



# Lloyd's New Life

Canada's longest-serving news anchor gives us a glimpse into what his life is like in retirement.

BY JENNIFER GOLDBERG

PHOTO: GREG HALL/MONKEY PEN COLLECTIVE



Lloyd Robertson greets his wife Nancy after his final newscast on Thursday Sept. 1, 2011.

I'm 10 minutes into a leisurely summer hike with iconic national news anchor Lloyd Robertson when I realize I've worn the wrong shoes for this interview. I've dressed to impress one of the most important personalities in Canadian news in a dress and platform sandals, but Robertson is more appropriately attired for a stroll in khaki walking shorts, sneakers and shades.

It's a much more casual look than the suit and tie in which most Canadians are accustomed to seeing him. As the face of CTV News for 35 years, Robertson cut a dapper figure from behind his anchor desk; the Order of Canada pin glinting from his lapel, his hair impeccably coiffed. Today a slight breeze is ruffling his famed do. "Patricia, did you bring the hair spray?" he calls out, jokingly, to his longtime CTV publicist. "You know hair is the most important part of television."

We couldn't be farther from a TV studio as we trek around the lush grounds of the Swan Lake community in Markham, Ont., where Robertson has lived with his wife, Nancy, since 1997. We wander through thick greenery, over footbridges and around a serene pond at the

centre of the property. Robertson takes care to point out the Indian burial ground at the edge of the property and he greets each passerby with a hearty "hello!"

This is Robertson in his element now, away from the bright lights and anchor chair. He takes this 40-minute walk four days a week when the weather's warm. "I believe that keeping the body active is extremely important, because if your body is active, you mind will continue to work," he says.

Since officially retiring from the nightly news in 2011, Robertson has more time to devote to physical activity – along with his regular walks, he works out with a trainer twice a month and has recently started doing Pilates – but his days are far from free. In addition to co-hosting CTV's weekly news magazine show *W5*, which has him going into the office two-to-three times per week, he keeps busy doing interviews, speeches and events to promote his recently published memoir, *That's the Kind of Life It's Been* (a play on his trademark nightly news signoff, "...and that's the kind of day it's been.")

I ask why, at age 80, he continues to work so much after stepping down as CTV's chief anchor and senior editor. "I'd been going on this

PHOTO: CHRIS YOUNG / THE CANADIAN PRESS



**Left:** Before Robertson was a nightly news anchor, he hosted *Teen Tunes*, a radio music show. Here he is, along with producer Jack Shapira (standing), in 1956 giving DJing advice to two high school students. **Right:** Robertson having a coffee and a chat at Cora in Toronto.



treadmill at 140 K each day, and I thought if I stopped flat I would break my legs,” he says. “The thought of stopping really frightened me. I wanted to slow down, but I didn’t really have a plan for any kind of retirement. I just thought I would work more according to my own schedule. The idea of putting my feet up was definitely not what I wanted to.”

It’s easy to understand why walking away from such a long and celebrated career would be daunting. To date, Robertson holds the record as the longest-serving national news anchor in North American TV history, a career he began in 1952 at a local radio station in his hometown of Stratford, Ont. “When I started, there were no journalism schools, there were no broadcast schools,” he recalls. “I started off in the business learning as I grew with it.”

He made the move to TV in 1954 when he joined the local CBC news team in Winnipeg, and went on to anchor *The National* from 1970 to 1976 before moving on to anchor *CTV National News*. For 35 years he spoke to the nation from behind that desk, reporting in his famous dulcet baritone on the most important news events of the past four decades – nine Olympic games, the Terry Fox Run, the 9/11 attacks and 14 Canadian elections, to name just a few.

**A**fter we finish our walk, Robertson suggests we head to a nearby coffee shop to continue our chat. No sooner have we settled into our booth than a waitress hones in on the icon in the room. “Your voice is just so soothing!” she exclaims, “I grew up with that voice; it’s so familiar.”

Robertson’s unique ability to connect with the public has won him numerous accolades, including a star on the Canadian Walk of Fame and the Order of Canada in 1998. *TV Guide* readers also voted him Canada’s Most Trustworthy Anchor for 11 years in a row. It’s also made him a part of millions of people’s families. “What struck me more profoundly as I was signing off was that people really like to make that connection on a daily basis through a newscast, and they regard you as part of their family,” he says.

In retirement, though, Robertson is mostly concerned with his own family. He mentions his children and grandchildren often during our talk. “My eldest granddaughter is a journalist and is always asking questions,” he says. “She published her first piece in the *New York Times*.”

One retirement goal is to spend more time with his seven

grandkids and four daughters. He was so busy when they were young, that he didn’t get to be around them nearly as much as he would have liked. “I’ve made a point of getting to know my daughters better,” he says. To that end, Robertson is looking forward to the upcoming annual family get-together that he and Nancy host each year at a cottage south of Algonquin Park. Undoubtedly several games of Scrabble will be played. Sometimes, the kids even win.

He also appreciates the chance he has now to explore his own passions. “Now that I’ve slowed to this pace, I see opportunities for doing other things, like maybe some more writing or travel,” he says, adding that he has recently visited the Mediterranean and South Seas. Still on his bucket list are trips to Russia, China, Africa and Turkey.

One of the most important parts of his retirement, however, is devoting more time to charity work. “I have had such a good life and I’ve been so lucky that a lot of what I do is about giving back,” he says. As a spokesperson for various mental health organizations, such as The Mental Health Commission of Canada and the Mood Disorders Association of Ontario, Robertson often speaks about his mother, who suffered from severe psychiatric disorders

and underwent a prefrontal lobotomy when Robertson was young. “The discrimination against mentally ill people at that time was profound,” he recalls. “It’s better now but there’s still a stigma.”

He also lends his time and personality to the Arthritis Society, teachers associations, and various other causes. He’s even involved with the condo board at Swan Lake. “I find now that giving back is the most satisfying thing I do.”

Where retirement will take him is anyone’s guess. He may write another book – either about mental health or Canadian history, he says – and he’d like to keep doing some journalism as long as he can. Robertson is the first to admit that he has adapted quite nicely to the slower pace of retirement. “I missed [the nightly news] when I first left, I felt that there was something missing every day, but I don’t find that anymore,” he says. “I got used to a different routine; a different pace.”

Though he still wishes that he could do a big story when it breaks – he was particularly sorry to miss out on the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee – retirement, says Robertson, suits him just fine. “There are no average days anymore,” he says, finishing his last sips of coffee, “and I kind of like that.” ■

PHOTO: CBC STILL PHOTO COLLECTION

PHOTO: GREG HALL/MONKEY PEN COLLECTIVE