

Remembering Bill Webber

Dr Gavin Stuart's in memoriam of Dr Webber was printed in the March issue of the BCMJ. We felt that Dr Webber's stature and the affection with which he was held by the medical community justified this second tribute. Dr Grantham is professor emeritus and first head of the UBC Department of Family Practice. — ED

When a particularly remarkable colleague and friend dies, we sometimes need to pause and try to ascertain the reasons why this particular loss seems so unusually painful.

Although Bill Webber was born in Newfoundland, he didn't even talk funny. If we believe in stereotypes, it may, however, explain his often droll way of expressing himself and his delightful appreciation of humor in others and in his life in general. Actually, Bill always spoke thoughtfully and with precision, one of his hallmarks even as a young man; a reflection of his organized mind.

In the late 1940s at West Point Grey's Lord Byng High School, only a few blocks from where he lived and worked all his life, Bill was known as a "brain" in the adolescent argot of the day, even to those in grade 12 (like me) when he was in grade 10. His cute girlfriend then was Marilyn Robson; she became his lifelong partner, support, and helpmate. Though Bill and Marilyn were both outstanding at remembering people's names (like spouses of faculty members) Marilyn was probably the better. She is now his widow, loving mother of their three successful kids, and grandma to their seven grandchildren.

As an undergraduate at UBC, Bill became a "first class" pre-med student, universally recognized by us all as one who would have no difficulty getting into the just-established (in 1950)

medical school—which he of course did, no problem.

For those in UBC Med '58 he was top of the class each year and popular gold medal winner at graduation. Bill's development as a teacher showed early; in a recent BCMA video (*Medical Frontiers—100 Years of Innovation*), a segment documenting our school's early days contains a photograph of half a dozen (oh-so-young) medical students in their short white coats apparently seriously contemplating a pathology specimen. If Kodak can capture body language, in this picture Bill Webber is already clearly teaching his classmates the finer points of the structures under scrutiny.

Bill Webber did a junior rotating internship at VGH, two post-graduate years at Cornell researching the functions of the distal renal tubule of the rat, and then commenced his outstanding ascent up UBC's academic ladder: faculty association president, Department of Anatomy professor, Faculty of Medicine dean, associate vice-president academic, and member of the Senate and Board of Governors. His list of accomplishments is long and has been detailed elsewhere; a university CV format does not easily give us the true measure of this remarkable man.

So here was a doctor (which means *teacher* in Latin) who never practised clinically, yet somewhat paradoxically became revered and is now dearly missed by two entire generations of practising physicians in BC. How so? Three reasons.

First, Bill Webber was a man who *gave*: of his time, his knowledge, his expertise, his caring, and of himself. He gave support, provided guidance and encouragement, and remained perpetually accessible, even in his various roles as the boss. Evidence includes being UBC's longest-serving medical dean, an honorary degree from

his home institution, and many other prestigious awards.

Second, Bill Webber evolved into the consummate *teacher*. Whatever it is that great teachers possess, he typified it. He was patient, enthusiastic, interested, inspiring, knowledgeable, and had high expectations—all these things—and was always highly evaluated by students, trainees, and colleagues for these characteristics. Hence, the William Webber Medical Education Lectureship, the Killam Teaching Prize. His real love of teaching was not limited by our university's regressive mandatory retirement policy—he continued teaching and mentoring until he died.

Third, Bill Webber was a *bridge-builder*, a mediator, an arbiter. His style was consistently non-confrontational. He was highly successful in national organizations and was particularly effective locally as dean in establishing positive working relationships between the academic and practice-oriented medical communities here in BC. Witness his recognition by the VMA as their Osler Orator and Prince of Good Fellows, the Alumni Association's Wallace Wilson Leadership Award, and senior membership in the CMA. He did much to create, nurture and maintain the positive town-gown situation from which all of us benefit here.

In early January, Bill Brown, the kindly (self-appointed) President for Life of our UBC medical class of '58 phoned: "The Dean has had a stroke." There have been several deans now, but we knew who he meant. Three weeks later, Bill Webber died, age only 71. We've lost a really great person here. For Dean Emeritus William Alexander Webber, MD, FRCPC, LLD, there'll be no more classroom (or small group sessions considering the "new" curriculum), no more mentor group visits, no more committees,

councils, consultancies, or commissions, no more meetings, no more community soccer or lawn bowling, no more family time at Gambier Island.

I am only one of the many, many people sharing in the profound sadness of this loss.

—Peter Grantham, MD
West Vancouver

Dr Harry N. Watson 1922–2005

Harry was born in Edmonton, attended the University of Michigan for 1 year, and then UBC for 3 years. He received his medical training at McGill University, graduating in 1948. He interned in Montreal and Vancouver and then established a general practice in New Westminster. He served on the advisory board of St. Mary's Hospital, was chief of staff at Royal Columbian Hospital, and then president of the Westminster Medical Association.

Harry was interested in medical politics and economics, not only at the local level, but also at the provincial and national levels. He was elected to the BCMA executive, chaired the Economics Committee from 1956 to 1959, and became president of the BCMA from 1961 to 1962. He was a representative for the CMA on the 1962 Royal Commission on Health and in 1963 was a member of the Special Committee on Principles of the CMA.

In 1988, the BCMA granted Harry lifelong membership. He gave up his practice in 1989 and subsequently retired to Arbutus Ridge on Vancouver Island, where he and his wife happily pursued their art interests and golf until his death in April 2005. He is survived by his wife, Mary Jane; three sons, Paul, Chris, and Geoff; daughter, Victoria; grandchildren, Emily and Evan; brother, Richard; and sister, Glenna.

—G. Fyffe, MD
New Westminster

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New BCMA Partners scholarship

The BCMA Partners have good news for mature students this year. The Partners scholarship panel has been receiving a rising number of applications from students returning to school to complete a degree or earn a second degree, and following a successful year of fundraising, the Partners are now offering a third \$500 scholarship to honor applicants in this category.

Ms Louise Oyler, past president of the Partners, says, "It's hard to compare the extracurricular accomplishments of high school students being supported in the home to mature students who are supporting themselves and perhaps a family. These students should be recognized in a category of their own."

The quality of applications for the scholarship program continues to be impressive, and the judging process is challenging. Applications are assigned a number and forwarded to the panel with names and contact information removed to assure anonymity. They are graded in categories such as marks, athletics, arts, and volunteer and community work. Evaluation of these accomplishments is the easy part of the judging process. Once the applications are narrowed down based on those scores, the panel must look for extraordinary qualities in each student in order to make their difficult final decision. Students who have overcome some sort of adversity or personal challenge, or who have shown an extraordinary level of community service, tend to make the final cut. Cover letters also play an important role. Ms Lori Garg, treasurer of the Partners, says, "All applicants are high achievers, all are involved in things besides academics. We need

to see something beyond that. Some cover letters are written so well that by the time you finish the letter you feel like you know them."

The Partners fundraising efforts are greatly valued by scholarship recipients. Mr Ryan Wilson, one of the successful applicants from 2005, is in his first year at the University of Calgary, studying biosciences. Mr Wilson contends that winning his scholarship helped to increase his confidence so that he now has the grades and determination to get into medical school, and he says that the money helped toward paying his tuition. He has greatly enjoyed his first year at university and welcomes the challenges of pursuing his career in medicine.

Applications for Partners scholarships will be accepted until 1 May 2006, and successful applicants will be notified by 30 May. Information and applications can be found online at www.bcma.org, in the members' section.

—Tara Lyon
BCMA Communications

BCMA Annual Convention

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