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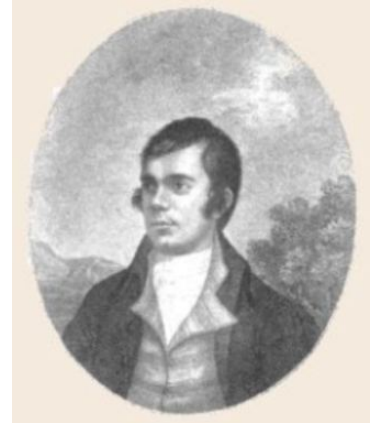
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ROBBIE BURNS Toast to the Immortal Memory

Presentation by Tammy Truman

I am anything but a Burns expert ... but when I was asked by John to do the speech and toast to the Immortal Memory, I was flattered, honoured and more than a wee bit scared. What could I say? Here's me, a wee lassie from the prairies with English blood cursing through these veins. But I like a challenge and I felt I had not ever completely understood just what the fuss was all about for this man we call Robbie Burns, so I made it my project to find out and now hope to help the rest of you understand as well.



I wondered why should other nations and other people celebrate the birth of a Scottish poet? And why are these celebrations so unique?

The English have Shakespeare; the Irish have Joyce; the Americans have Longfellow; the Italians have Dante. Every one of them is an internationally known and respected figure, but to none of them is paid the homage that is paid to Burns even in their own country. Burns is universally acclaimed.

Why should all of this be?

Robert Burns was born in Alloway, Ayrshire, the west coast of Scotland on January 25th, 1759. That's 255 years ago. We celebrate his birth, we don't mark his death. Robbie, as he became known, and his work is all about life and living, it celebrates the common Man. In his short 37 years, he left a huge impact on the world.

Who was this guy? How did he think? What legacy has he left? His dad was a poor peasant farmer, trying to make a living on 70 acres of land. Life was extremely harsh and the farm was not succeeding. Even as a small child Robbie had to work long hours with his father and many evenings were spent huddled around the fire listening to his mother's stories and his father reading from the bible. The little cottage was extended twice to accommodate the growing family, where eventually there were 4 boys and 3 girls. When he was 6, his father, William Burness (yes Burness ... it was Robbie who changed his name to Burns later) and some neighbours established a school in the village and hired a teacher, John Murdoch. Robert and his brother Gilbert attended the school. The teacher told Pa Burns that young Robert showed the potential of a gifted scholar. Sadly the teacher only stayed for 2 years, leaving the boy's father to continue their education on his own. Pa Burns held that the three most important things on a boy's life were education, education and education, the most important of them being Education.

For Robbie the combination of poverty, hard work on the farm, story-telling and his tremendous ability to observe life in general, was the making of THE Man. One of his first stories is of him and his brother Gilbert leaning over a farmyard wall watching the hens and the rooster scratching about. One of the hens gives the

cont'd on page 2 ...

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rooster the eye and he starts to strut across the yard to do his manly duty. Just then the farmer comes out and scatters seed about the yard. The rooster stops and starts to peck at the seed. On seeing this Robbie turns to his brother and says "Gilbert, I pray that I will never be as hungry as that!" ... his life as a womanizer started young. At the tender age of 21, Robbie and his brother founded a "bachelor's club": it was founded on diversion "to relieve the wearied man worn down by the necessary labours of life". Robert was elected its first President and the first meeting drew up the rules for membership, one of which required that "Every man proper for a member of this Society, must have a frank, honest, open heart; be above anything dirty or mean; and must be a professed lover of one or more of the female sex. No haughty, self-conceited person, who looks upon himself as superior to the rest of the Club, and especially no mean spirited, worldly mortal, whose only will is to heap up money, shall upon any pretence not be admitted." Not quite the 4 way test of Rotary, but other than the professed lover of more than one female, same basic concept. I wonder if we added this part into our club, how many members we would lose?

His father died when he was only 25 so he and his brother became partners in the farm. First they tried crop, switching to dairy, but both were failures. It was around this same time that his womanizing would get to him as he got pregnant his mother's servant girl, Betty, and also had an affair with a lady named Jean Armour. This affair even had him spending some time on the cutty stool in front of the church congregation while they called him a "fornicator". Robbie spread his seed once more to Jean during this affair and she delivered twins the next year. But Jean's father would not consent to their marriage so Robbie made plans to emigrate to Jamaica, where he would be taking a job as an overseer on a plantation, and in order to raise money for the passage, he published his first volume of the poems.

His first collection published at age 27 was a set of poems essentially based on a broken love affair. In a matter of weeks he was transformed from local hero to a national celebrity, fussed over by the Edinburgh literary of the day, and Jean Armour's father allowed her to marry him, now that he was no longer a lowly wordsmith. Alas, the trappings of fame did not bring fortune as most was drunk away, and he took up a job as an exciseman to supplement his meagre income. While collecting taxes (ironically for alcohol), he continued to write, contributing songs to the likes of the famous ballad we all know "Auld Lang Syne". In all, more than 400 of Burns' songs are still in existence. He and Jean gave birth to 9 children in total.

Burns wrote that "women are beautiful and foolish - beautiful so that we will love them, and foolish so that they will love men". Burns sadly was also a drunk and even though he should have been living a good life with the sale of his poetry, he many times was homeless, after leaving Jean Armour and sleeping in friends' beds.

But his poetry and songs struck the heart of many and overshadowed the pathetic circumstances of his life.

Now even the most fervent admirer will admit that it was sometimes difficult to fathom exactly what the poet means, but we must remember that he transformed a dialect of Scottish

peasantry into high poetry and this was 250 years ago!

I should point out here that if nothing else, Burns accomplished the singular feat of writing something that looks very much like English and is nevertheless wholly unpronounceable by English speakers from outside his homeland.

Burns died at the young age of 37 from Rheumatic Fever at Dumfries in the South of Scotland. During his short life he would aspire to great things. After his death, he would become legendary, or as some would say, immortal. His immortality runs deep in the veins of all Scots, perhaps unknowingly, and he has evolved from mere man to being symbolic of all things Scottish. He is now one of the great cornerstones of modern Scottish History, and the significance of his memory is celebrated throughout the world.

I will leave you with one of his poems that means the most to me as it's been slightly altered to an understandable form of English:

An old man travelling a lone highway,
Came at evening cold and grey,
To a chasm vast deep and wide.
The old man crossed in the twilight dim,
The sullen stream had no fear for him,
But he turned when safe on the other side
And built a bridge to span the tide.
Old man said a fellow pilgrim near,
You are wasting your strength by building here,
Your journey will end with the ending day,
You never again will pass this way,
You've crossed this chasm deep and wide,
So why build this bridge at eventide.
The builder lifted his old grey head,
Good friend in the path, I have come he said,
There followth after me today,
A youth whose feet must pass this way,
This chasm that has been as nought to me,
To that fairhaired youth may a pitfall be,
He too must cross in the twilight dim,
Good friend, I have built this bridge for him.

Mr President, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, I ask you all ... Scot or not ... fill your glasses, aye fill them to the very brim, and raise them high as I give you the greatest Scottish toast of them all, the Immortal Memory of Robert Burns.



World Understanding Month

February 4th Adalberto Damini, Exchange Student
 February 11th Valentine's Program — evening meeting
 February 18th Club Assembly
 February 25th Abe Janzen — Mennonite Central Committee (meeting at 12:15 at Willow Park Golf Club)

Literacy Month

March 4th Miriam Dreher, Yodelfest
 March 18th St. Patrick's Day Program
 March 25th Robert Greenwood and Dana Luebke, Sun Ergos Theatre and Dance

Magazine Month

April 8th Alessandro Massolo, U of C Veterinarian re Coyotes
 April 11th -13th District Conference, Lethbridge Lodge Hotel & Conference Centre
 April 29th Youth Evening Meeting

Promote RI Convention Month

May 27th Karla Tejeda, Outgoing Exchange Student

Rotary Fellowships Month

June 1st - 4th Rotary International Convention, Sydney, Australia



Meeting Photo Gallery

Thanks to John McBean for arranging a great meeting!!

Ed. Note: As the scribe was the MC, and was enjoying a wee dram of scotch, there are no meeting notes. I guess you should have been there!

Photos courtesy of John Beatty



McPopoff and McTaylor with our exchange students

Hello everyone!

One more week is gone, the time is flying, wish that I could stop it! I want to start with a quick correction ... last week I wrote Ed's name in the blog, but I actually wanted to mean Wayne. Those name tags are not helping me that much, I should learn how to read! Sorry about that!

Anyways, that was other really busy week, I was just busy again, what was amazing! Starting with other really nice skiing weekend, with a beautiful powder day on Sunday, but the highlight of the weekend was the sensational vertigo that I got at the top of the mountain, what was almost as unpleasant as eating the haggis on Tuesday. I am not going to lie, I love the Scottish culture, love the music and everything, but the sheep stomach with meat did not taste that good for this Brazilian! Taking out the last part, I would like to congratulate all the people involved on the last meeting, it



was a wonderful lunch with incredible presentations, music and everything! Too bad that I did not get to try that Scotch!

Anyways, after the meeting I went straight down to Canmore, where I met with other exchange students for a presentation to the Canmore Club on Wednesday morning, what was an awesome opportunity to get together with other students and get more of the mountains air! And to complete my day, on the afternoon, I had my second curling session. I hate to tell that, but I want to say sorry to Norm and the Stickers, but you guys should try again the next time, but I am aiming for the Brazilian curling team, so it will get harder! Thanks again for Paul and all my team, this is being lots of fun and something that I will never forget!

I need to say that each week my exchange just gets better and better, I do not know how to thank everyone that is making my life here in Canada so special! See you guys again next week, with more and more good experiences I am sure!

Meeting Photos

Rosemary Crawford, our RI Foundation Committee Chair, had a busy day!



The club received a \$1000 US donation to the RI Foundation from Charter President Father Greg's will. It was presented by his neice



Joe Jorgia receives his multiple Paul Harris Pin



Rena St Clair receives her Paul Harris Pin and Certificate

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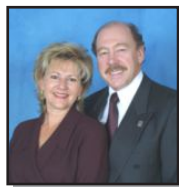
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