

Georgetown Graphic - August 14, 1986

## Roberts dies in mishap

Larry Wayne Roberts, a five-time world speed-cutting tobacco champion famous locally for promoting the Blue Grass Tobacco Festival, died Saturday in Owen County of injuries sustained in a motorcycle accident.

According to state police, Roberts, 42, was riding a trail bike 15 miles south of Owenton on KY 607 when he lost control of the bike, ran off the roadway and struck several trees. He was pronounced dead at the scene by Owen County Coroner Lanis Garnett.

Roberts, a resident of Lynette Drive, was founder and president of the Blue Grass Tobacco Festival, a two-day celebration of burley tobacco farming.

A fast-talking, 6-foot-5 forklift operator, Roberts seemed determined to single-handedly raise tobacco cutting from farm drudgery to an art form.

"Cutting tobacco is one of the few jobs that still has to be done by hand," Roberts said in a "Scott County Personality" article a few years ago. "Strength and skill still count. Machines and computers have taken over just about everything else."

Roberts said he and his brother Spence had spent 30 years perfecting techniques to

make themselves faster cutters, always encouraged by their late father, S.S. Roberts, who was a pretty fast cutter himself.

"I guess Spence and I were about 18 before we finally passed him," Roberts said. The champion always lauded the talents of his brother-in-cutting.

Talk about the Roberts brothers and their fast cutting gradually spread outside Scott County, and one day in 1972 a test was arranged. Some representatives from R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Co. were brought in as official observers, and the two Robertses cut loose on an eight-acre tobacco field in Woodford County.

Eight-and-one-half hours later, Larry Roberts had cut 2,350 sticks of tobacco and Spence Roberts had cut 2,210 sticks. Some checking around was done, and when no one could be found who claimed to have cut more

tobacco in one day, Larry Roberts went into the record books as the world's fastest tobacco cutter.

Perhaps his greatest feat was in 1979—one year after he suffered a heart attack—when he cut 2,358 sticks of tobacco in 8 1/2 hours. He had competed against three machines, once before television cameras from "PM Magazine," and had beaten all three.

That same year, Roberts retired from competitive cutting and got into the promotional end with the Blue Grass Tobacco Festival.

A native of Bourbon County, he was the son of Aileene Roberts Anderson, Wilmore, and the late Spence Roberts Jr., was a member of the First Church of God, and President of the Blue Grass Tobacco Festival, and was an employee of the Hoover-Johnson Control Company.

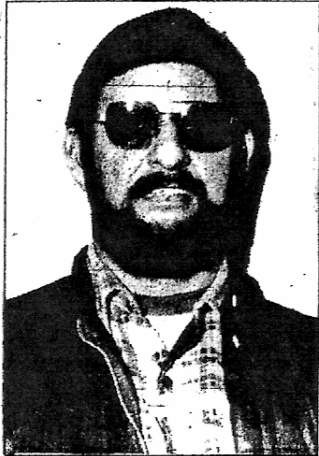
Other survivors include his  
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wife, Dora Ann Bailey Roberts; two daughters, Katy Ann and Donna Sue Roberts, both of Lexington; a son, Larry Wayne Roberts Jr., Georgetown; a sister, Mrs. Ella Drunker, Rebondo Beach, CA; a brother, Shelton (Spence) Roberts, Danville.

Funeral services Tuesday at Johnson's Funeral Home by Bro. Robert Lakes. Burial in Georgetown Cemetery.

Casketbearers were Russell Gardner, John Bailey, Charles House, Bill Dowles, Gregory Williams, Doug Roberts, Ray Gillispie, Ollie Covington.



LARRY ROBERTS

*Roberts, Larry Wayne 1943 - 1986*

