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## **SCHOOL DAYS FIRST AID TRAINING, 1950's STYLE**

**H. David Vuckson**

Continuing on with the theme of last month's story, there is more to be told about health care in Collingwood in the 1950's. This involved basic training in "Preliminary First Aid To The Injured" as taught to public school children by the St. John Ambulance organization. Many of you will remember that in Grade 7 or 8 at Senior Public School when we were about age 10 or 11, we received instruction from the St. John Ambulance representative, Mr. George Llewellyn Nutt (1911-1991) a gentle soul in his late forties from Woodstock, Ontario.

We learned basic skills such as distinguishing between simple and compound bone fractures, where the pressure points in the body are to stop profuse bleeding, how to make a sling, the procedure for artificial respiration in use at that time (more about that below), the difference between a burn (dry heat) and a scald (moist heat) and so on.

It was definitely a simpler time sixty years ago. We had never heard of such things as the various life-threatening allergies

that now exist. Of course, some people suffered from “hay fever” and there were, at times, campaigns to pull up ragweed out of the ground along the roadside and in ditches around Collingwood. The only allergy of concern that I was personally aware of at that time was that a girl of my acquaintance had asthma and would react in the presence of a cat or dog and have some difficulty breathing. We did not know of things like peanut allergies causing life-threatening anaphylactic shock and just about every kid ate peanut butter—practically until it was coming out our ears—in that era. Kraft Foods assured us in television commercials that their peanut butter was “fresher in the jar than peanuts in the shell”. Peanut butter was taken to school in sandwiches and we and our mothers who made our lunches never gave a moment’s thought that a peanut butter sandwich could be dangerous to someone else’s very life.

Our St. John Ambulance First Aid training involved hands on-exercises. Each student received a sheet of linen which, with the aid of complicated diagrams, could be worked into a number of aids such as an arm sling, or a “ring knot”. I don’t know how many times my mother had to pretend she had a broken arm so I could practice making a sling out of this bandage and putting it on her because we had to put a sling on another student as part of the examination.

The most memorable exercise of all was that of Artificial Respiration *as it was then-taught* using the back pressure/arm lift method invented in 1932 by Holger Louis Neilsen (1866-1955) of Denmark. You have to imagine a swimmer has just been rescued from near drowning at Sunset Point by the lifeguard. The procedure of “AR” at that time was to lay the person face down on the ground with their arms folded at the elbows and stuck out at their side like wings with their forehead resting on their hands. Then you would kneel in front of their head and with your two hands positioned over the victim’s upper back you would press down while counting 1-2-3-4 and then quickly move your hands to lift their elbows up high while counting 5-6-7-8. This was to be done over and over until the victim revived. We practiced this technique on our classmates who were already breathing and it was done on the level expanse of hardwood floor in front of the stage in the Senior Public School auditorium.

Manual manipulations like this were later superseded in the 1960’s with “mouth-to-mouth resuscitation” (tilt the head back to open the airway, lift the chin up and forward, pinch the nose, blow through the victim’s mouth at a normal rate of breathing). It would have been difficult to teach the mouth-to-mouth method in Public School because “locking lips” with another classmate at age 11 would not have played very well for the students or the parents and even today many, if not most,

adults are not keen on doing the same with a stranger. The favoured technique today is chest compressions and the use of an Automated External Defibrillator (AED). Pam recently participated in a CPR training session and those who signed up were told in advance, "You don't have to 'kiss' anyone unless you want to". The group practiced on mannequins.

Our experience with "AR" at Senior Public School in the late 1950's brings to mind a joke we learned in my favourite dictation in French class at C.C.I. in the early 1960's and anyone who was in Mary Hamilton's class in those years may remember it. She would first wipe the blackboard chalk dust off the LP record against her skirt before putting it on the turntable and then we would listen to the dictation in French once through before writing then the voice on the record went through it a second time more slowly. Translated into English the dictation went something like this: *A millionaire big business man (Monsieur Le Gros) and his wife have gone to Florida on vacation. One day while they are stretched out on the beach, the man leaves his wife momentarily to go and buy a cigar. When he returns there is an excited crowd milling about. He asks a bystander what is going on and is told, "It's a woman they've just brought out of the water." The man looks and says, "That's my wife! What are you doing to her?" Someone explains, "Artificial Respiration". The man becomes very angry*

*and yells at them, “ARTIFICIAL!!!-ARTIFICIAL!!!—GIVE HER THE REAL THING!!! I’M RICH AND I’LL PAY WHATEVER IT TAKES!!!”*

Toward the end of the school year Mr. Nutt “examined” us in First Aid techniques and we all received a certificate with the following words: *“THE PRIORY OF CANADA OF THE MOST*

*VENERABLE ORDER OF THE HOSPITAL OF ST. JOHN OF JERUSALEM. THE ST. JOHN AMBULANCE ASSOCIATION, AMBULANCE DEPARTMENT-FOUNDED 1895—INCORPORATED 1914 FOR INSTRUCTION IN FIRST AID, HOME NURSING AND CHILD WELFARE. THIS CERTIFICATE IN PRELIMINARY FIRST AID TO THE INJURED IS AWARDED*

*TO \_\_\_\_\_ (NAME) \_\_\_\_\_ WHO PASSED AN EXAMINATION OF PROFICIENCY IN THE SAID SUBJECT ON \_\_\_\_\_ (DATE) \_\_\_\_\_ AT COLLINGWOOD, ONT. REGISTERED AT OTTAWA, CANADA AND ST. JOHN’S GATE, CLERKENWELL, LONDON, E. C.”* The document was signed by

George L. Nutt and along with it we received a St. John Ambulance pin that was to be worn to identify ourselves as someone who could count to eight and save a drowning victim at Sunset Point. As one of my friends said, if he had to save someone’s life they wouldn’t stand a chance.

Today in our complex world when there are so many more hazards to life and limb than there used to be, a number of organizations including St. John Ambulance offer up-to-date

First Aid courses. You never know when quick-thinking and First Aid skills may indeed save someone's life.

***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.***