



“Remembering Dr. Donn Blair (1920-1985)”

When Albert Donn Blair was growing up in Red Deer Hill, Saskatchewan, he probably had no idea that he would eventually become one of British Columbia's most respected chiropractors. He probably had no idea either, that throughout his entire life he would make many significant contributions that deserved respect and admiration not only in his professional life, but in his private life as well.

The 1961 Canadian Memorial Chiropractic College yearbook, *Cornerstone* provides a brief biographical sketch of Donn's life at the time of his graduation:

This is the year that 'life begins' for Donn Blair – he having confessed, along with Jack Benny, to leaving 39 behind. In order to trace his migrations since birth . . . one would need a map of Canada. Briefly, Donn has lived in Toronto, Vancouver, Saskatoon, Regina, Fort William, Price Albert and all points west! Educated at Prince Alberta Collegiate, Balfour Technical School, Regina and Saskatoon Tech., Donn went on to higher learning at the Brisbane School of Aeronautics in Vancouver, the University of Saskatchewan and the University of British Columbia. He has been an aircraft mechanic, tooling engineer, surveyor, draftsman, forest ranger, merchant and parking lot attendant – the latter while at CMCC. Donn provided you can 'teach an old dog new tricks' when he won the J.M. Wallace Scholarship Award as a freshman. He also served on the Clinic Committee. He lists his hobbies as photography, football and dancing girls (in that order – which proves he's over 39!). Donn and his charming wife Evelyn will return to Vancouver. . . .

More specifically, he was born in Glidden Saskatchewan, March 1, 1920 to Don and Edna Blair. When Donn turned 10, the family packed up and moved to Red Deer Hill (just outside Prince Albert) where his parents became proprietors of the General Store and Post Office. His only sister, Elva Bliss, lives in Prince Albert to this day (1986).

As a child on the prairies, Donn developed a keen enthusiasm for flying machines. By the age of 10, he was building model airplanes that could actually fly. In fact, if it wasn't for a childhood baseball injury which robbed him of most of the vision in one eye, he would have pursued an aeronautical vocation – preferably as a pilot. He applied to both the air force and private airline industry and was rejected in both areas due to eye sight deficiency. During the war, Donn worked as a tooling engineer for the Boeing Company in Vancouver. (He quipped that "if I can't fly, 'em, I'll make 'em.") His education at the University of Saskatchewan was in the field of architectural engineering. However, the meticulous work involved in drafting proved to be too demanding for his eyesight – he was forced, as a result, to abandon that profession also.

Fortunately, fate works in mysterious ways. The loss to aeronautics and architecture, resulted in a very significant gain to chiropractic – but more about that later.

Evelyn Caroline Cook hailed from Innisfail, Alberta. After completing teacher training as well as some classroom experience in Alberta, she moved to Vancouver. That's where she met Donn Blair. That's where they became lifelong best friends. And that's where they were married on July 16, 1949. Apart from four years in Toronto (1957-1961) they stayed in Vancouver's west end remaining what would be considered the "ideal couple" until Donn's untimely death some 36 years later. It was often said Donn's first love was his practice. However, anyone who knew the Blair's well, knew that Evelyn held that first place. The practice was, in reality, the runner-up. Evelyn continues to live at their suite on Robson Street.

Donn's first introduction to chiropractic was, like that of many chiropractors, the result of personal experience. Donn suffered from severe, recurrent headaches. He consulted Dr. Bill Sutherland, late of downtown Vancouver, whose expertise brought a quick halt to Donn's headaches. Distressed at his inability to secure a meaningful position in the aeronautical or architectural fields, Donn was faced with the prospect of beginning a new career. It was Evelyn's chiropractor, Dr. Rolly Newitt, also of downtown Vancouver, who persuaded Donn to take a stab at an education in chiropractic. Donn enrolled at CMCC in 1957. He never looked back.

Despite the fact that he was one of the most mature students in his class (he was 37 when he started), he quickly demonstrated his academic abilities by winning one of the most prestigious academic awards – the J.M. Wallace Scholarship. The 1958 *Cornerstone* carried the following description of him:

Like still waters deceptively so deep

This quiet one, this bantam-size

Displays the mental prowess of a giant.

Among his close associates at college were Murray Strudwick and Bob Schwager (both now of Australia), Bill Martichenko and James Matthews (both of Toronto) and Tony Harris (of Britain). Among his classmates, Donn was well liked, highly respected and unanimously admired. At graduation, Donn received the Walter T. Sturdy Award for overall academic proficiency throughout his four years.

When Donn and Evelyn returned to Vancouver in 1961, Donn did locum tenencies for Drs. Clint Heuser and Rolly Newitt. In October, 1961, Donn began his own practice at 803 Denman Street, an office which had belonged (since 1951) to Dr. Art Rossiter (who was then moving to Australia). Situated on a highly visible corner, he office came to be somewhat of a landmark of the west end. Donn remained in that location for 24 years.

Success is measured in many ways. To Dr. Donn Blair, it was never measured in dollars and cents. He was one of those unique – and rare – doctors with a genuine concern for his patients. He was a holistic chiropractor. He was a healer – in every real sense of the word. He thrived on the challenge of

patients with chronic and difficult problems. When those patients needed his time, they got it. His dedication however, constantly disrupted his appointment schedule, interfered with his personal life and played havoc with his own health by resulting in fatigue. (It was common to pass by his office at midnight or later to find all lights aglow – a sign that Dr. Blair was busy composing a detailed report for a lawyer or insurance company requiring his expert opinion on a patient's case.)

Donn was not a "systems" practitioner *per se*. He studied Applied Kinesiology and Sacro Occipital techniques extensively, but much of what he practiced was a synthesis of those methods combined with his own personal techniques developed in his many years of clinical experience. He rarely missed a post-graduate lecture in Vancouver and attended many outside the province too. Among his favorites were technique seminars taught by Dr. Major DeJarnette, (founder of S.O.T.), in Omaha, Nebraska. Over the years, the two became very good friends and developed a deep, mutual respect for each other. In many ways, Donn considered DeJarnette his mentor in chiropractic.

Donn's professional contributions went far beyond that which took place in his office between him and his patients. Concerning chiropractic association work, he chose to remain out of the spotlight. He was very much a behind-the-scenes man. As a result, much of his association work went unnoticed to all but a very few alert board members. They noticed, because it was Donn who provided the essential, detailed statistical analyses of professional fees and services for the profession. The statistics were essential for medicare negotiations with government in Victoria. Of course, he did it all without pay – and without a whisper of complaint.

Dr. Dunc McNeil once said "show me a man who doesn't like Donn Blair, and I'll show you a man who has a problem within himself." If Donn Blair had any faults, he kept them to himself. He was charitable. He was a gentle man and a gentleman. He was thoughtful and contemplative, quiet and quick-witted, intelligent and wise, energetic and enthusiastic. Though he and Evelyn never had children of their own – Evelyn of course had her students – he was like a father to many patients and colleagues alike. He was an advisor to some, a counsellor to others and a strong shoulder for many.

His memberships included the BCCA, CCA, CMCC, B.C. CMCC Alumni Association, SORSI, Vancouver Aquarium and the B.C. Lions Touchdown Club. He was one of the early driving forces and ever-present supporters of the B.C. CMCC Alumni Association and is one of the chief reasons that organization remains to this day, the model of active provincial alumni associations.

His enthusiasm for the B.C. Lions football team was unparalleled. He was a season ticket holder right from the start. He also compiled, "in his spare time", a complex set of statistics detailing the performance of the Lions and their "prey". He had a keen interest in nature, photography and classical music. He kept abreast of, but was never active in, provincial and federal politics. He subscribed to several science, business,

nature and health science journals. His enthusiasm for aviation carried into the space program. Had NASA required volunteers for the space race, Donn would have been their first man in line. (When the first man set foot on the moon, Donn spent three days – including one full sleepless night – following every detail of the events on television.)

Donn passed away on February 22, 1985, one week before his 65th birthday. In that time, he improved the lives and health of thousands, helped to establish a solid reputation for chiropractic in the community and carved a permanent position for himself in B.C.'s chiropractic history. Like the many sunsets and sunrises he enjoyed from his Robson Street suite overlooking Lost Lagoon, Dr. Donn Blair will be remembered forever as a ray of sunlight that brightened many lives from 1920 until 1985.

Dr. John Taylor DC/Vancouver

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