

## Stew

Dr Stewart Burriss, one of the first certified obstetrician-gynecologists in the BC Interior, is an impeccable gentleman-physician, loved by patients and colleagues alike.

**Sterling Haynes, MD**

**S**tewart Burriss was delivered by his uncle in 1920 at the Royal Inland Hospital in Kamloops, BC. His dad, always known as HL, was a physician too. I found HL to be very reasonable and easygoing. Stewart's mother, Robina, was a gem from Manitoba and had a positive outlook and was well groomed and smart at 90 years of age. Robina raised five children and had a Scottish woman's typical multitasking mind—she was undaunted by any event. Stewart was her first child.

Stewart went to school in Vernon's Mackie Prep School and later high school in Kamloops. He graduated from UBC with a BA and later an MD from McGill. He was determined to finish medical school and served for years in the University Officers' Training Corps during the war years until

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Dr Haynes was a country and urban doctor for almost 40 years in BC and Alabama. He is now retired, living and writing in Kelowna. His latest book, *Wake Up Call; Tales From a Frontier Doctor* is now available as an e-book.

graduation with an MD in 1946. He started his 3-year obstetrical and gynecological training in Montreal and finished in England at the Queen Charlotte's Maternity Hospital and the Chelsea Hospital for Women. Stew married a Vancouverite, Jean Leckie,

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in London. He passed the MRCOG exam in 1952 and then he returned to Kamloops to practise medicine. Stewart and Jean had three sons, and their eldest, Alan, carries on in the family tradition as a GP in the Burriss Clinic in Kamloops.



Stewart was one of the first certified specialists in "obs and gyne" in the Interior of BC. Stew's affable ways endeared him to all his colleagues. He was always well groomed, fit, gentlemanly, personable, had impeccable manners, and his patients loved him for both his skill and his demeanor. When I practised midwifery in Williams Lake, he was a beacon. He always returned my emergency telephone calls and helped me and my colleagues in difficult maternity emergency situations in isolated communities.

Stew walked everywhere and he kept fit playing (and winning) championships at UBC and McGill in badminton and later the Interior of BC with his wife Jean and with singles champion Bill Dalin as his partner. Later he became a very good squash player. When in his 70s, he ran hard for my drop-shot, fell, crashed into the front tin, and cut his head. I thought he had killed himself, but in fact he had torn his hamstring. Stew said, "My leg is sore; I'm bleeding from this facial cut. Maybe I'd better stop playing squash." Stew was a great competitor, but the

severity of the torn hamstring ended his racquet-sport days.

Stewart's hands were strong, his grip sure, his eye keen, his posture excellent; he never tired in the operating room. He was the fastest, surest-handed operator, especially doing C-sections, with whom I ever worked. He did close to 1000 sections and maybe 5000 hysterectomies. Stew delivered 6107 babies too. He was a whirlwind in emergencies; whether placenta previa, abruptio, eclampsia and convulsions, or locked twins, Stew was the man! I never saw him angry or flustered in the operating room with staff or with patients.

Over 40 years ago the federal laws changed and therapeutic abortion became legal in Canada. The stipulation was that abortions could be done where the life or the health of the pregnant woman was in jeopardy. At the Royal Inland Hospital I served with Douglas Hunter, psychiatrist, and Stew on a committee approving therapeutic abortions for women, provided the abortions were done in the Royal Inland Hospital. We seldom turned down any woman's request.

Stewart took a lot of flak over the years from some of his medical colleagues, but mainly from the pro-life group. This group picketed the hospital and picketed Stewart and Jean's residence for years, night and day. Stew never chastised pro-lifers unless they set foot on his property.

Before the therapeutic abortion law I saw women with pelvic infection and perforated uteri. Occasionally, in the 1960s I extracted slippery elm inserted into the uterus by illegal abortionists in Williams Lake. On one occasion the hotel room abortionist had shoved lye pellets up the cervical canal into the woman's pregnant uterus. Luckily, with Stewart's phone call and treatment advice to me, the woman lived.

Stew knew his patients. He took a detailed history, especially the family history. Stew knew their families,

their background, and who they were related to. The ranch women were especially enamored by his knowledge and history of local families. He also knew the history of the area and, it seemed, every ranch and farm in the Thompson and Cariboo regions.

Sixty years ago, when I was practising in Kamloops, one of my maternity patients developed a prolapsed umbilical cord while in hard labor. I managed to push the distressed infant back into the pelvis with my gloved right hand, put the mother on oxygen by mask, and place her in the head-down position. Stew came right away when I called and we moved the mother to the operating room, located one floor up. Stew took the stairs.

The elevators were slow, and with me under the sheet pushing the infant's head back and the nurse pushing the gurney, we rushed up to the third floor. While partially concealed under the sheet between floors, I heard a little girl say, "Mommy what's that man in green overalls doing to that woman having a baby?"

Then the elevator door opened and we met Stew, who was preparing to scrub for the C-section. In minutes he was operating, and soon I could feel Stewart's scalpel on my right index finger. I heard Stew say, "the baby boy is out and everything is okay. By the way, was that your gloved finger I cut? Sorry."

"Yes, you cut my index finger. I may need a couple of stitches," I replied.

At Stewart's retirement party his colleagues gave him a bronzed corkscrew, a replica of the large Bonney's corkscrew that he used to screw into the fundus of the uterus. The handle of the corkscrew was used to pull the uterus out of the pelvis and aid in the dissection of the uterus during a hysterectomy. Stew still has his memento, and I have mine. Whenever I notice the scar on my index finger, I am reminded how lucky I was to work with Stew.

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