

ROBERT “BOB” DONOVAN

Bob. In his own words.



Bob, in a photograph selected by Nick.

A note from Nick

The goal is simply to paint a picture of Dad in his own words—from more than 2,000 emails he sent me over roughly his last five years—combined with photographs he gathered, kept and posted in his room.

I remember him saying something like, “My dad made 80; I’ll be lucky if I do too.” Seeing friends pass away seemed to deepen his gratitude for each day. He quoted his friend Bill: “this ain’t the rehearsal.”

Dad gained so much from his friends: company, help, music and shared memories. These pages are a thank-you, with room for everyone’s own picture of Bob.



Bob, Nick and Gladys with Simba and Izzy, around 2020. Names and approximate date supplied by Nick.

Don’t Cry When I’m Gone

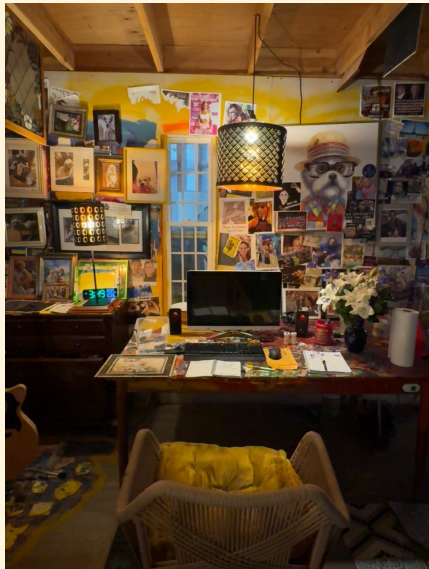
Tony Garcia

Dad asked me to save this song for when the time came, and to share it with you. - Nick

Listen on YouTube: youtube.com/watch?v=0vSdSa-4oCk

Photographs

A room full of memories.



Bob's workspace.



At home, with a dog in his arms.



A moment in the barber's chair.

A little of Bob

What he hoped to leave behind

I hope to think I will leave more than money behind, ability to love and be loved and compassion and understanding

Bob's words - 2022-03-24

Enough to be happy

I have everything I need to be happy.

Bob's words - 2026-05-20

Still enjoying it

always enjoying if I am breathing

Bob's words - 2025-12-18

Still learning

77 soon and still learning about life

Bob's words - 2024-03-02

Work & fairness

A skill worth respecting. A person worth paying.

His working-class father and Irish roots carried into his own professions as a union electrician and a barber. The family outline comes from Nick; the recollections below are Bob's.

His father, on the docks

My Dad was 20 in 1929 he worked thru the depression working the docks in New York he was fortunate

Bob's words - 2022-01-06

What the union meant to his family

If my dad didn't have a union to protect him they could have worked him to death The overtime pay was what kept us out of poverty, his 12 hour days

Bob's words - 2022-09-05

Remembering Labor Day

Remember labor day is honoring all workers like my dad who slaved away with their hands and backs over the years

Bob's words - 2024-08-31

Working after school

Junior year, I was on Jr Varsity Football and Basketball, but quit in my Senior year to work after school and weekends to help my Dad and buy a car, spending money for me

Bob's words - 2023-02-16

Electrical work, then the night shift

worked as electrician got off at 330 and drove a cab until midnight

Bob's words - 2023-02-16

Respect for a living earned

I never complain about a man earning a good living

Bob's words - 2023-08-23

His last years behind the chair

thanks I like that pic it was after i left under the market to go work with the Scissor Wizard my last 2 years

Bob's words - 2023-05-21

Football between customers

I recall playing football in the parking lot between customers

Bob's words - 2023-08-05

His advice about working people

take good care of working folk

Bob's words - 2024-09-06



High school with Dave



Dad in the 1980s



Dad in the 1980s

San Francisco

A walk through his city.

A continuous passage from the tour he wrote for Gladys.

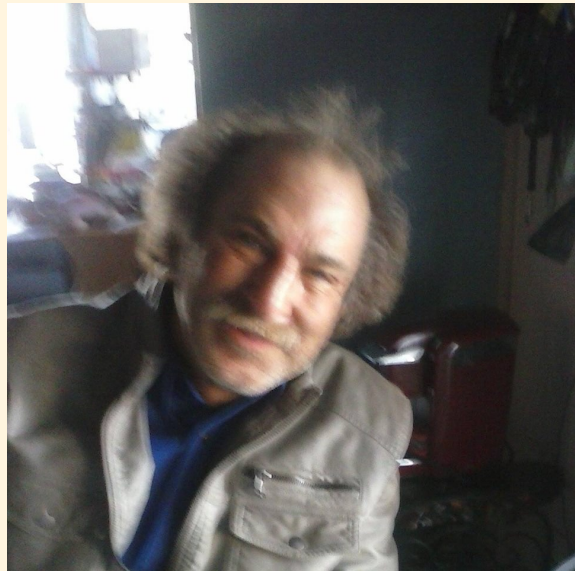
Writing to Gladys, July 2023

Have you explored Golden Gate Park, The Japanese Tea Gardens, "Hippie Hill" where no clothes were allowed, lot's of weed in the air I was born in the Sunset, which is close to the park, about 2 blocks from the park, 9th and Irving In the park there are Bison, Coyotes, Bobcats, many bird species, fish in some of the small lakes The Haight Ashbury , some folks hanging out on the street, waiting for The Summer of Love 1967 to come again, they will be waiting a long time At the end of Market at the Ferry Building they have a great Farmers Market, at that end of Market I worked 8 or 9 high rises wiring them, from the ferry building walking toward Fishermans Wharf is Pier 23, used to be a jazz club where i took Carolyn on our first date, I met her at an Irish dance with Kathy, and took her there for a nightcap

Bob's words - 2023-07-24



Betty, Bob's mother.



An everyday portrait.

Music

A guitar within reach.

Giving guitars to Nick's friends and having them over to "jam" was part of his life, as Nick remembers it. The first update below went to his friend Nick Damato.

An ordinary update to an old friend

Thanks for the update! Glad you are well Not doing much, 75 next year, pickin my guitar and writing a few songs

Bob's words - 2021-07-21

His old barber, still playing

Al was my barber when i was 15 and up at 83 he is still blowin that horn make a trip some tues evening or sunday afternoon

Bob's words - 2021-11-03

Another guitar to give away

I am looking at a hundred buck guitar at 11 I think I have given too many away lol your friend who got married the other day I think I gave him one

Bob's words - 2024-11-03

Giving rather than taking

I'd rather give than take have always been like that

Bob's words - 2025-07-06

More playing, more writing

I need to play my guitar more and do some more writing in my crib here to occupy more of my time

Bob's words - 2025-09-13



Playing guitar, with photographs all around.



Dad pickin with Garth

Friendship

The people he kept remembering.

He remembered friends in stories for his book, on his room walls, and through continued communication. That infinite collage supplied many photographs gathered here. These notes recall work, childhood games and places where he felt welcome.

To Kent

I am lucky to have had you for a friend sir

Bob's words - 2023-11-07

Thanking Ron Sheckler

We are very lucky to have you as friend

Bob's words - 2022-04-18

Fifty years with Jarles

Been friends 50 years so yes happy that we are still friends

Bob's words - 2024-06-02

Growing up with David Morgan

I have known David Morgan since I was 13 years old, as we were neighbors in the same housing tract in South San Francisco, California We would play 'kick the can' , as well as tag team football with other kids in the area. David and I also enjoyed Boxing as a hobby, he usually got the best of me but not always

Bob's words - 2023-03-25

A special place on holidays

Howdy Paul I do hope they can get down to Tiburon to see you, Many great memories for me there, as both my folks had passed away and it was nice to have a special place to go..on holidays

Bob's words - 2023-11-13



Dad with a friend

Animals & care

Room for another creature.

Simba was Nick's dog, staying with Bob while his son was away. Taking in rescues could mean extra work and stress in his later years. As Nick recalls, the young dog below was brought out of the shelter and later found a suitable home with his help.

Simba, making himself at home

Simba is in his house for the afternoon, I don't want him confined to my bed 24/7 I will bring him in for the evening and all night he hogs the bed

Bob's words - 2021-12-11

A young dog, and love left to give

I took on a 7 month old pup, they said he is chihuahua but looks more like a dachshund, about 10 or 11 pounds He was given away on craigslist or going to shelter I figured company for Billie when i am out and I still have a lot of love to give at my age. He is a cute little guy See you soon
Love Dad

Bob's words - 2025-02-03

Recognizing his limits, still full of love

After taking in the young dog, Bob worked with a rescue to find him a more suitable home. He wrote this while arranging it.

I guess I know that I don't have much time left and a lot of love left in my heart

Bob's words - 2025-02-11



Dad getting a dog adopted.

Helping others

Care, with its sleeves rolled up.

Bottles to refill

can you save all the plastic water bottles and caps, I refill them and take them to the homeless thanks

Bob's words - 2022-07-11

The rounds, and some blueberries

save empty bottles, I take water to street people a few times a week There are some blueberries for you you if you want

Bob's words - 2023-08-15

Clothes with another use

can you not put any used clothes in the garbage, I just retrieved a pair of jeans, I seriously scrounge around for clothing for the homeless and poor

Bob's words - 2024-03-17

Thinking again afterward

2nd thought I wish we would have left her some money , I will know better next time

Bob's words - 2025-05-10

A memory from Nick

In his later years, Dad sometimes spent Thanksgiving and Christmas on his own, volunteering at homeless or animal shelters. He also went to Goodwill to buy clothes and supplies for people who were homeless, giving out gifts from his car.



A lap full of dogs.



On the property with Garth

His outlook

A little of how he saw life.

Small replies, a piece of imaginative writing, encouragement and a lesson he took to heart. Each belongs to its own moment; together they offer a little of his outlook.

Happiness, in his own reckoning

I am happy 98 percent of the time the other 2 percent, I wish i could still go out and hustle a few small wiring jobs

Bob's words - 2023-03-18

A world of hope

From an imaginative story he shared again with friends in 2025.

It would be a world where we can progress to the next natural stage, and regress back to kinder and gentler times, a world of hope not fear..

Bob's words - 2025-01-26

Do what you love

no it isn't but do what you LOVE

Bob's words - 2024-01-19

A song against war

anti war song by Donovan

Bob's words - 2023-05-10

The visit he wished he had made

Lesson to me don't put shit off as you may not get another chance to do it

Bob's words - 2025-07-19

Everyday Bob

Coffee, jokes, and love.

The way to breakfast

Going over to Zaz Sammy's Cafe for some french toast or pancakes No freeway driving rio linda blvd all the way

Bob's words - 2024-08-06

Pasta and sushi

I like pasta as much as you enjoy sushi thanks i will have a leftover

Bob's words - 2025-04-11

His younger photograph

I was almost good lookin there before I got old

Bob's words - 2023-11-08

The care he received

thank you both for all you do for me, I am very lucky

Bob's words - 2024-10-27



Dad with baby Nick



Dad holding a family member



Dad with Maureen and Kyle, 1980s

Family history from Nick

The places. The people. The work.

A working family

Bob's father came from Ireland at fifteen, worked the docks, and spent his working life as a union delivery truck driver. That working-class outlook carried through Bob's own professions as a union electrician and barber.

San Francisco and a change of trade

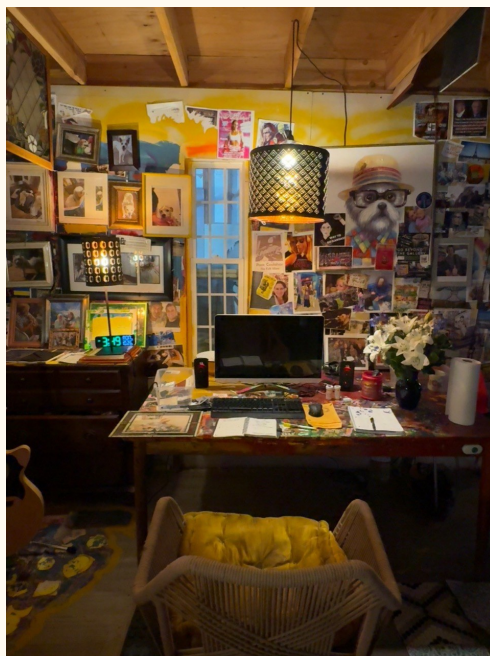
San Francisco was home, with work taking him around California and beyond. He met Carolyn in the early 1980s; their son Nick was born in 1985. When the commute to San Francisco became impractical, he left electrical work for his own barber and cosmetology shop in Pine Grove.

Rio Linda days

Later came the Central Coast, Stockton and the Sacramento area. For roughly his last ten years, he lived on Nick and Gladys's Rio Linda property: getting breakfast, greeting neighbors, playing music and keeping up with friends.

The room, and the dogs

His room became a seemingly endless collage of people, pictures and keepsakes. He rescued and adopted dogs over the years; many are buried on the Rio Linda property.



Bob's workspace, photographed by Nick.