DR. ANDREW MURRAY CARLISLE

Some experiences of a pioneer doctor in the north:

I practiced medicine in the Alberta part of the Peace River country from June 1921 to June 1957. I saw this new country grow up. I am no public speaker. As the whale once said to her calf, "Remember, son, it is only when you are spouting that you are liable to be harpooned," so I have never done much spouting in public.

This will only be a chat:

First, I would like to give you a brief resume of my background. I was born in Peterborough, Ontario in March 1896 into a family of seven, five boys and two girls. I was the second youngest. I got my senior matriculation there, started medicine in Toronto in September 1913, and joined the Second Division of the Canadian Army in March 1915 as a stretcher bearer, then three and a half years overseas, almost three years of that time at the front in France.

In September 1918, I was sent home along with some other medical and dental students to finish our courses. We got home October 10 and started medicine again in Toronto in uniform; but on November 13 we were discharged and out on our own. Our father had died while three of us boys were in France, but my oldest brother a doctor in Winnipeg, helped me financially 'til I graduated in May 1921. At that time I had been asked to go to Ocean Falls, B.C. to assist a doctor there, so I took my Dominion Council examinations so I could practice in the west.

I just finished these exams when I got an urgent telegram from my brother-in-law, Jack Archer, a lawyer in the Peace River country, to come at once to Lake Saskatoon, a small village there north of the 55th parallel, as the only doctor there had left because his young wife had died. So not knowing whether I had passed my Dominion Council exams or not I left by train for Edmonton and I am glad I did. I found out in Edmonton that I had passed. I got registered with the College of Physicians and Surgeons and in a few days I left by the weekly train for Grande Prairie, then the end of steel, a 500 mile trip that took 30 hours, if it got there. Grande Prairie is 260 miles northwest of Edmonton as the crow flies and Lake Saskatoon was 15 miles northwest of there. Mr. Archer met me at the station and drove me to Lake Saskatoon where some calls were already waiting. I had only $10 to my name when I arrived there. There were so many things I needed. My oldest brother, the doctor, had bought me a medical bag and some necessary instruments when I stopped in Winnipeg. My second oldest brother, Dave, had been wounded seriously just after we took Vimy Ridge and had taken up soldier settlement board land on the east shore of Lake Saskatoon. The village was on the west shore. As one great need was a car, Dave mortgaged his farm and lent me enough money to buy a brand new 1921 T-model Ford. That was the first year that Henry Ford had put a self-starter on them and was a most useful addition both in winter and summer.

I found this a beautiful rolling country, so different from the prairies, dotted with lakes and bluffs of trees, high in the sunny skies wild ducks and geese flying in the fall, always the snow-capped Rocky Mountains on the horizon. It looked like the promised land to me.

There were many men there who had just returned from the First World War, on the farms and in the towns and some with English brides. Lake Saskatoon had been the distributing centre for the whole area until the railroad came in 1916, making Grande Prairie the end of steel. The big trading companies then moved away, the Hudson Bay, Revillon Freres, and the Diamond P etc. So I rented the Diamond P store mostly because it had a nice new lean-to that had been built on its west side. It made a good warm office and I had slept in a big unheated store those first two winters. There were usually a few 5 foot high blocks of ice above my bed as that was my water supply. A Scotch lady made me two big comforters each lined with carded wool, about an inch thick, so I slept comfortably. For this luxurious accommodation I had paid $5.00 a month, but after paying my large livery bill and my drug bill it wasn't always easy to find that five dollars. I had to carry my own medicines, I couldn't just give a prescription to patients who lived thirty miles or more miles from a drug store.

There was no antifreeze for cars in those days and winter set in early. At first I used coal oil in my radiator but then the motor would get so cold the car wouldn't start. So then I would use just water, a tricky business at 20 to 30 degrees below zero. Even with a good radiator cover, a large piece of cardboard and a thermometer visibly sticking out of the

radiator cap. I used to keep two large pails of water boiling on my office stove. So when I had to start the car in cold weather I would pour one pail full in the radiator with a big funnel, leaving the drainage tap open and then shut the tap and pour in the second pail full. When the engine had warmed a bit in four or five minutes, I would turn it over a few times with the crank, pour a kettle of boiling water in the carburetor, I would get in, pull out the chock and step on the starter a few times and it would usually start. If not, I cranked it. Then if the tires were not frozen to the ground or flat I would get away. So often the very cold weather would make those early tires go flat. But in the winter I usually drove a cutter and team, and in the spring and fall a buggy and team, on the clay roads and prairie trails. These roads were like pavement when dry in the summer, but that was the shortest season of the year there. When asked what we did there in the summer time, one fellow said: “Oh, we play baseball that day.” But the season for hockey and curling was much longer. I met an old army friend a few years ago who said I was looking young. When I told him I had lived up in the Peace River country for thirty-six years he said: “Ohhh, that explains it. Anything will keep in a deep freeze, even the…”

Well, the province is called Sunny Alberta. While the days in June and July are usually quite long, when you had to look south to see the brilliant northern lights you began to realize you were up in the north. In June and July one can read or play golf until 10:30 p.m. and the north glows all night like the midnight sun. But in December and January the days are real short. Lights are needed in the buildings before 4:00 pm and it’s cold. I have driven by a government thermometer at midnight that registered sixty-five degrees below zero [-54° Celsius] at the experimental farm at Beaverlodge. But every January or February we often got one or two chinooks. We welcomed that warm dry wind from the Pacific coming at us over the mountains. We have seen the temperature change 90° in an hour or two from forty below zero [-40° Celsius] to fifty above [10° Celsius]. The snow would start melting and the ditches start running and you would think spring had come for sure. But in two or three days the temperature would drop to way below zero again and this was hard on gardens and trees. As a warning of a chinook a blue/green haze would soon be seen in the west, called a chinook arch. Soon you could hear a rushing sound and then the warm wind hits you. People would come out of hibernation and so would some animals. The chinooks are a wonderful phenomenon and they sure break the monotony of winter there.

In 1928 I was lucky enough to get a great fur coat. It had been ordered by the Russian ambassador in England but by the time they had it made for him diplomatic relations had been cut off with Russia. A man who worked at the furriers in London sent it to his brother, a farmer south of Lake Saskatoon, and I got it from him by a trade and some cash. It was reindeer calf on in the outside and wombat skin on the inside, with a thick woollen lining in between and a high beaver collar. It was huge and had been made for a much bigger man than I am. I had to get six or eight inches cut off the bottom before I could walk in it. I already had a coonskin coat, and this new one slipped over the top of the coon one nicely. I had large beaver gauntlets and a fur hat. The Grande Prairie paper had an entry in it one day under a column called, “Things I Have Seen” saying, “Dr. Carlisle had enough fur on for an Arctic Expedition,” but it sure kept me warm.

When I would start out on a cold trip with the cutter and team, dressed conservatively in heavy Stanfield underwear**,** with all this fur on which was like a mattress, with a charcoal heat warmer burning at my feet under a big buffalo robe, the weather didn’t seem too bad. Eventually the reindeer calf fur on the outside started to wear off and it was christened by our family on account of asthma.

The worst time for getting around in the car was in the spring. The snow on the roads would melt all day in the warm spring sun, forming pools which would freeze over each night, just mining the roads like tank traps for cars. I was coming home from Grande Prairie about 4:30 one April morning when I broke through the ice in one of these tank traps. There was just one thing to do, get a team to pull the car out, so I walked a third of a mile west, then a third of a mile north to the farm house of an Irishman I knew, Mike Cochrane. I threw some snowballs and pebbles at his upper window to waken him, helped him hitch his team, and we walked out to the car in the spring dawn dragging a chain. On the way down he said, “Have you got your toothbrushes with you, Doctor?” I said, “Oh yes, Mike, I always carry them.” So he hitched the chain to the Ford and we splashed through the water, ice, and mud to firm ground. Then he pointed to a lower molar. So I said to him, “Oh yes, Mike, sit down,” so he sat down on the wide running board of the Ford and I

pulled out his aching tooth. As he sat there afterwards spitting blood on the snow he said, "Well, what do I owe you, Doc?" and I said "Well, what do I owe you, Mike?" "Well, I guess one good pull deserves another." I said, "That's very generous of you, Mike," but when I went to help him up his trousers were frozen solidly to the running board. He said, "You are a heck of a dentist, you don't freeze me up here but down there." Dentists were scarce in Canada in 1921 when I graduated, so the University during our fifth year gave medical students some instructions on tooth extraction and local anaesthesia which was a big help to me.

When I got married, first I promised to give my wife all the money I made taking out teeth. But I soon had to break that promise as that was the only service for which I usually got cash. I had many calls to the country, and the farther out the patients were the less money they had. So I wrote to the Public Health Department in Edmonton and eventually they paid me $100 a month for the next three years for my work in the three unorganized districts west of Lake Saskatoon. I was the only doctor between there and the B.C. border for 45 to 65 miles and the only ambulance. On one far-out trip the only food in the bachelor's shack was eggs, so a district nurse and I had just six boiled eggs apiece for lunch and a mug of tea and we were grateful as we were hungry. In the summer of 1921 I first met my future wife, a student from Toronto University, home on her summer holidays. We became engaged in the following summer and the next year, 1923, we were married. She had graduated and I had bought and fixed up a house, and where do you think we went on our honeymoon? To Victoria, B.C., and we liked it and still do.

The country was in a recession when I got there in 1921 due to a cow bill passed in 1912 to encourage farmers to buy cattle and the banks were allowed to lend farmers money up to $500 just for cattle. But in 1920 the price of cattle went a way down and the banks needed their money back and money was tight. The banks held mortgages on all the farmers' chattels, which left the businessmen and merchants without any security. You may have heard this story. A man was seeing a bank manager when the phone rang. The manager answered and said, "No no, oh no, yes no no no," and hung up. The man laughed and said I was just wondering what you said "yes" too. The banker said, "Oh, he asked me if I could hear him." The bankers were having a rough time too.

The early days in this new country were the hardest for me, but the most interesting to look back on. The hungry twenties and thirties, so called, but few, if any, ever went hungry or cold. The settlers hadn't been there long enough to become established. They had no bank loans, especially when the great depression came in the 1930s. We knew a few thrifty farmers who said that all they bought in the stores during that time was sugar and salt, but it was a very fertile, productive land. I have a newspaper article here that claims that the soil around that area of Lake Saskatoon, later called Wembley, had grown more world champion grains for farmers than the soil of all the rest of Canada put together. Herman Trelle, whose farm was two miles south of Lake Saskatoon, won the World Wheat Championship four times and was crowned the Wheat King of the World and barred from further competitions. In 1926 on his first exhibit he won both the world championship in wheat and in oats. The first time in the history of the Chicago World Fair that both championships had gone to the same exhibitor. His first and second prizes in grains at the various shows in Canada and the United States numbered more than 600. I had the honour of taking out the King's appendix and bringing their first princess into the world in their farmhouse. Several other exhibitors won world championships there too, in wheat, oats, timothy, peas. It became a yearly habit to go to Chicago. Garden crops were very good. Wild game and wild fowl were plentiful; wild fruits, raspberries, strawberries, saskatoons, and blueberries etc. were abundant. There was lots of poplar wood and open-faced seams of coal on the banks of the Wapiti River five miles south to be had for the hauling. For only a few could pay cash for a doctor, they did keep us well supplied with wood and coal, meat and fowl, milk and cream, butter and eggs, vegetables and sometimes homemade coffee. They roasted a mixture of grains and ground them up. The drink tasted a little like Postum. I remember one young man who brought us a load of wood saying, "Well, one more load and the baby is ours."

I just stayed three and a half years in Lake Saskatoon. Our famous railroad in 1924 was extended 15 miles west to a point three and a half miles south of Lake Saskatoon, and eventually the whole town moved down to the railroad and it became a new town they called Wembley. The buildings were dragged or skidded down on logs in the winter time. But I had been accepted as an intern for a year in surgery at the Sick Children's Hospital in Toronto by Dr. William E. Gallie

who became the professor of surgery at the Toronto University and later was in charge of all the Shriners hospitals on the North American continent. It was a highly sought after internship and I was very fortunate. Interns got no salaries in those days, just their room and board, uniforms, and laundry. I was there all of 1925. It was strenuous work but a great opportunity. I stayed on three months more, and in 1926 in paediatrics with Dr. Alan Brown, the famous paediatrician. Then we looked over Ontario for an opening, but encouraged by a warm invitation from the new town of Wembley, we returned west again in April 1926. I knew that was a place where I was needed the most and where we both had relatives and good friends. We had sold everything before going east except our house and piano. We had had our house moved down to Wembley in the wintertime but the snow must have obscured the land marks for it was placed crookedly on our lot and it is still crooked to this day. Wembley was our home for the next ten years. Our three children were born there.

The only hospital was in Grande Prairie and I made that 15 mile trip each way nearly every day and often two or three times a day, and eventually we lived in Grande Prairie for twenty-one years. After my 15 months at the Sick Children's Hospital I felt much better equipped but I still had a lot to learn. For instance, I started holding baby clinics. At the first one I gave a prize for the best baby. Well, that was a mistake! I never did that again. Mothers, grandmothers, and even grandfathers were mad at me for that. But the clinics were valuable. Many of the young mothers did not know how to feed their babies properly. There was no literature available to instruct them. I found many babies with rickets and I had one baby die of rickets, which you know was caused from the lack of fat-soluble vitamins, especially D vitamin. Boiling the milk kills the vitamins and were not being replaced by cod liver oil or other vitamin products or exposure to sunshine. I got literature from the Children's Hospital and gave it out freely for years to every mother after her first child was born, a new copy of Dr. Alan Brown's book "The Normal Child," and most of them followed it explicitly. When doctors examined the youth from that part of the Peace River country for the Army in 1939 they reported that they found the least disqualifying disabilities in them, than in men from any other part of the province. I gave Dr. Alan Brown's book a lot of the credit.

Our famous railroad was called the "Edmonton Dunvegan and British Columbia" or the "ED&BC" or the "extremely dangerous and badly constructed railroad." There are many funny stories about it. My wife was on it once when it ran off the tracks five times in 45 miles. It was a real Toonerville trolley but it was the only connection we had with the outside world for eight years after I got there. There was no road out in any direction, no telephone connection, only telegraph, no radios, there was airplanes, just the passenger train once a week, and later twice a week, so we doctors had to cope with everything that came along and almost everything did.

Dr. O'Brien and I removed a brain tumor once but we sure sweated on that all one night. First learning how to locate it and then how to remove it, which we did in a day or so successfully.

The government started building a road to Edmonton in 1928 and finished it in 1929. It was called the Sunshine Trail and for good reason. If there was no sunshine there was no trail. Once in the thirties my wife and I left Edmonton on a sunny Sunday morning with our city clothes on and ran into a rain shower. When it had stopped we made only six miles in four hours. We had to get out every three or four hundred yards and with our bare hands claw the gumbo out from under our mud-guards to free the wheels. Oh, I guess some of you know what that's like. We barely made shelter for the night. In 1928 the Canadian Medical Association of all Canada was meeting in Edmonton and I wanted to be there. The road was just being built but my wife and her brother and I went on it anyway. We made it in 21 and 3/4 driving hours, beating a previous record of 27 driving hours, so the Edmonton Journal told us. The men working on the road would say, "Turn and take a run at it, we will pull you," which they did many times, often for a mile or so. The next issue of the Toronto Star Weekly had an article and a big cartoon of us saying, "Doctor drives 555 miles to attend the medical convention." We had started out in a fairly new Durant but it wasn't quite so new when we got back. They let us run the railroad track once for a way but it wasn't used much anyway, so there was very little danger of being run over.

Soon bush pilots started coming up north performing at Fairs etc. Some took supplies up farther north to Fort McMurray and Whitehorse in the Yukon Territory. And soon we got a field for them to land on. Grant McConachie,

later president of CPA, came up from Edmonton twice in a three engine Ford boxcar so-called, a cargo plane and flew me about 60 miles or so north, two years apart, to treat his mother-in-law. We landed on the back field of their farm.

On one mercy flight that I was on fifty miles east, we crashed. A woman had been kicked by a horse which split one of her kidneys and she was bleeding a lot. The roads were absolutely impassable and the ferry was out. I flew out with a young pilot to Debolt and we landed on a ploughed field and we got the patient bound up and loaded on our little plane. She was a big women weighing over 200 pounds. A patch of straight road had been cleared by the local folk who pushed the plane out from the muddy field onto the narrow twenty-foot road and we took off. We just got a few feet off the ground when our right wing dipped a bit and we hit one fence post after another each nearly tearing a big rip in the canvas of the wing. But we landed back on the road with nobody hurt. The patient was taken to the house and the pilot and I spent the rest of the evening and the night standing on boxes, sewing the rips on the canvas wing, with our hands way above our heads, by lantern light. It was very painful work and our arms ached badly and there was a chilly breeze blowing, and besides, we were in a hurry. I had brought two rolls of six inch adhesive tape and we wound these around the wing over the stitching to reinforce it. By the time we finished it was daylight. We got the plane pushed out on the road again and the patient back in it. This time we made it. Got to the hospital in time to give the lady blood and operate. She made a good recovery. This incident was written up in the papers at the time and resurrected again two years ago by the Calgary Herald. I have a copy here of the article in the Calgary Herald in 1967.

For several years after I had returned from Toronto I was the only doctor there who could blood-group people and give transfusions. I used the continuous syringe method of whole blood. For the first several years we had to make our own serum by blood-grouping. Dr. L. J. O'Brien, a man in his late 50's, a skilled surgeon, and a great friend of mine, was in Group 2 and I was in Group 3 by the Jansky system. So when a transfusion was needed I would draw a syringe full of blood from him and he would draw a syringe full from me, and when the blood settled I had enough #2 and #3 serum to group the patient and a hundred or more people until we found a suitable donor. We never had any serious reactions although we gave many transfusions. One afternoon a big income tax inspector from Edmonton, a Mr. Thompson, was waiting in my office to see me. I was blood-grouping people to find the right donor for a patient and driving four or five people to the hospital every half hour. He got restless waiting, so on one trip I asked him to come along too. He came, he had the right blood group and I had him donate a good quart of blood. For years he used to tell his friends in Edmonton, "Aw, it's an awful country up there. I was up there once as an income tax inspector and they bled me."

In 1927 we had a large epidemic of a very virulent smallpox. There were 35 deaths from it in the area from Grande Prairie to the border. The young wife of our provincial police sergeant, Sgt. Purdy**,** was one of the first. My wife and I went to all the schools from Wembley to the border and vaccinated all the children. The government paid nothing for this, just supplied the vaccine. My $100 dollars a month had stopped when we went east. The teachers had asked the children to bring 50 cents apiece for their vaccination. Some did, some didn't, and some just brought the rest of their family with them. All were vaccinated. The Indians had the least resistance to smallpox. Almost none at all. There were a lot of Indians on the reservation at Rio Grande thirty or more miles west of Wembley that I looked after. A big Indian Agent, Leo Ferguson, half French and half Indian, a good friend of mine, always came with me. To protect the Indians, we went first thing out to the reservations. Leo would send nine or ten horseback riders out in all directions and gather the tribe together and all the Indians were vaccinated except two families and two teenage boys. They had hid under a little bridge or culvert and were not vaccinated. They all got black smallpox and they all died, all 16 of them. I have often thought that the whole reservation might have been wiped out if we had not gone out there early. Black smallpox is hemorrhagic smallpox showing no resistance. The pox fill with blood and the patient bleeds from all orifices of their body and it was always fatal in those days.

Saskatoon berries were plentiful in the fall. As you know they are like big blueberries with large seeds and they were eaten freely and preserved by… but they were a health hazard, especially to the young bachelors on the homestead. The Indians picked them on horseback, dried them out in the sun on hides, and eat them all winter. The large seeds tend to gather in the appendices causing abdominal pains and cramps. So often they would then take a good dose of castor oil or other strong laxative causing the appendix to rupture. Then they would call to see a doctor and too often it

was too late. We had no sulfates such as penicillin or antibiotics at that time. We would operate with a minimum surgery and drain, but the death rate was high so we really had to preach the gospel not to take a strong laxative when they got a pain in their stomach. People still have a terror of appendicitis in that district.

House calls after midnight were never very popular in the cold weather. I would try to get all the facts to be sure that a cold trip was necessary, but they generally managed to get you out one way or another. One cold night in the 50s, a man phoned about 2:00 a.m. and said: “Come out to the house, doc, I think my wife has appendicitis.” I said to myself, “Appendicitis, appendicitis. Why, Jack, I remember taking your wife's appendix out about 15 or 16 years ago. I never heard of anyone having two appendices.” “Well,” he said, “did you ever hear of a guy having a second wife?” “Oh,” I said, “I will be right down.” They would get you out one way or another.

The settlers there as a rule were young hard working people and most friendly. No settler was young enough to have been born up there. They had all come from other places, everywhere. There were some older men who had come down from the Yukon and Alaska. They had been prospectors who had gone north in the gold rush of 1898 and had great tales to tell. I had treated one of them that had said he had been so long in the north he had Arctic Circles under both eyes. Of course his trouble was he had burned out his kidneys on cheap liquor and moonshine. A good writer could have written wonderful books about the characters there.

When the Duke of Devonshire was the Governor General of Canada, he came up there on a shooting trip. His itinerant [itinerary] took him to Henry Robertson’s place for lunch one day. Henry was a good farmer on the shores of the big lake, Bear Lake, where the ducks and geese are plentiful. As the ladies were taking away the dishes from the meat course, Henry said loudly, “Oh, keep your fork, Duke, there’s pie coming.” It became quite a saying in that country.

An elderly Irishman, Frank White, a homesteader in Halcourt, forty miles west of Grande Prairie, was a real character, of whom there was many stories. He made good bread for all the bachelors around and served good Sunday meals on a long clean table in his log shack. A visiting preacher came one Sunday and sat down at the head of Frank’s table with six or seven young bachelors sitting at it. Frank was at the stove when the preacher turned and said, “Mr. White, do you mind if I say grace?” Frank said, “Oh, say any darn thing you like, there is not a woman within 40 miles.” There was always lots of humour in it.

I was a coroner there for 36 years but a younger man did that job for the last while. But I had many interesting cases and could tell you some grim and true murder stories. I even led a posse in 1923 of thirty five men through the dark woods on a May dawn in search for a murderer, a moonshiner, who had just shot and killed his partner. The police asked me to take over while they went to look for him at his house. We didn't run into him. I'm glad he escaped our amateur net but it was a spooky experience in the dark. He had been in there a few hours earlier as a tree fell over quite near when I was examining the body.

But I think you've heard enough for one night. In trying to describe the beauty of this new country I found some lines from a known poet and changed it a bit to fit the north.

Fall
Rockies on the far horizon,
infinite tender sky,
the ripe rich tint of the wheat fields,
and the wild ducks sailing high,
and over the lakes and the uplands
a honking wild goose squad.
Some folks called it Autumn and others called it God.

Well, take a rest. It was along winded speech but they seemed to enjoy it and I thought you would like to hear it.

Part 2 – Wedding anniversary celebration in Victoria, B.C.

[The first part is **not discernible**…….]

I was married on the June 28, 1923 in the Peace River country. On the 28th of June 1980 on our 57th wedding anniversary we went to church in Victoria here and this is what the preacher had to say to us before a pretty full audience.

[First part not discernible…..] I'll tell you he is pretty proud today as they are celebrating an anniversary they had just a couple of days ago. Remain standing, will you, Dr. Carlisle. He has trouble getting up and down and I don't want you to get down because I just want you to stand again later. What anniversary was it? "57." Preacher says: "57" [clapping] and there's the lady who has endured those 57 years. [clapping] She had a birthday Thursday, [Dr. Carlisle says: "two days before"] The preacher says: "Great"

You know Dr. Carlisle was a country doctor up in the Peace River country and used to ride around in a cutter and had a pair grays. Do you know what a pair of grays means? Two horses. Angus would you read what is some of Dr. Carlisle's doggerel? He is a great man for writing doggerel. That is for sure. Let's put it that way and it's good. [Angus reading] It's called:

The Grays

Sometimes when relaxing I have a daydream
And I think I am driving my favourite team
Having to answer a long distance call
Through sunshine or blizzard or pleasant rainfall
With a spanking good team that are raring to go
In a buggy through mud or a cutter through snow
Those wonderful horses, so easy to drive
Sure helped keep many sick folk alive
Sometimes we would switch to a wagon or sleigh
To take one to hospital so far away
And the farther the call, the less money they had
In the twenties and thirties it often was sad
But, I did enjoy it, to youth it was fun
And a challenge so big but it had to be done.
My Ford in the summer was also a pet
But my grays in the winter I'll never forget
They'd take me to places that cars couldn't make
And they would bring me back home asleep or awake.

[clapping]

This is Jim Carlisle (son):

I was born on the 15th of February 1927. I am the oldest of three children, Mary Jean and David are my siblings and I wanted to say a few words about my father who was a pioneer doctor in Grande Prairie and quite a remarkable guy, as a matter of fact. In 1915 his whole class got up, he was in second year medicine at that point, and his whole class got up and joined the Canadian army and went overseas with the 5th Field Ambulance, which was a unit out of Hamilton, led by a Colonel Farmer, and that class stuck together until the day that my dad died. It was the most important thing in his life to have been in the First World War. He was at Vimy, as was my Uncle Dave, and that was a terrible experience. I have listened to accounts of it on CBC recently and after the battle at Vimy, at night the stretch bearers used to have to go out and wander amongst the dead to see if they could find the wounded. It must have been a horrible experience.

But my dad seemed to have survived it very well, and in his unit he was always known as "Happy Carlisle," as he was always cheerful, and he always had a joke and I think that saved him a lot of the trauma which must have been involved in being involved in that war.

As he says in this recording, which he made for a Kiwanis group or a church group giving his account as a pioneer doctor out west, up in the Peace River country, he went to the Peace River country in '21 or '22. That's where he met my mother, she was also a U of T grad and had an honour in English which she used very well. She was quite a talented lady and was on the Grande Prairie School Board and was very active in the United Church both in Wembley and Grande Prairie. She taught Sunday School and had a C.G.I.T. group and she got the new Grande Prairie High School after she went out to Edmonton and saw Mr. Manning at one point.

In any case, my dad went out west in '21 and I think after a time out there he realized that his training wasn't adequate to deal with all the problems that he had to, so in '22 or '21 he went back to Toronto and studied for a year with Dr. Gallie and also for a year with Dr. Alan Brown. Now Gallie – I didn't realize what an important surgeon he was, but when I came to St. Thomas the people here bragged that the Professor of Surgery at Western had been a Gallie grad and apparently that was the best surgical training you could get in Canada and possibly the whole of North America at that time. Gallie went on to train hundreds of particularly good surgeons and one of them of course was my dad. In any case, when he had finished the Gallie Course also later in his life, when I was about sixteen and I was born in '27, went down to Chicago and practiced taking out gall bladders on dogs so he could do that more complicated surgery too. When he got back to Grande Prairie he did all sorts of surgery, from gynecology to neurosurgery, and during the Second World War he was the only surgeon in Grande Prairie. I think Dr. L.J. O'Brien had retired by that time. He went into politics, and Gurth, his son, had not yet graduated, so Pop was left alone in Grande Prairie and worked tremendously hard. My brother Dave said that at one point that he was delivering 1000 babies a year. I think possibly that's an exaggeration. A lot of my father's stories had been somewhat exaggerated but certainly he was very busy during the Second World War.

After he got his first car I think he often used it as an ambulance because many of the people up there only had horses and certainly during the depression all they had was "Bennett buggies," so Pop used his car to make trips up to Dawson Creek and I actually went on a trip with him to Fort St. John to see a sick kid and bring it back to Grande Prairie. I can remember also that he made a trip up to Dawson Creek to bring home my Uncle Doug's first wife, Alma, who had had an ectopic pregnancy, and he brought her down from Dawson Creek and operated on her. He gave anaesthetics for the other doctors who were taking out appendices because at that point in time, if somebody got a pain in their belly, and particularly if it was on the right side, they got their appendix out because there was no other way of treating it and of course if their appendix ruptured generally the patient got peritonitis and died.

When I was a little older, I watched my dad operate, which was a very scary procedure for me. He put people to sleep using ethyl chloride and ether. The ethyl chloride made people hyperventilate which was a little frightening and then he poured the ether on and they gradually went to sleep and then had to do the surgery. The ether had a very nice smell to it. It was heavier than air and collected at the bottom of the operating room. It was highly inflammable so one had to be very careful about what one wore on one's feet, because a spark would have blown up the whole operating room.

I can remember going up to Fort St. John with him one cold winter night when they were building the Alaska Highway and seeing all the American trucks parked on the side of the road with their engines running because it was so cold up there that at 40 below if you let a car or truck stop at night you could probably never get it started again.

Things I remember about my dad's surgery are that he took out tonsils using a Sluder, later people used a snare, but when Pop took out tonsils he put on a Sluder, which was like a guillotine and it had a hole in it so if you pushed down on it the tonsil popped up into the hole and then you had a knife-like guillotine which you pushed down, cut off the tonsil, grabbed the tonsil, put in some packing, took the other tonsil out, scraped out the adenoids, and father always said he liked to scrape out the adenoids as the patient was going down the hall going back to the room. However, it was a somewhat bloody and, I found, frightening procedure.

He did a lot of deliveries, he delivered a lot of people up north. When he did a "C section" he did the old-fashioned kind, not through a small incision near the pelvis, but a large incision from the sternum down to the pelvis, then he popped out the uterus and then cut into the uterus, which caused a lot of bleeding, and in the next ninety seconds he had to cut into the amniotic fluid sack and there was a lot of fluid in those things, and a lot of meconium and baby shit, so it was a little frightening because he had to get the baby out in ninety seconds, hold it up by its heels, clean out its mouth and nose, probably give it a spank on the bum and hope that it started to breathe and watching all this was a little frightening, at least for me as a teenager.

As I may have said earlier, my dad, when he was in the First World War, was known in his unit as "Happy Carlisle" and I think that title was well deserved. His parents had been Methodist lay preachers and he was brought up in Peterborough and in the summer they went up to Karwartha Lakes where the Carlisles had an island and the whole family were set free to roam on that island. He had five brothers and two sisters and his older brother, Harold, was an ENT man, his next brother, Doug, worked for DeLaval, which made cream separators for Peterborough, and his brother, Harold, helped him get through medicine.

Sunday nights they apparently used to go out in canoes and have sing-songs and worship services on the lake. So he sang all his life. He had a very good voice and was always singing and when he needed to relax he could play the piano by ear and sat down at the piano and sang at the top of his voice. One of his favourite songs was "Sussex by the Sea" which I could sing for you but I'll spare you that.

As I got older I would go with him on house calls into the country, because he made a lot of house calls into the country because, as I said before, I think he used his car as an ambulance. All the time when we were in the car we always sang or he would recite poetry. He loved "Service" and could recite a number of his poems at will, "The Cremation of Sam McGee" and others. One of his favourites was about the man who carried a pack of cards over his heart. One of his friends had got shot. He carried a Bible over his heart and the Bible had stopped the bullet. The fellow with the pack of cards got a bullet right in the same place and he said the pack of cards had done the same.

But Pop liked to sing and I think when he was in medicine, he was in a troupe of actors called the "Poor Belly Infantry," the PBI. They showed it all over Ontario and he must have showed it in the Hamilton area and he was the star, he was a runner. I would like to do some more investigation on the PBI and his unit. He had a good voice and he sang in church and he sang over the radio and he always was singing and always was cheerful and happy and I think that helped him deal with what he must have had in the way of post traumatic shock, because I am sure that all the veterans who came back from the First World War, who were labelled at that time as being "shell shocked," actually would be diagnosed as being called "post-traumatic stress syndrome" in today's world and at that point the only drug available to treat shell shock or post-traumatic stress was alcohol, and most of the veterans who came back from the Second World War used it liberally, as did my father and his brothers. My uncle Dave, who had also been at Vimy, was married to a Christian Scientist so he didn't use the alcohol quite as liberally as my father or my others uncles, but it was the drug of choice for the veterans.

In latter years, after he had met Moral Re-Armament, my father and my mother spent time at the Moral Re-Armament Training Center in Mackinac, and while he was there, a number of Moral Re-Armament plays and musical shows were produced. Yes, he was a good actor and of course as an actor he liked to be the centre of attention. The play was called "The Crowning Experience." It was produced first at Mackinaw as a play and later shown in the United States. It spent a whole winter playing in Atlanta in Georgia and for the first time whites and blacks went into the same door. My dad played the role of a policeman in that play and was very proud of being able to do that. He was quite disappointed when he didn't get the role in the movie, but he did have a small role in another movie called "Voice of the Hurricane," which Muriel Smith was in too. Muriel Smith took the lead in the play "Crowning Experience." She was offered the role of one of the wives in "The King and I." She was a very good singer. Bill Close was also in that movie. His daughter is a movie star.

Well, this is Jim Carlisle recording on the 22nd of August, 2010.

I want to say that I was very fortunate to grow up in the Peace River country and my dad certainly made a great contribution to life up there. He was a very well-trained surgeon and a well-balanced person, so I hope he will be remembered up there. I think that is all I would like to say about him. There is much more that could be said but I think I have said enough so that's it.

Transcribed by Grace Wallace
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