



Bernie Mason, MD

Dr Bernard L. Mason 1933–2011

Bernard “Bernie” Mason, MD died at age 77 after a long struggle with several serious medical conditions.

Bernie was born in Docking, Norfolk, England. He immigrated to Canada in 1954, settling in Winnipeg. Having served in the British Royal Air Force, he joined the Royal Canadian Air Force as a flight navigator upon arriving in Canada. Bernie used his air force discharge money to start a real estate company, which in turn helped finance his medical education at the University of Manitoba.

As the oldest member of the class of 1965 Bernie was admired for his maturity, wit, and elegance—he was an unforgettable character. After his internship at Winnipeg General Hospital, he and fellow classmate, Dr W.L. Grapentine, moved to Biggar, Saskatchewan, where they took over a large general practice.

Bernie was an innately gifted physician—bright, practical, and well trained. Most importantly, he exuded optimism and a confidence in his abilities that enabled him to forge strong therapeutic alliances with his patients.

This was his core strength. His clinical experiences in Biggar helped him to become the gifted physician whom the people of Princeton and Sechelt would come to know and respect.

In 1971 Bernie relocated to Princeton, where he served the community as a physician for 28 years with great dedication. He also served as the community’s coroner. He retired to the Sunshine Coast in 1999 intending to fish and play bridge, but was encouraged to return to medicine for another 5 years.

Bernie is survived by his wife, Florence; his children, Richard Mason and Barbara King; the family he shared with Florence, Tim Keogan, Jeff Keogan, Lisa Keogan, and Michael Keogan; his brother, Sir John Mason; his sister, Monica Playford; and many grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

He was predeceased by his son, Christopher Mason, his daughter, Laurel Mason, and his brothers, Raymond and Neville Mason.

A memorial was held for Bernie on his birthday, 4 August 2011, in Sechelt. Four out of five members of his medical school clinical group attended, a testament to the strength of his friendships and collegial respect.

—William L. Grapentine, MD
Kennebunk, Maine, USA

Dr Alje Vennema 1932–2011

Dr Alje Vennema was born in Leeuwarden, the Netherlands, in August 1932. He came to Canada in 1951, graduating from McGill University Medical School in 1962. He attended Hammersmith Post-Graduate Medical School in 1969 and the Welsh National School of Medicine, receiving a diploma in tuberculosis and chest diseases in 1970.

During the 1960s he worked in South Vietnam as a technical advisor and later as director of Canadian med-

ical assistance to South Vietnam from 1965 until 1968.

Alje subsequently attended the London School of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene, and became a board-qualified pediatrician in 1982. He worked in the department of pediatrics at Tulane University in New Orleans and later in New York City, becoming director of the Bureau of Tuberculosis in the New York City Department of Health.

He came to BC in 1988 and worked as a clinician in the Division of Tuberculosis control at the BC Centre for Disease Control until 1997, although he continued to provide sessional coverage.

Alje was the author of two books and spoke six languages. He was deeply interested in helping the less privileged throughout his career. Shortly after his arrival in Canada he started working in the Downtown Eastside. He believed in giving back rather than taking, and working where he was needed.

Among his accolades were the Order of Merit from the government of South Vietnam in 1965, the Distinguished Graduate Award from McGill University, and the Order of Canada in 1967.

He was still working when a stroke disabled him and cruelly deprived him of his great love in life, which was walking and hiking long distances. He did not want a funeral service but prior to his death, at his request, we gathered to say our farewells. He died shortly after on 7 June at his home, in the company of his wife, Miriam, and his son, Alje. Many of us expressed our desire to make a difference when we entered medical school. Alje Vennema did just that. He left nothing on the table.

—Richard K. Elwood, MD
Vancouver

Dr Harry Walker Webster 1930–2010

In August 2010 I heard that Harry was unwell, so I contacted him and was invited to join him at his home overlooking Nanoose Bay. I drank tea with Harry and his wife, Lou, on their sunny patio, and Harry told me that he had recently discovered a hard lump above his right clavicle that had tested positive for small cell carcinoma.

Harry had an interesting early life. His well-produced biography, *Bring on Tomorrow*, details his childhood in South America and his subsequent life in Canada.

Harry was born in Chile in 1930, a birthplace that would cause him trouble when crossing borders even after he obtained his Canadian passport. When he was an infant, his family moved to La Paz, Bolivia, where his father continued his business enterprises. While in La Paz Harry was educated at the German school, but when German propaganda at the school increased—including the instituting of the Nazi salute—his family withdrew him in 1938.

In 1939 Harry and his brothers left for boarding school in Santiago, Chile. They traveled south by train on a spectacular rail route reaching 13 000 feet before ending at Antofagasta, Chile. This was followed by a boat trip to Valparaiso and another train to Santiago, to the Grange School.

By 1944, difficulties with the Bolivian government were affecting Harry's father's ability to conduct business in the country, and he decided to move the family to Vancouver.

In March 1945, Harry, his brother, and his father boarded a Liberty ship for New York, picking up strategic cargo along the west coast of South America. After passing through the Panama Canal they were

considered to be in a war zone, and they were escorted by planes and naval units until reaching New York 3 weeks later. They completed their journey to Vancouver by rail, and reunited with the ladies of the family who had made the trip by air through the US.

Harry's father purchased a family home on West 40th Avenue and he and his partners took ownership of an import business. Harry and his brother entered high school at Prince of Wales and attended grade 13 at King Edward. After graduation they worked in the forestry industry, but after 2 years of working in various jobs in logging camps on Vancouver Island (fire watcher, whistle punk, and cat swamper) Harry decided that was not what he wanted to do. His brother Alec stayed in the industry.

In 1948 Harry consulted with the university counseling service and decided to pursue a career in the medical field. Knowing that in 1950 a new medical school was to open in Vancouver, Harry enrolled in the pre-medical program. While attending university he participated in many fraternal and social activities, and also joined the Canadian Officer Training Corps, which involved extensive training in all forms of artillery. The Korean War broke out, but Harry was spared call-up and joined the first class of the new UBC medical school in 1950.

Harry graduated in May 1954 and spent his junior internship at the Montreal General Hospital, where he met his wife, Louise. After marrying in 1955 they moved to Vancouver, where Harry spent a year training in surgery at Shaughnessy Hospital. He then looked for a place to practise, rejecting several options before finally choosing Port Alberni.

For 34 years he maintained a busy general practice, cultivating a special relationship with the First Nations in

the community. He was also a member of the Kinsmen Club, served on City Council, and spent 7 years on the Port Alberni Harbour Commission.

In 1965 Harry hired a locum and traveled to England with his family for a year to study pediatrics, obtaining the DCH.

Harry retired from full-time practice in 1990, and he and Lou moved to a new home in Nanoose Bay, where he enjoyed developing a garden on the hillside. By request he did locum work, made a 3-month trip as a cruise ship doctor, and volunteered twice in Guatemala as a translator and physician. He was a charter member and past-president of the Probus Club of Nanoose Bay.

Harry's family was his greatest priority, and in 2007 he was able to take some of them on a tour of discovery to the places where he spent his youth in South America.

Despite his many pressures, Harry always kept a cheerful, positive demeanor. He was interested in people, and was a good listener—rarely irritated or dispirited. He was an excellent associate in practice.

Harry's carcinoma was rapidly followed by hepatic and cerebral metastases unresponsive to radiation and chemotherapy, and he died quietly at home on 24 December 2010 in the company of his family.

Our sympathy to Lou and the children; Patti, Lynn, John, and Margie; and their families.

—John A. Jemson, MD
Port Alberni

Did you know this physician?

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