

Memories of a swashbuckling father

My father was born March 10, 1912, in Denzil, Sask. He grew up on the family farm, received his medical degree from the University of Manitoba and studied in Oxford. After the war he and my mother returned to Canada, boarded a train and, as my father likes to tell it, looked out of the window in Port Arthur, Ont., liked what they saw, and got off. He hung out his shingle and went to work as a family physician.

He took me with him on countless house calls, delivered babies, did general surgery, prison work, and was much liked by his patients. He would play the piano in patients' homes, just for a few minutes before going on his next call. In 1964 we moved to Long Beach, California, where he hung out a new shingle and started all over again. My mother died in 1992, and my father moved to Cleveland a year later.

He loves to tell stories. I don't know much about his activities during the war, but I heard the tale many times about how he hid inside a wine barrel, in the wine, to avoid German detection. He spent several weeks recuperating in Lady Astor's castle, and has fond memories of that time. He never returned to his unit, was pensioned for several wounds, and still has shrapnel embedded in his head.

For years after the war he read extensively, preferring war-related books and anything on Africa, where his brother resided. He learned to speak and read Finnish, German, French, Spanish, Russian and even Swahili. I always felt that he was a swashbuckler. He never drove the speed limit, and when stopped would say he was a doctor on emergency call. He taught me to drive when I was 12, much to my mother's chagrin. We had a summer cottage on Lake Superior, and he would load up our small boat so that one false move could easily swamp it. My poor mother worried all her life about the safety of myself and my brother Ron, who is now a physician in New Zealand.

My father's major passion in life turned out to be junk collecting. He would map out house calls so that he could stop at every garage sale and thrift store along the way. As he brought junk in the back door, my mother was taking it out the front to donate. When he accepted that he was going blind as a result of diabetes, he hired a liquidator who held 6 sales in our house in Long Beach over 4 months. There were suits of armour, animal pelts, swords, pistols, surfboards — just about everything you could imagine. MGM Studios sent buyers twice.

My father's solid love, generosity and passion are my roots. After 2 strokes, partial paralysis and total blindness, without complaint he continues to enjoy book and *Newsweek* recordings, vanilla ice cream and as much pampering as he can finagle.

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fumes, burning cordite and burning petrol. The grass started burning all over the mine field and all around my hole. My face was scorched a bit. The sergeant and I decided to make a run for the house. Shells were exploding all over the place. A mortar bomb lit in the ditch in front of us. It didn't explode. The sergeant grabbed me or I would have stepped on it. We reached the house safely.

The men who had been unlucky enough to stay on the beach under and around the S.P. arty were burned alive. Some of them were probably wounded previously by mortar fire and could not move but I cannot for the life of me understand why they all stayed on the beach. As they burned up, they screamed blood-curdling screams that I can hear yet.

As the sergeant and Etherington and I made a run for it along the ditch, the ammo was going up continually. We ran around to the corner of the house where I had posted the sentries. Quite a number of wounded had gathered there so we sat down for a bit and hid from the flying steel. Finally we got everybody down into a big cement basement under the building. We cleaned up the basement and made a small hospital there. D[river] Etherington proved invaluable to me throughout the whole show. He is one of the coolest and best medical orderlies I have ever had. With S.P. arty exploding all around him he salvaged the mortar bomb case of serum and dressings from the jeep. The serum I think saved a soldier's life because he was practically dead when we gave it to him. Etherington and a gunner from the 19th F[ield] Reg[imen]t did nearly all the dressings for me as I could only use one hand. The boys were very much afraid, of booby traps in the old house. A North Shore sergeant walked through a doorway and had his brains blown out onto the floor beside him. There was an old bed and a lot of junk in the basement which they were afraid to move. A couple of us with five or six holes in us decided that a few more holes wouldn't make much difference. We threw the junk out. Nothing happened.

We dressed everyone, laid them in rows, gave them morphine etc. The ammo explosions were dying down so Etherington and I went to look for our jeep. All that was left of it was two front tires and the two petrol tins on the bumper. We salvaged the petrol and then hid while more ammo went up. As the ammo kept exploding and the petrol was burning everywhere, we couldn't go back onto the beach via our ditch. I took two stretcher squads and we sneaked west along a hedge and then across the mine field in single file. Half way across a sniper shot at us. We hugged the ground for a few moments. Then there was a burst of sten gun fire which I deemed to be in the direction of the sniper. Finally we ran for it and hid behind a wall. ...

We gathered up all the wounded from among the burning S.P. arty. Most of the men there were dead, including the engineer officer who had told me I couldn't get off the beach. Etherington put the fire out in a burning Arty jeep and backed it into the water away from the main fire. Then we went along the beach to the B[rigade] D[ressing] S[tation] and reported the location of our patients. I sent