



Season 11: Episode 12 | Ruth Ann Onley | The Inspirational Life and Faith of David and Ruth Ann Onley

Hello and welcome to Scripture Untangled, a podcast by the Canadian Bible Society. My name is Joanne la Fleur. I'm a friend of the Canadian Bible Society and I'm going to be your guide for today's episode.

Today Ruth Ann Onley will be interviewed by journalist Lorna Dueck. Ruth Ann Onley is an award-winning Christian recording artist who has touched hearts for over 35 years with her concert singing ministry. She's married to the late David C. Onley, the 28th Lieutenant Governor of Ontario from 2007 to 2014, and Ruth Ann has had the opportunity to perform at many patriotic, military, and cultural events.

She also flew into the far northern communities on David's behalf to continue his aboriginal literacy programs. In 2008, Ruth Ann and David even had the honor of meeting the Queen at Buckingham Palace. She's a contributing author to the Word Guild award-winning book called *Faith, Life, and Leadership*.

She's the recipient of an Honorary Doctorate of Literature degree from Canada Christian College and the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal and the King Charles III Coronation Medal.

She's Nana to nine precious grandchildren and Ruth Ann continues to delight in sleepovers and soccer games and to pursue her love of singing as she lifts the name of Jesus. Enjoy this conversation.

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Lorna Dueck: Well, hello Ruth Ann Onley. Isn't it great to be together today?

Ruth Ann Onley: It is, Lorna.

It's been many, many years. I've known you so many but never done something like this at this stage in my life.

Lorna Dueck: I think we're taking a private friendship and making it public today, but we love to learn how the Bible began for our guests.

How did you first discover the Bible?

Ruth Ann Onley: Well, I was born into a Christian family, so I guess that's the number one thing. I had Christian grandparents who were missionaries for a very, very short time in their lives. 1907, I think, went to China.

But they were the ones who, they gave me, I was looking for it the other day for this podcast, couldn't find it. It's my first Bible, beautiful, beautiful black leather with a zipper around it. And my name engraved in gold, Ruth Ann Wallace.

My maiden name is Wallace. And that was one of the rare times I saw the E on my name because I took it off many, many years later. So that Bible was a treasure to me as a little girl.

And it still is my treasure, although I think I put it away somewhere, so it won't get lost, and it's lost. And they also gave me this little charm bracelet. They were lovely.

I only knew them until I was about 10, and then they both passed away. But a little charm bracelet with the Ten Commandments on it. I thought, what a beginning when I, you know, I step back now and look at me as a little five-year-old girl, because I think I was about five or six when this Bible was given.

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But the Bible has been very much a part of my life. And I just remember Bible teachers at school, actually, a little show-and-tell here. I had studied to show myself approved.

And I came from that generation when Bible teachers came to your school once a week. And we had Miss Abriel, who I've known, and she just passed away. She was a hundred, I think.

But I remember the competitions we'd have to memorize Scriptures. And so...

Lorna Dueck: In a public school.

Ruth Ann Onley: Public school.

And it was in Bloomsburg Public School in Simcoe. And these teachers would come in. And what a beginning.

I mean, I have kids now, grandkids that are in a Christian school, but this was free public school. And we had this wonderful teaching.

Lorna Dueck: What a wonderful beginning.

But you didn't always stay attached firmly to the Christian teaching. What was your journey in that?

Ruth Ann Onley: I was baptized at the age of 11. And I understood that, going down into the waters of baptism, confessing the sin and God bringing you back up, a new creation in Him.

I understood that. But I was pursuing music. And as I got into my very early 20s and went out and did what I was hoping to do, and that was singing, I just decided that it was kind of a 911 thing and God would be there.

I didn't feel I was particularly; I wasn't particularly open. My brain was just focused on singing. And I just, I decided I would leave Him, and I knew He was there.

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But it just was just that cool, cold heart, I think, really.

Lorna Dueck: The journey of being a musical performer took over for you.

Ruth Ann Onley: Yeah.

Lorna Dueck: Okay, so you have had a deep passion since childhood of being a singer, a performer. What was it like for you as you unpacked your ability to sing? Where did it take you?

Ruth Ann Onley: I had a wonderful teacher who believed in me. And he said, Ruth, you have it, whatever it is.

I didn't know what it was either. But I do now as I sing. But then I was singing, you know, the love songs and the sort of emotional passion of music.

I was out on the road touring with a group, that was one of the first jobs I had in the mid 70s and traveled, and it was exciting to be all around the US and parts of Canada. And then I got tired of that, which it is what it is and came back home to Toronto and got an apartment and shared it with my cousin. And so, then I went into the singing of local areas around here.

There were a lot at that time in the 70s. There were a lot of hotels that had dining rooms and, you know, sort of that classy kind of music situation where I could, I had this dream of being like a Lawrence Welk singer, you know, this really good music, pretty music and singing. And, you know, that was just my vision in my head.

But so, it took me into, but part of this world also took me into some of the darker scenes of a lot of alcohol in these bars. And it was, I found my heart in a place that I didn't want it to be. I didn't want to be in there.

And at that time, too, Lorna, there was, as you remember, smoking was everywhere. And so, cigarette smoke was permeating all places. And my throat would become very hoarse and laryngitis.

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I was plagued by laryngitis all the time. But it was very, it got to be tiresome.

Lorna Dueck: And in a delightful twist, you get drawn back to church in a quite an unusual way.

Tell us what happened.

Ruth Ann Onley: It was because of my cousin who is my roommate, we saved money in the shared apartment. And this would be the very early 80s.

Now. I was still singing. And a knock came to the door one night.

And it was a handsome gentleman with horned rimmed glasses. And he carried a cane, and I could see some awkwardness to him. But as he said, I'm David Onley and your cousin Ellen is doing some publicity for me.

She was working at General Publishing at the time, which was the publisher of a book he had written called *Shuttle*. And David couldn't get a job. He was well educated with his degree in political science.

But at that point, nothing full time was there. So, he dug in and went down to his parents' basement, lived at home, and wrote this book, he went off to NASA and...

Lorna Dueck: Science book really, wasn't it? It had a lot of science in that. Yeah.

Ruth Ann Onley: And he was getting quite respected to with the more he was known. But anyway, it was through him. And then at the time he asked my cousin...

Lorna Dueck: Ellen was his publicist. Your roommate happened to be his publicist.

Ruth Ann Onley: My cousin,

Lorna Dueck: And they had a meeting at the house.

Ruth Ann Onley: Yeh they did. And it was evening. And I was here hurrying off to go to sing at the Skyline Hotel at the cloud room dining room.

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But during one of those, and this happened many times and David and they met other places not in our own apartment. But in that course of knowing her, he boldly asked her if she'd come to church, if she wanted to come down to church. And so, she asked me I came home from work, I think one night and she said, you know, this guy I'm working with David Onley has asked me to go down to church and do you want to come with me? She wasn't particularly interested.

But I knew that church that church is one that my aunt, my single wonderful World Health Organization, traveling nurse aunt had gone to and she was very instrumental in my... she would bring me to Toronto. I lived in Simcoe, a little hometown of, you know, a small town. And she's the one who introduced me to the big city and to theater and to opera and to musicals and how to navigate on the subway system.

Anyway, it was through her she asked me, you know, I would accompany her to church when I would come for a visit for a weekend. And so, I knew that church. And so that's what we did.

We went down. And at that church, as always is the case, there are people that were drawn, I was drawn to this young group of young people in their 20s, just beginning their work life. And in particular, two girls, Diane and Judah, who I could identify with, with their work, one had a, she operated her own business was a beauty supply business.

And the other I could relate. So, I could relate to that, because I was self-employed. And I could also relate to the other girl, Diane, who talked about a lot of failed relationships, and but how God, how Jesus changed her life.

And, you know, it was through those encounters over lunches after church that I wanted what those girls had. And I knew I wasn't happy. I wasn't, there was a deep, deep void and an emptiness in my own heart.

I wanted what they had. And that was the beginning. And so, one of them asked me to her home, she said, my apartments just down the road, not far.

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And she said, Let's go and come over and do apricot tea. So, we had apricot tea and some cookies. And over that conversation, she asked me if I would ask Jesus into my heart, I knew what she was talking about.

I just didn't know him. I knew about him. But and I remember the tears poured out and just poured out so big, huge, taps.

And I just felt so transformed from that one moment. It was very, very dramatic for my spirit.

Lorna Dueck: And you know, this is so interesting, because you were brought to church through a client relationship that David had with your roommate and just the faithful work of God's Holy Spirit in the church. He didn't have to do a thing about your salvation. God was totally taking care of that. But then you get an experience with God, I'm going to maybe fast forward a few months. Yeah.

And you have a dream that you are going to marry someone with a disability.

Ruth Ann Onley: Yeah, I mean, that was maybe back in February, it was March 15, that I was born again. I know the date.

And I'm sorry, very emotional about it. But it was March 15. And then through the summer, we just saw each other and we saw the group and...

Lorna Dueck: You and David saw each other. Yeah.

Ruth Ann Onley: This friendship, David was like a spiritual mentor. And then it was during the summer's July, I woke up in the middle of the night, with the voice saying, Ruth, you're going to marry him. And I yelled, no, no, three times, it was Ruth, you're going to marry him three times.

And three times, I hold myself up, I think myself say, No. Very emphatically, no, I'm not. No, I'm not.

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But it was through that dream that and then getting to know David a bit more. And I mean, I thought, Oh, he's not a date. We're just going out for lunch.

But then I remember one day, he kissed me. And I thought it was through my window of my door of my car. And it was after you know, goodbye, you know, from one of our little lunches or dinners or something.

And he kissed me. And I thought, Whoa. So, it was really God's plan.

And, you know, I had left the Lord, but He didn't leave me.

Lorna Dueck: And I think we need to tell our audience that it has only been two and a half years since David passed away. And in that precious home church where you guys, you know, launched your relationship, and Jesus brought you back to salvation.

An incredible state funeral took place for your husband. And I'm just going to ask our audience to hang on for a few moments to hear that part of the journey because a state funeral in a Christian church, home church is a really important part of the story. But let's first discuss living with someone with post-polio syndrome.

Ruth Ann Onley: Well, polio is a destruction of the nervous system.

Lorna Dueck: And David had, yeah, David had polio.

Ruth Ann Onley: Yeah, polio at age three.

He lived in Midland. And one summer... and anyway, he had it and then they moved the home down to Toronto to get help he needed. He needed a bigger city.

So that's what brought him to Toronto. But so, marrying someone with polio when we first got married, he had one leg brace and was half a leg brace. So, it would only come up just under the knee.

But as he got older, it also, his strength diminished, just getting older period. And also, the bracing increased, he had two full leg braces right up to the top of his thigh.

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Sort of stilt man, he lived like stilt man, if you're gonna walk, he could, you know, grab up and get out of a chair very awkwardly.

I remember, in restaurants, he would get off the chair, and his nose would almost hit the butter dish. I remember sort of being embarrassed. And I would turn the other way; I didn't want to see it.

And that was the way it was basically all our life at the dinner table, his nose would practically hit the table, was just the awkwardness of trying to get up and lock your knees, so that you could lock your knees. But without your knees locked, it was a crumbling body, there was no strength. But the locked knees stilt man, with these two full leg braces enabled him to walk around, then there came a time.

So, raising tiny babies, we had our three boys, three years apart, specifically, because he couldn't lift them up and out of a crib. So, he wasn't hands on, I had to place the babies on him or with a pillow. And it would be a big moment, you know, to have that.

So, in many ways, the physicality of David was, and he talked about this, not that being able to hug people and that closeness that he missed all really all his life. Having canes in his hands, we didn't walk around hand in hand and an arm around each other and sort of that, that kind of style of warm. But as he got older, though, so he was able to have a scooter, and it was a portable scooter, they got better and better.

And in terms of being able to kind of tilt them up on the car and push them in, even he could do it at certain points in his life. But so, it was secure to have these three little kids was quite the sight, you know, we went off to Christian camps, when I started being asked to sing, that was our summer holiday. And the kids when they were really little, one would the baby be on his lap, actually, holding on to the back of the next one, who is standing on the platform with his little hands holding gripping the handlebars with David.

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And then the oldest was on the back of the scooter, you know, sometimes would crack the frame, some of that plastic framing that, it was a funny sight. And the exhibition or somewhere, I would say, let's go get an air balloon, like a helium balloon. So, I can see where you are.

Lorna Dueck: You did mention that this is then once the babies are a little older, your music career comes back to you in a very different way. You start singing for the church, tell us about that.

Ruth Ann Onley: Well, it was a matter of kind of the real pivotal moment was going down in 1989, a Maple Leaf concert with Sandi Patty, and she performed and David had to go to do the late news.

Lorna Dueck: We should mention he's now got a job at City TV in Toronto; that's just the late 80s.

And I just got to tell the audience, TV was larger than life in those days, like that City TV was doing groundbreaking things. It's nothing like the media world now that is so saturated. So, he was a big deal.

He was the weather guy, then he became the science guy.

Ruth Ann Onley: And the first guy with physical disability that was shot the cameras, Moses Znaimer, the boss said, you shoot him all the way down to the floor. I don't want any of this because they were sort of afraid that they were cropping him off and all the shots so they couldn't see his cane and his hand holding the cane and his sort of the bracing.

And so, he did have that job. So, he did go with me. It was like an eight o'clock or seven o'clock concert.

And he had to go back to city to do the 11 o'clock. So, I had to find my way home. We had to come in two cars.

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And but it was her concert that changed my life.

Lorna Dueck: And what, got a vision that you could sing for God?

Ruth Ann Onley: I thought, yes, if this is what I want to do, I want to. And I had a few little cassette tapes at the time.

Lorna Dueck: Cassette tapes, oh Ruth Ann we're getting too old.

Ruth Ann Onley: (I had to) make sure it was right at the spot. You had to start at the church service or sometimes they had to (sound)check. So, I did have a few and I'd learned some and I had done a little bit of singing.

But so that made me realize I could record my singing to these tracks. And I put a couple of tracks on the tape, and sent them to Huntley Street, sent them to People's Church and it was through People's Church, I think, first that got me on air. And there's, you know, God's media at the time was television, People's Church.

And then from there, Huntley Street responded and David Maines. And so, it was a whole new journey in eighty-nine and ninety.

Lorna Dueck: And what did that relationship with God's music do for you spiritually?

Ruth Ann Onley: Oh, it was transforming.

It was that piece that was missing all those years of just singing love songs and emotional emoting of which is wonderful. We all love to hear the songs. But this was ministering and this touched a part of my... it ministered first to me.

And then I knew it was God's Word in song. That was the difference of when I was singing. And I knew that.

And it still is today. If a song isn't basic, it hasn't got the Scriptural basis to it. Some are just I just call them throwaways.

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Nevertheless, they're part of the Christian, especially right now, a lot of stuff. But a lot of good stuff is still there now as well. But in the era when I was doing it all through the 90s, it was these tremendous gospel songs that were done from the U.S. A lot of American, you know, American singers, Steve Green, Sandi Patty, all the big names were doing these amazing tracks as well.

There were orchestras. They were beautiful. And they don't have the same in some ways today.

But all through that era of the 90s, the churches were open to bringing soloists in for part of the sermon messages or there were conferences as well and women's ministries and all of that. So, and those still continue, the women's ministries. And but the churches don't I don't go to churches to sing anymore.

They have their own worship bands.

Lorna Dueck: Right.

So, into this world of music, church music now, and you're just, you know, booking all the time. And that's when I got to meet you and we both when you came to sing for us at 100 Huntley Street. But around 2006, something called *The Project* begins for you and David.

And this project is your plan or God's plan that you guys consider stepping forward for public service. And I want to just pause on that a minute because I since we as Canadians interested in living for Jesus, we need to sometimes consider public service, like that is like being involved in the Canadian fabric of what keeps our country together. So, tell us about how you and David began to consider that.

Ruth Ann Onley: Well, it was May 24 weekend, and David came home, we had dinner, the boys left the table, the boys were still at home, they were going off to university at that time. But so, I cleared the dishes, and we sat still sat at the table.

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And David said, I want to tell you something right now I got to share with you. I've had a request to let my name stand as the next Lieutenant Governor of Ontario. And I was listening and thinking, I barely know what that's about.

But I do know that I sang for a few events for the Lieutenant, for four Lieutenant Governors and in different places where they were as well. And I had, because I had sung for the Blue Jays, *O Canada*. In the late 70s, there was a very much this bilingual thing going on in Canada, to more French and then it was very hard.

Lorna Dueck: We are bilingual now. But I remember when we had to birth that.

Ruth Ann Onley: Yes, and there was a push to do more French in Ontario.

And so, my manager at the time, asked the Blue Jays if I could sing *O Canada* first time. And they said sure. And they're all American.

They didn't really know the political temperature at the time in our country, not really. And so, he said, then do it in French, Ruth. And they said, Sure, you can do it half in French, half in English.

This was the Yankees versus Toronto, 1978, May 24th weekend. So, it was a big game with the Yankees. And I went out and I started singing in English, and then - "Car ton bras sait porter l'épée, Il sait porter la croix!": and then I started the French.

Well, I heard a boo. And this this drone of boo came over. And I didn't know what to do.

So, I just continued and I added a little French at the end, which had been what I was going to do. It was all acapella. And so, it stirred up a lot.

And there were reporters and then it was for the whole weekend, there were a couple of games, so I had to come back. And the Blue Jays said, sing it again, do it in French, you know, so he did. And there were more boos.

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And so, it really kind of a front-page story. And so, there was also a funny political cartoon, cartoonist at the time.

McPherson, Duncan McPherson would do cartoons. And he did one of this and you could probably check it out. I don't know.

It's like May 26 of 78. And I'm out on the, you know, the field in the middle of the song. And I'm disheveled.

And I got this big mouth, singing, you know, O' Canada. And there are hot dogs being thrown at me. I think they're beer bottles.

And I don't know if they had beer then. But anyway, and it just said the caption said, "Very well, then let's just hum."

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Lorna Dueck: Canada was so divided about political-ism.

What publication did that political cartoon about you get published in? The Star?

Ruth Ann Onley: Yes, The Star. David did a big blow up. It's downstairs. And it was black and white. And I've got a big blow up of I'm pretty sure it's The Star. But it started a path of singing *Oh, Canada* for many things. And my manager at the time, then I would get to conventions and public things and where the Lieutenant Governor was attending.

So, I did know, and I remember Lincoln Alexander at a few events.

Lorna Dueck: Well, you know, and I'm sorry, I thought I had researched you well, but I didn't know that story about hot dogs being thrown at you at a Blue Jays game during the national anthem.

Couldn't get more Canadian than that. And I'm struck by that because patriotism is a big part of your life and David's life. You love this country.

You've written another anthem that can be sung for Canada. But I think we should just go back to the project, which David senses, he's called to try for the Lieutenant Governor's office. And lo and behold, after a year of background work, you guys get a call from the Prime Minister.

Ruth Ann Onley: David got a call at City TV about four o'clock in the afternoon. And they said, the Prime Minister is going to call you at whatever 7.30. And so, David was on the way back from, he'd finished his shift, and he was driving the Honda Odyssey back up the Don Valley Parkway, waiting for this call.

The Prime Minister was on route or something just to Nova Scotia. And so, David took the call, and it was a light rain. It was July the 4th.

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And he was just hoping he could keep his mind together on with the wheel. Because he said that he knew the Prime Minister won't call you if you didn't get the job. He'll call you if you got the job.

And he knew that's what was coming up.

Lorna Dueck: In 2007. That's 2007.

Yeah, you both step into this enormous, visible public service role as Lieutenant Governor of Ontario. And on his official coat of arms was the Latin motto, *Through adversity to the heights*. He's the first person now with a physical disability to hold the post of Lieutenant Governor.

Why did he choose that motto?

Ruth Ann Onley: "Per ardua ad alta." Yeah, "Through adversity to the heights." Well, every Lieutenant Governor gets a coat of arms.

And so, when we were putting things together, that was part of it. I think there was there was one already used. And so that was the closest to the heights.

I think he wanted to the stars. Because of this book *Shuttle*. He loves space.

And I think that was already in use somewhere. So, through adversity to the heights, which I like even better. I think it was, it gave him, first of all, the Lieutenant Governor can have a platform, can have a mandate, it's a focus where they can do their good during their term, and focus on something that means a great deal to them and to Ontarians.

So, David focused on disability, and he defined it. And this was always in his speeches, just accessibility for all, accessibility is that which enables people to achieve their full potential. And he said, whatever it takes to help someone live a life full, and they're employed, and they have every opportunity like anyone else.

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And so that was the beginning of his mandate. And it really blossomed and filled up and a lot of the groups that have autism and a lot of sports, things that we would highlight by going to the Paralympics, went to four Paralympics, Vancouver and London and China, and Mexico, just to make it interesting how a person can just be the beacon. And he wasn't, you know, I thought David at one point wanted to be a preacher, a long time ago, and he sat and he talked to a pastor, he said, do you feel called? He said, no, but I want to, I think I want to.

Anyway, he didn't do it. But I, you know, he couldn't preach, but he had a platform as Lieutenant Governor.

Lorna Dueck: Certainly did.

And part of that platform took him all across the far part of Ontario. But he couldn't manage the accessibility issues of the far north. So that becomes your job, you begin to take on the job of flying into Canada's most northern Ontario's most northern communities.

To see our citizens up there, you sing gospel songs for those beautiful people up north. What did you learn about that? What did you encounter?

Ruth Ann Onley: First of all, I think it meant something to the people that the northern aboriginal, the aboriginals have such a connection with the crown with the queen with the king in their treaties. And so, it meant a great deal of someone, and when they knew someone from the office of Lieutenant Governor, the Queen's or the King's representative was up there. And I would say I'm his wife, and we want you to know we haven't forgotten about you.

And we're here, you know, to listen and to help. They appreciated that just not to be forgotten. But the aspect of singing gospel music, I've actually got the song.

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It was because there was a Christian grand chief, and he's of the Anishinaabe Aski Nation, and most of it in Ontario's Anishinaabe Aski Nation, quite a mouthful. And he said, I want you to sing. He learned I had sung.

When you come up, and so he would join me on almost all of the trips that were far north, either from his office in Thunder Bay, he would fly and join somewhere.

Lorna Dueck: The chief did, the chief wanted you to be with them?

Ruth Ann Onley: So, I had meetings, I don't know what I did with them, because they sort of daunted me. But with the band chief, the band leaders, it was like sort of like town council, and they would get together. But when the grand chief was there, they really listened. And it just gave sort of gravitas to what I was doing, too, that he would be there.

Lorna Dueck: And he would then promote the libraries, the books.

Ruth Ann Onley: The libraries and listen to their needs. And there were some summer camps with the kids there.

And also, there were nursing stations that were connecting at that point, 2007 to 14. So, a lot of the nursing stations had all the technology going down to the hospitals, you know, they could be visually like we do now but very beginning of all that. But the chief had, he said, I want you to sing *Amazing Grace* in Oji-Cree.

So here it is in weird, weird lettering. This is what I learned in phonetics. This is my take.

And I sat on the phone and listened to his wife in Thunder, she lived in Thunder Bay, she was a nurse. And the grand chief's wife sat with me. And I over and over again, I wrote phonetically those words that she was trying to, you know, impart to me.

Lorna Dueck: And what happened to the audience when you would sing in Cree?

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Ruth Ann Onley: Oji Cree was, you know, when they could hear their language, it was such a, it was moving, you know, amongst all the Aboriginal cultural sort of world up there. And you see, you know, the leathers and the beads and the teepees and the great big pots where they would have, you know, build these outdoor sort of mesh kind of barbecue things. And everybody would sit around and eat and bannock.

And there was a role, one event, I went to a row of elder women, and they have great respect for the elder's, huge respect. These are the women that would wear those very colorful scarves over their heads, about seven of them on this bench. And they would have, you know, their shirts and these long skirts over there and down over their knees, but these long knee-high stockings.

And they sat there and I realized they were weeping, starting to weep as I started singing. And it touched my heart that, you know, I thought that that song, *Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place*. And it was.

And they were just appreciative.

Lorna Dueck: There are so many more stories we could tell about your life as the vice regal consort to your husband, the Lieutenant Governor. But on January 14, 2023, at the age of 72, David passed on to his eternal reward.

And Ruth, I remember we spoke on the phone shortly after that. And you said to me, Lorna, his body was so tired, so tired of being sick. He just wanted to go home.

What was David anticipating?

Ruth Ann Onley: No, I read your, I'm when I'm thinking his body was done. It was spent he was 72 going on 92, 102. It was very; it was getting so weak.

I'm not sure. I don't know. David was a very public person.

And he loved people; people give him the energy. And he never left too much unsaid. But I never heard him say that to me.

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Ruth, I just want to go home. I really didn't hear that. But I've been still thinking about it.

It's probably a question I'll never know. But he said, I want to live, I hope I live long enough to see my grandkids graduate from high school. But God knew better.

He didn't and I don't know if he knew he was going home. I kind of, it was quite a surprise because he'd been in the hospital several times after all these seizures. He had about three major seizures into the hospital back home into the hospital back this time though, for the past year of his life.

He was in a power wheelchair. He didn't like being in there. But he didn't want me to tell people that he didn't like because that's, it was just him.

I think maybe he knew that was his end. But he did pass and we were around him at the hospital up in ICU. And when he his final breath, we could see the numbers.

It's all this technology. And my son, Michael said, Mom, he just said, "wow." So, you know, it was a very, very soft because you had to get very close.

It's kind of hard all of us being near him. The beds are high for my height. I'm five, two and a half.

And I couldn't quite get really close. But apparently, David just uttered that last expulsion of air to the word, "Wow." So, what can I say?

Lorna Dueck: Yeah, okay.

And so then here on earth, the rare occurrence, the great honor of a state funeral takes over your grieving. And you can, I'll just tell our audience, you can still find that on a quick search, just type in David Onley and, and there's a very moving part of those of the start of the state funeral, where your three sons, Jonathan, Robert, Michael, are walking behind the hearse of their father, the military honor, the horses,

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all the beautiful uniforms, the somber pageantry, the state coming into your home church. What was that experience like for you?

Ruth Ann Onley: I knew it was very honoring.

We'd been to one state funeral, only one during that time, and it was Romy LeBlanc, the Governor General 2009. It was small, it was a smallish area in New Brunswick. So, I knew there would be the, that some of that pageantry.

It was surreal, sort of, just, I just sort of placed my boys there. And I'm going, oh, there's three sons. And you sort of see it with other pageantry and other funerals and Queen and, you know, Mulrooney, all these different state kind of funerals.

But what it did was, in a way, take a little bit of that personal touch away. There were so many people that, politically, that had to speak, had to do their speaking. The only thing I regret. I was very proud of my sons.

And I think it was very important. I think they all stated that David was present for them. And that was the main, main thing.

But I did miss hearing from David's brother, and he did not get the opportunity. It was just, they did not want that funeral to keep going on and on and on. So, I missed part of the funny stories that could have been told about David.

That was the part I kind of did miss.

Lorna Dueck: Even in his funeral, you had to share him. But the boys' speeches were phenomenal.

And then you sang at David's funeral. Not in person. I know you pre-recorded it.

And you took care that it would not be too difficult. Tell us why you chose to sing what you sang.

Ruth Ann Onley: It was actually played off my CD.

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So, it was me, let's see, 1997, many, many, many years ago. It was a song that we, I did my first CD in India. And we wanted this one song in honor of my mother who had passed away six years before.

She was a great musician. She played the organ at church. And this song had a beautiful piece of organ that came in.

And I knew that it would translate beautifully at York Minster Park at our church. But the song itself was very important. And it was called *No More Night*.

"No more pain, no more tears, never crying again. Only praises to the great I am. We will live in the light of the risen Lamb."

Lorna Dueck: We will live in the light. You know, we're almost out of time. And I had wanted to talk to you about how you and David wrote a new anthem for Canada.

"We are the people of the maple leaf." Why was patriotism so important to you as a couple?

Ruth Ann Onley: It was very important to David. He loved, he did love the moments that he could be the honorary colonel, or he had an OPP uniform and just stick a big uniform on David.

Like he didn't have the shoulder strength. But, you know, he just really, I think it was like a little boy dream or something. But so, the military in both our families is very important.

My father served in World War II. And so did his father. His father was a navigator.

My father was an air rescue pilot. And so, we grew up with that deep, deep respect for our country and for those who served. And so, it was just sort of natural to be part of so much military stuff.

But the reason we saw and heard this song being played by a single piper was at a church service, which is also part of the opening of the courts in Ontario. And so,

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they'd have the opening of the courts, but they'd have this church service as well. And this lone piper went down the aisle and back to this.

And he played this song, which I found out later was written by two Germans in 1982 for the Highland Games in Munich. And these two German writers loved Scotland. And so Highland Cathedral. It was just the magnificence of the land. That's why the word cathedral was used in Highland, of course, because it's in Scotland. And so, this song has been played.

It was played in military places. But David said when he went home, he nudged me actually in the church. He said, I can hear a song.

"We are the people of the Maple Leaf, proud to defend our home in war and peace." And so, he went home and he wrote two verses, two choruses and a bridge to that song. And we were able to get an interested person who put money forward where we could go to the CBC.

And we got Rob Carley because David had done a Murdoch mystery, little movie part as a lieutenant governor.

Lorna Dueck: So many stories in your life.

Ruth Ann Onley: Yeah.

But he said, let's get Rob Carley to do the music. David was a visionary. I'm not.

And so, Rob Carley, you know, and Murdoch, very successful. So, he wrote a whole arrangement. We hired, we did it at CBC, hired Toronto Symphony people.

Lorna Dueck: Find it online. It's so beautiful. Yeah.

We are the people of the Maple Leaf. Okay. Take that patriotism, take your love for God. What kind of Canada do you hope your nine grandchildren will grow up in?

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Ruth Ann Onley: I hope there will always be church doors open, that there will be freedom, in that world of where they're growing up. I pray that they will remember their Scriptures from their own desire to know the Lord, that they will follow Him.

You know, I think Christian grandparents always pray, if they aren't, they should be for sure, that their children will just love Jesus and will love His Word and will follow His ways and will be obedient and trust Him, just that they will know the Lord.

I pray that our world is, you know, I thought about this question, I thought about, you know, what did my grandparents back in 1950 something, when they gave me that Bible, what were they thinking? Like they didn't live until, they only lived till 1960. And yet our world has continued. I think there's a going to be, I think there's a revival.

I've heard that, you know, in these young Gen Z's and...

Lorna Dueck: Yes, we have been tracking with it at the Canadian Bible Society. There is definitely an awakening for Christ amongst Gen Z, definitely.

Ruth Ann Onley: You know what, we need to pray as well for our politicians. We are so good at stripping them down and just really a lot of vile, a lot of comments that go out. We do need to lift them in prayer.

Lorna Dueck: Absolutely, absolutely. And Ruth Ann, we're going to close.

And I think we'd love you to pray for our politicians and, and just that reminder that we've got to lift up this beautiful country to the God of all gods. Would you close us in prayer?

Ruth Ann Onley: Dear Father, we thank you for this moment together to bring Your name forward, to bring our country's name forward, to bring our leader's names forward, and to bring our families and our children and grandchildren, to bring our whole lives before you, Lord. So, we just pray now that our country will remain steadfast, that you will revive.

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And there will be a revival that there's so many who are just on empty, Lord, that have no sense of hope in their lives. And we just lift them, and we lift the leaders who lead them, Lord, that You will be, give them their guidance, give them the message from the people and that they would follow and that they would be creative in their policies. And Lord, we just lift each leader, no matter what we feel about them, Lord.

They need your strength, and they need your guidance. And so, we come today in gratefulness for this beautiful country, in gratefulness for the spirit of the people that, and may we remain always people with the glass half full and not and not keep looking at the negatives. May we, may the joy of the Lord be our strength, Father.

We pray this all in Jesus' name.

Lorna Dueck: Ruth Ann Onley with the Canadian Bible Society. Thank you so much.

Ruth Ann Onley: Thank you so much, Lorna. Thank you for all you're doing. I've learned so much from looking at so many of your, yes.

Thank you.