

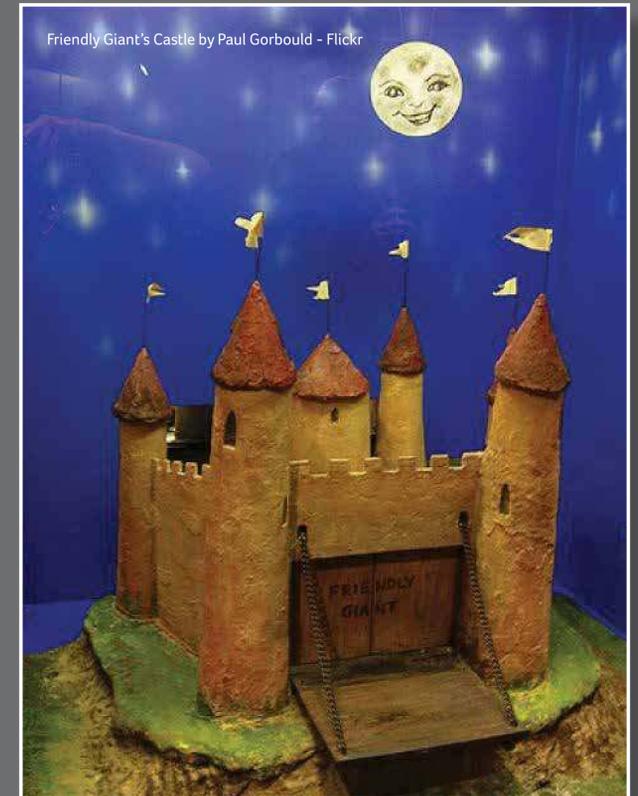
# Robert Homme

## *The Friendly Giant*

Robert Homme was born in Stoughton, Wisconsin on March 8, 1919. Growing up, he learned to play the clarinet and recorder. At the University of Wisconsin, while he was earning an economics degree, **he began a broadcasting career on the side at the campus radio station.**

With the advent of television, he found himself working on a children's bedtime show for the university's TV station. The show's set was decorated with miniature props. During one **broadcast he caught a glimpse of his seemingly giant hand rearranging the tiny furniture,** and the idea for *The Friendly Giant* was born.

In 1958, the CBC offered Homme a 26-episode contract. He accepted and moved to Toronto. There he was joined by Rod Coneybeare as puppeteer, and an amazing team was born. **Characters, format and miniature set never changed** during the program's more than 3,000 episodes.

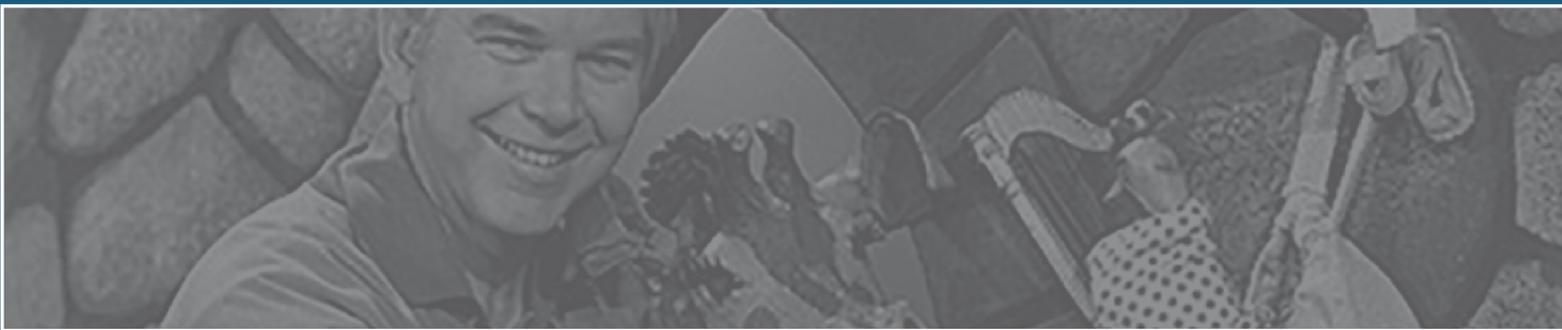


Courtesy of the Canadian Museum of History



Each episode followed the big guy as he and his hand-puppet pals, **Jerome the Giraffe and Rusty the Rooster** explored a single topic. At the core of the show's success was the fact that to children, all adults appear to be giants. But Homme proved that grown-ups can share kids' sense of play and wonder.

Over the years, *The Friendly Giant* hosted many of Canada's top musicians, including Moe Kaufman and Peter Appleyard. Homme **introduced his young audience to eclectic styles as well as performers** - everything from Cole Porter to Elizabethan madrigals.



The CBC's decision to cancel *The Friendly Giant* in 1984 was greeted with almost universal contempt. **There were questions in the House of Commons**, while angry viewers bombarded the CBC with letters. The broadcaster reprised the show for a series of half-hour specials, but no regular episode was taped after that year.

With the exception of one book and two CBC albums, Homme refused to license the show or his image. *"He could have become a millionaire with Friendly Giant toys and other spinoffs,"* says Coneybeare. **"But Bob wouldn't commercialize his bond of trust with the kids."**

For many years following, Jerome, Rusty and the castle were on display in the CBC's Broadcast Centre in Toronto. But then a **major mistake was made**. The Friendly Giant's puppet friends were used in an off-colour comedy routine on the 2007 Gemini Awards without the family's permission. There is no way, the family reported, that permission would have been granted had they been asked! Our reproduction of the castle is the work of Natasha Hertle of Grafton.



Homme with Grand Daughter and Order of Canada



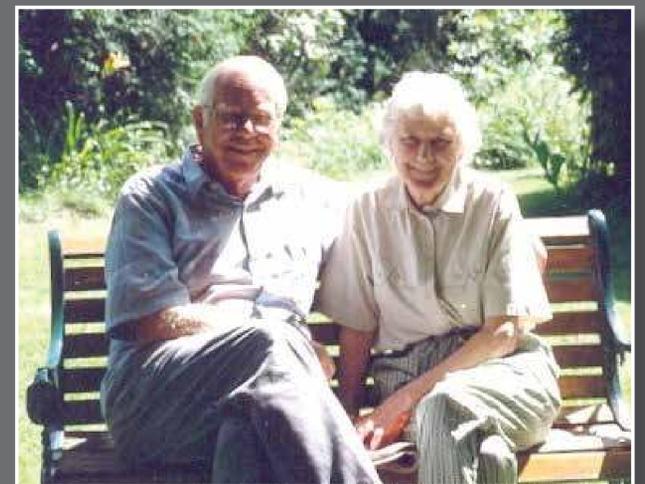
Long before he retired, Homme discovered a place to relax, and eventually build a retirement home, **in the countryside of Grafton Village**, just east of Cobourg. He became a familiar figure around town and members of his family still live nearby.

He became a citizen of Canada in the early 1990s and was **invested into the Order of Canada as a Member** on November 2, 1998. As he was too ill to travel at the time, Governor General Romeo LeBlanc took the unusual step of coming to his home in Grafton to bestow the honour.

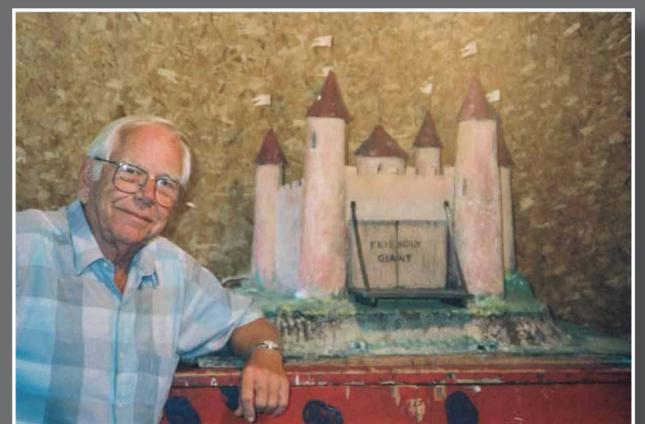
Robert Homme passed away in his Grafton home on May 2, 2000 at the age of 81.



The Friendly Giant as seen on CBC



Bob and Esther Homme in Grafton



Bob Homme and Castle