

## Dr Eugene Bruce Steinson 1934–2011

After a brief encounter with an aggressive malignancy, the Cloverdale Cowboy hung up his saddle and spurs for the last time. He faced life's last chapter with his usual wit, dignity, and acceptance. When he informed me of his gloomy diagnosis he commented with his customary smile, "Someone has to get these bad diseases." In the end he epitomized Martin Luther's dictum: "Every man must do two things alone; he must do his own believing and his own dying."

Bruce's life adventure began in rural Melfort, Saskatchewan, and he never forgot his roots. At age 10 he moved west with his parents and older brother Doug, settling briefly in White Rock and finally Cloverdale. As a precocious 14-year-old he profited by picking up beer bottles with his father's truck and collecting the deposit. After graduating from Lord Tweedsmuir High School, the University of BC beckoned. He graduated with a medical degree in 1959. At this point Bruce's life became pleasantly complicated as one of his UBC classmates, June Schoenle, became his first soul mate. They married the same year and completed a 1-year internship in Newfoundland—the most lucrative program in the country!

After internship they returned to New Westminster to continue their careers and raise their family. Bruce was very successful as a caring, compassionate, and crusty GP with his colleague Ken Green—the proverbial Butch Cassidy and Sundance Kid. During this time June focused on raising their three children. Despite this challenge she was able to complete her residency in child psychiatry. After 5 years of bliss, the train derailed when June was diagnosed with breast cancer that did not respond to therapy.

In 1975 Bruce married Gale Smith

and adopted her son, David. Gale was his partner and best friend for the next 36 years. During that time he was father and mentor to David, supporting his education and development into a respected family physician in our community.

Bruce overcame his fear of flying by earning his private pilot's licence. Shortly afterward he acquired a hot, single-engine, six-seat Cessna 207-CF-QRT. Bruce often described this machine as "too hot of an airplane for a low-time pilot." QRT was the family's transportation to their Green Lake cabin. One hot summer's day at the lake's airstrip he experienced the harsh reality of high-density altitude and a high flying fence. Shortly afterward he announced, "I'm going to sell the plane." He had the foresight to realize that aviation can be a risky endeavor.

Bruce enjoyed the challenges of general practice until 1991 when he passed the torch to a keen, young, energetic physician, John Yap. He also had the trust and wisdom to choose John as his own GP. His patients and the medical community were never disappointed in his choice—nor was Bruce himself.

Few knew that Bruce was also a closet mechanical engineer. There was nothing he couldn't fix. On one occasion he resuscitated a whirlpooling toilet with a shoestring, a twist tie, and a piece of his belt—shades of Apollo 13; absolute genius!

Bruce was renowned for his rapi-er wit and incisive sense of humor. At departmental and staff meetings his perfectly timed one-liners had the deadly impact of a silent fart in the middle of a church sermon. He could revive any terminal meeting.

Music was another of Bruce's passions—especially town and country. Johnny Cash was his idol. On occasion he would entertain the family on



Bruce Steinson, MD

the Green Lake sojourn with his a cappella rendition of "A Boy Named Sue."

Bruce lived for his soul mates, children, and grandchildren.

He was an easy book to read—black or white, no ambiguous shades of grey. As quoted by his 5-year-old grandson, Ashwin, "No means N-O, NOT, NEVER, NONE."

In many ways Bruce has left the world a better place. His spirit and presence are remembered by his family, friends, and colleagues.

*Tuum est.* Never a dull moment and not one wasted in 77 years!

—John Albrecht, MD  
New Westminster

### Did you know this physician?

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