend. I told him I loved him. I didn't know how long it would be before I wouldn't be able to tell him that, so I didn't hold back.

On Sunday, January 22, 2012, Derl left us. It was almost six years to the day that I first became part of the Vernonia Realty family. I know he was ready. We who have loved him may never be ready to lose such a dear friend, who was one-of-a-kind.

You gave your all to us in this community, Derl and I will miss you for a very long time. Many of us will.



Derl Roberts June 26, 1932-January 22, 2012



Made in Vernonia Opens Storefront

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"Gordon Smith, who owns the building, was really instrumental in making this happen because he was willing to work with me," says Larsen. "He had heard about the store when I called to rent the space and was very excited about having this here."

Larsen has been working hard during the month of January to create a warm and inviting space, and collecting more items to display for sale.



In addition to locally made soaps, jewelry, pottery lotions, barnwood signs, children's toys, and clothing, Larsen now has the wall space to display paintings and photography from local artists.

"Everything just kind of came together," says Larsen. "It's been kind of magical."



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