



GRADUATING STUDENT WITH ALZHEIMER'S THANKFUL FOR SUPPORT

By John Milner

Ron Robert crossed something off his bucket list when he crossed the stage with 120 other King's students at Fall Convocation on October 19, 2022. He admits he was "really nervous" about taking part in Convocation, "but that was part of my bucket list - to cross the stage with the other graduates."

He adds that he was looking forward to speaking with many of his classmates at Convocation. "Some of them, I haven't seen in two years (due to the pandemic)," he says.

Ron graduated with a three-year Bachelor of Arts Major in Cross Disciplinary Studies.

Diagnosed with Alzheimer's in 2016, Ron, 84, decided to go back to school to keep his brain stimulated to fight the effects of the disease, a journey that led him to King's in 2018. "It means a lot! I am really pleased," Ron says about graduating.

He likens his experience to a team project involving not only himself and his family but King's as a whole, including faculty, the ITS department and Accessibility, Counselling and Student Development (ACSD). "Without all of their help, I never would have been able to graduate. They all pitched in and went above and beyond the call of duty," he says.

Ron says that coming to King's has helped keep the effects of Alzheimer's at bay. "I wouldn't have the quality of life I have if I hadn't come to King's. It gave me something to aim for. It keeps my brain working," he says. Ron explains that while he has trouble with his short-term memory, his long-term memory remains excellent. Taking political science courses has helped, allowing him to remember events he covered during a 20-year career as a radio and television journalist in Saskatchewan and Alberta.

Ron has praise for many faculty members who were very cooperative and helpful. "They were tremendous. They seemed to have a knack for pulling information out of me." He developed good relationships with Dr. Graham Broad, Associate Professor and Chair of History, and Dr. Andrea Lawlor, Associate Professor of Political Science.

"Working with Ron has been the privilege of a lifetime. It's so rare to meet a person with so much experience in the field that you're teaching, coupled with a willingness to share his experiences with the students. I would lecture on the constitution, but Ron was quite literally in the corridors of power where and when it was being negotiated. While I provided the theory and the context, Ron could share such fascinating insights into the negotiations and personalities behind these momentous events. Ron's experiences transcend so many areas of politics - he could teach a master class in the subject. Still, he is unfailingly kind, humble and generous with the students," says Dr. Lawlor.

In addition to his studies at King's, Ron also became part of the Alzheimer Society's continuing nationwide campaign "Yes. I live with dementia. Let me help you understand." in 2019. He spoke several times at Western, including at Western's School of Occupational Therapy's 12th Annual Profession Pinning Ceremony and the Schulich School of Medicine's Geriatric Interest Group.

Carol Walters, CEO, Alzheimer Society Southwest Partners - Elgin Middlesex and Oxford, offers her congratulations to Ron on "truly an inspirational accomplishment."

"Through his studies at King's and his dementia advocacy work, he has helped reshape the common (and often problematic) views around Alzheimer's. Despite the challenges the disease may present over time, he is living his life to the fullest degree possible. And through his academic work among his student colleagues, he has broken through the ageism wall with his courage, openness, and sharing of his valuable life experiences," says Carol.

Ron has always expressed his appreciation for the accessibility services available at King's. "The accessibility (at King's) is fantastic. I certainly couldn't do it without the aid of Accessibility Services and they do it so willingly, it's wonderful," he said in a story published in September 2018.

"Our innovative team in Accessibility, Counselling and Student Development is committed to providing a holistic support in partnership with students and faculty so that every student has the opportunity to flourish within the unique academic experience we provide at King's," says Joe Henry, Dean of Students.

During his time on campus at King's, Ron could often be found chatting with students, faculty, and staff in the cafeteria. He had previously mentioned that the social aspect of his academic experience "keeps me going."

"Ron's been a wonderful addition to our campus. Always positive, Ron brightens up the day of everyone he interacts with. He engages in class discussions, contributing unique perspectives from a lifetime of experience. Ron takes time to connect with and support other students and is always willing to offer some wisdom to those in need," says Paul Wilton, '07, Associate Registrar in Enrolment Services, who has worked closely with Robert.

"It was really great being with the young people. This generation is the one we've been waiting for. We need them more than ever," he says. The current generation reminds Ron of the 1960s, which saw great demonstrations for civil and gender rights and against the U.S. war in Vietnam. Ron characterizes students as "very kind and caring."

If you missed connecting with Ron over the past four years, you may still have a chance to as Ron intends to continue taking courses this year. "After that, I am thinking about going for my master's," he reveals.

Congratulations to Ron and all our students who crossed the stage at Western's Alumni Hall during Fall Convocation.

