



HEALTH CARE IN THE 1950'S, SMALL TOWN STYLE WITH DOCTOR BOB

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Most anyone in their senior years who has lived in Collingwood since the end of the Second World War should know or have heard the name of Dr. Robert [Bob] Nesbitt Storey (1913-1995). When I was young our "Family" Doctor was, literally, "family". Bob Storey and my mother were first cousins (their mothers were sisters, being two of the daughters of R. W. O'Brien). To me he was a "first cousin 1x removed". You could say that cousin Bob knew me from day one because he delivered me in the old G & M Hospital on Moberly St., just one of an estimated more than 1500 babies he is believed to have personally delivered in his career. Bob Storey's desire to become a doctor may have been influenced at least in part by the short life of his younger brother, Harry Storey, Jr. "Baby Harry", born with congenital heart disease, died in November 1933, four days after his 15th birthday.

Following graduation from C.C.I. in 1931 Bob Storey was a student at the University of Toronto. In his second year at U of T (1932-33), he was the Second Year Representative on the DAFFYDIL Committee. DAFFYDIL was an annual variety show, founded in 1895, put on by the medical students. In February 1933 the show was held on two consecutive evenings in the Hart House Theatre then followed by the annual DAFFYDIL banquet at the King Edward Hotel. Despite the seriousness of their studies, the medical students knew, as well, how to not take life too seriously and how to have fun.

Subsequent medical studies took Bob to London, Ontario and the University of Western Ontario. There, in 1936 he was a member of the Delta Upsilon Fraternity and a member and President of the Hippocratic Society. Reflecting his passion for sports when a student at C.C.I. he also found time to play rugby, hockey and basketball at Western. In June 1937 his father Harry R. Storey died young at age 55 of heart disease. Medical student Bob Storey signed his father's death registration as the "person giving information", the first of many such countless forms he would sign during his long career as a doctor.

I'm sure he had high hopes of being a doctor, notwithstanding that during the lean years of the Great Depression when money was in short supply, doctors were sometimes "paid" for their

services in firewood, shingles or eggs. The lean years of the Depression would soon be over and, ironically, the economy would roar to life with the coming war. Bob graduated from Western in 1938 and then worked as a clinical assistant at the hospital in Albany, New York followed by time at the Hamilton, Ontario General Hospital.

In the fall of 1940 he enlisted in the Canadian Army and was first posted to the Canadian Medical Services of the Queen's Own Rifles and shortly thereafter he was transferred to the then-new medical services branch of the Royal Canadian Air Force serving at C.F.B. Trenton and subsequently posted to England sometime after early March 1942 when he had visited a friend in Buffalo. In December 1942 the *Enterprise-Bulletin* reported that Flight Lieutenant Bob Storey had been promoted to the rank of Squadron Leader. "Doc", as he was known in the Air Force became liaison officer at R.C.A.F. Headquarters in London for the duration of the war. At the time of his promotion and transfer to London, *Wings Abroad*, an air force publication overseas stated, "'Doc' shall always be remembered with gratitude by the squadron for his untiring interest in the welfare of every individual."

In 1946 with his war service behind him and following completion of a radiology course at Toronto General Hospital, Bob Storey responded to a request from his life-long friend Dr.

Donald McKay (Jr.) to join him in his medical practice at 27 Third Street, Collingwood in a house next door to the old McKay home known today as Thurso House (originally the home of Dr. Donald McKay Sr. (1866-1940). One of his first “family” tasks as a doctor in Collingwood was to sign the death registration for his aunt’s husband (my grandfather R. J. Hewson) at the beginning of May 1946.

Theresa Armitage, whose parents had owned the Tremont Hotel for many years until 1952, was the nurse/receptionist for Drs. McKay & Storey. Harking back to the earlier reference about doctors being paid for their efforts with firewood, shingles or eggs during the Depression, Theresa Armitage, when interviewed by Christine Cowley for her landmark 2008 Collingwood history book *Butchers, Bakers, And Building The Lakers*, stated that even in the 1950’s, doctors often treated people who could not afford to pay them at all or “they’d give the doctors chickens or ducks or maple syrup” (pg. 125).

Provincial Health Insurance was still some distance off in the future so people paid for their medical care as best they could.

As the years went by other partners came and went in the office on Third St.—to name a few: Don Paul, Ron Timpson and Peter Savage. Bob became Medical Director at Sunset Manor in 1969, a post he held until he retired in 1992 at age 79. He was also the Coroner for Simcoe County for many years.

Throughout his entire medical career, most of it in Collingwood, he was known for his warm and caring bedside manner and for the personal interest he took in his patients as individuals and in what was going on in their lives and the lives of their families.

Family health care in the 1950's largely revolved around the doctors making house calls at literally all hours of the day and night, sometimes in horrendous weather, especially when they had to make their way to remote rural locations during snowstorms in the winter. Sometimes a doctor was summoned to a remote area on a backroad somewhere up on the Blue Mountain. They might travel part way in their own car and then be met by someone with a truck or a team of horses and a sleigh. In town there were visits to the doctor's office for vaccinations and check-ups and other procedures. Walk-In Medical Clinics as we know the term today did not exist. People went to the hospital for operations, for serious illness, and to be treated for accidents. For example, in the days before safety glass in car windows, it happened frequently in head-on collisions that people were hurled right out through the windshield.

There were other aids to health care as well: Collingwood's one ambulance lived at the Ste. Marie St. Fire Hall. There were four drugstores on the Main Street (Stuart Ellis, Don Bremner, and Herb Chapman, all on the east side and Whit Hammond on the

west side) and, in an era when stores were closed on Sundays, one of those four drugstores had to be open on Sunday on a rotating basis to dispense medicine.

Bob Storey lived just two blocks down Ste. Marie St. from us and I well remember “Dr. Bob” coming to the house with his black doctor’s bag as I went through the childhood diseases of measles, mumps and rubella which we generally caught from other children at school who were contagious/just coming down with them (the combined “MMR” vaccine for these diseases did not appear until 1971). My case of mumps in 1956 was so bad that my cat would not enter my bedroom, so distorted was my face on both sides. It is recorded in a book that other mothers came to have a look at me—“the worst case of any kid”. We could have charged admission to this freak show! Strangely, I didn’t get chicken pox until I was 39 when I was in the same room with a 4-year-old boy who had five spots on his face. Having now had chicken pox at 39 instead of in childhood, I thought I couldn’t get its cousin shingles until maybe age 125 but they told me it doesn’t work that way so I got the shingles shot in 2012.

The doctor’s bag in those days contained a variety of instruments for monitoring a person’s vital signs and other items for First Aid. This list is by no means comprehensive, but some of the bag’s contents were: tongue depressor,

thermometer, reflex hammer, stethoscope, otoscope (ears), ophthalmoscope (eyes), scalpel, bandages, scissors, some form of antiseptic, forceps, blood pressure cuff, pain relief, sedatives and a prescription pad. Sometimes small children, when asking where babies came from, were told that babies came in the doctor's black bag. The stork had competition.

Long before cell phones had been thought of, a loud bell connected to Bob's home telephone line was mounted on the outside of his house so that emergency calls would not be missed if the family were all out in the yard. When I cut a finger while pruning shrubs in his backyard, his wife Kate drove me to the office on Third St. where one of the newer partners, Dr. Don Paul, stitched me up without anaesthetic. When a plantar wart under my foot was finally ready to surrender, I rode my bike to Storey's house and had Dr. Bob rip it off, roots and all, and send me on my way with a band aid—small town medicine indeed!—no appointment, no waiting, Family Doctor almost within hollering distance. They don't make them like that anymore!

Vaccinations took place at Bob's office and at public school. I was the first child in town to get a dose of whooping cough and diphtheria vaccine with tetanus included at 6 months old in 1948. In my early school years (from 1952 on) the Simcoe County Health Unit provided school children with periodic

vaccinations/boosters for diphtheria, tetanus, small pox and whooping cough and, after it became available in 1955, the Salk polio vaccine. I couldn't understand why some of the girls fainted at the sight of a needle as we lined up in the hallway at Victoria School on Maple St. to wait our turn, but some did.

In that same mid-50's time period we also received a small round vitamin pill in the classroom each morning. One student, held a large glass jar and we each put our hand in it (the term "Food Safe" was unknown in those days) to get a chocolate-coated vitamin pill as we lined up to the drinking fountain in the classroom. One boy enjoyed them so much that he took a handful of the pills. We were constantly exhorted to eat chocolate by the Neilson's pull-down map of The Dominion of Canada in the classroom which showed a different one of their assorted milk chocolate bars in each corner of the map. Chocolate-coated vitamin pills and chocolate bars were much more fun than cod liver oil.

Bob Storey was also a practical person, knowing not only that some things in life could be challenging to deal with when common sense goes out the window, but also that some things just could not be done when it came to a person's health. When the hippie era dawned he invoked common sense when he said that "soap and water never hurt anyone". In 1973 when mentoring a young Dr. Allan Mickelson (Allan and

Suzanne are friends of mine here in Victoria), Bob gave Allan the benefit of the wisdom learned in his many years as a doctor when he told Allan what you could *not* make chicken salad out of. I'll leave it to the reader's imagination to guess what he actually said.

The licence plate on Bob Storey's car started with the letter "D" before the numbers so that a doctor could be readily identified in case of emergency. On March 1, 1959 a catastrophic fire destroyed Sheffer's Garage on Hurontario St. just south of the Dorchester Hotel. Among the vehicles destroyed in that fire was Bob Storey's new 1959 Ford Fairlane that was in for service. He had two new cars that year, the first one not even "broken in"—all that was left of it was a burned-out shell. Bob Storey, like me, had Irish ancestry through his mother and I wonder if he knew that Henry Ford named the Fairlane model after the street [Fair Lane] in County Cork, Ireland where his father William Ford had lived before he emigrated to the United States in 1846 during the desperate years of the Irish Famine.

My cousin Bob Storey, in his youth C.C.I. Student Council President, popular and distinguished student and athlete at both C.C.I. and the University of Western Ontario, is reported to have said in his high school Valedictory Speech in 1931, "No one ever got more out of the world than they put into it". His

life, not only as a physician, but also in the many other ways he contributed to his home town beyond the field of medicine, was a living tribute to that statement. In 1994, the year before he died, he was presented with The Order of Collingwood in recognition of all he had indeed put into the world, especially in his home town.

David Vuckson is a great-grandson of pioneer Collingwood merchant R. W. O'Brien. His roots in town go back to 1875. David and his wife Pamela live in Victoria, B. C.