

## Proust questionnaire: Bernie Toews, MD



**What profession might you have pursued, if not medicine?**

Teaching or church ministry.

**Which talent would you most like to have?**

Being able to sing as a tenor. I am a bass.

**What do you consider your greatest achievement?**

Being accepted as a member of the Vancouver Bach Choir.

**Who are your heroes?**

Joseph, Daniel the prophet, King David, St. Paul, Thomas Sydenham, William Harvey, William Wilberforce Rembrandt, Johann Sebastian Bach, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

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Born in Coaldale, Alberta, Dr Toews spent his early years in East Vancouver and then Paraguay. After completing medical school at the University of Manitoba, an internship in Los Angeles, and a year of traveling in Europe, Dr Toews returned to Canada to run a solo family practice in Coquitlam, and he has been on staff at Royal Columbian Hospital since 1977.

**What is your idea of perfect happiness?**

Singing a great choral work like the Mozart Requiem or Beethoven's Ninth Symphony with a big choir and orchestra.

**What is your greatest fear?**

Loss of independence through stroke, accident, or dementia.

**What is the trait you most deplore in yourself?**

Impatience.

**What characteristic do your favorite patients share?**

Optimism and a healthy skepticism of the medical profession.

**Which living physician do you most admire?**

Dr Allan Ronald of the University of Manitoba.

**What is your favorite activity?**

Singing.

**On what occasion do you lie?**

When I first discuss with a patient the outcome of a test that appears to indicate a grim prognosis I will often tell half truths.

**Which words or phrases do you most overuse?**

I am sorry for keeping you waiting.

**What technological medical advance do you most anticipate?**

Regrowth of central nervous tissue (e.g., in cases of spinal cord injuries).

**What is your most marked characteristic?**

Reliability (I hope).

**What do you most value in your colleagues?**

Clear clinical thinking and the ability to convey information in a logical and concise manner.

**Who are your favorite writers?**

Fyodor Dostoevsky, William Shakespeare, C.S. Lewis, Eric Metaxas.

**What is your greatest regret?**

The failure of my first marriage.

**How would you like to die?**

Very suddenly, while still doing something useful, not while driving my car.

**What is your motto?**

Life is a marathon, not a 100-yard dash.

**Submit a Proust Questionnaire**—your colleagues will appreciate it.



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