



Dr. Harry

By Sterling Haynes

On a sunny August day in 1938, I was walking and humming a Winnie the Pooh bear song, *Nobody Knows Tidily Palm* and not paying much attention. I was a fat little kid and I'd been swimming in Edmonton's south-side pool and my eyes were red from chlorine. Not seeing well and being awkward, I fell scrambling in a public rock garden and broke and dislocated my left elbow.

My eleven-year-old chum, Bill, saw that my arm looked "kind of funny" and ran across the street and got a solid citizen to drive us home. Each bump in the gravel road made me let out a howl.

At home, my mother phoned Dr. Harry Weinlos and his nurse told her to take me to the Misericordia (Mizz) Hospital. Dr. Harry, a prominent Alberta surgeon, would see me when I got there. I was told not to eat or drink anything. Mother called a cab and took me to the hospital. This was the first of many meetings I would have with this compassionate man.


Over the years, Doctor Harry became my doctor, mentor and hero. At the Mizz hospital, Dr. Harry appeared. He was a short, stocky man with a small, black moustache, a kind face and large, strong-looking hands. He wore small rimless glasses and behind the lenses he had bright, twinkly, brown eyes.

"Well, Sterling, you have a painful looking elbow. We'll have to take an X-ray and then Dr. Adamson will put a mask over your face and put you to sleep with some smelly stuff – it's called a 1-2-3 gas and you'll waken with your elbow fixed and no more pain. It's just a 1-2-3."

"Thanks Dr. Weinlos, I'll try and be good but my arm really hurts." Even now I remember Dr. Adamson putting the mask over my face and dripping on some 1-2-3 liquid on the cloth mesh as I struggled to breathe. Years later I was to learn that the metal mask composed of layers of cloth was called a Schimmelbusch mask. The liquid, called a 1-2-3, dripped onto the mask and was composed of chloroform, alcohol and ether. This very potent mixture quickly put me under. I remember waking up in the kid's ward vomiting and smelling ether, but my left arm didn't hurt. My fracture dislocation had been relocated. The next day Dr. Weinlos sent me home in a cast with a sling. There was no physiotherapy in Edmonton at that time. The only the rehabilitation was provided by Dr. Harry.

After eight weeks, Dr. Harry cut my cast off by hand with giant plaster cutters and I was told I could use the sling at home when necessary. My left elbow was locked in the flexed position and wouldn't bend much. I went to Dr. Harry's office on the 4th floor of the Birks building twice a week for treatment. At home, I was told to carry a gallon pail of water weighing ten lbs. with my left hand for 20 minutes twice a day. I wouldn't disappoint Dr. Harry!

The treatment at the office consisted of Dr. Harry putting his unshod heel in my left arm-pit and pulling on my forearm. I can remember hollering and trying to hold back tears. Dr. Harry persisted and always gave me 25 cents for hurting me. After four months, Dr. Harry had pulled my arm straight. I had acquired \$4.00, a vast sum for a 10-year-old kid in those depression days. When my Dad offered to pay Dr. Harry for looking after my arm, he refused. Instead Dr. Harry said he might ask my Dad for a few special favours. My Dad's dental office was in Room 321 of the Birks building at 104th Street and Jasper Avenue – just a floor lower than Dr. Harry's. The first of many favours Dr. Harry asked of my Dad was to fix the abscessed teeth of his indigent patients. After a few weeks, Dad called a halt to Harry's request as the number of dental abscesses doubled each day and my Dad's office was over-run with homeless people. Then Dr. Harry asked that on cold nights these same people be allowed to sleep on the floor in the dental office and use the office lavatory. Soon the Birks building manager noted that the third floor toilets were a mess in the morning. The



superintendent of the building then had a talk with Dad and Dr. Harry's request to house the homeless in Dad's office was stopped. This last episode strained their friendship slightly. Finally, my Dad wrote Dr. Harry a cheque to cover his professional fee for fixing my arm. Dad figured that paying Dr. Harry would be cheaper in the long run. Over the years, I would occasionally see a friendly Dr. Harry in the Birks building. He always asked about my school work and if I was going to be a doctor. He seemed disappointed when he found out I was only interested in hockey, baseball and tennis.

I got to know Dr. Harry much better when I was 18. One summer night, in 1947, I started vomiting and developed pain in the right side of my belly. Again Dr. Harry came to the house and diagnosed appendicitis and drove me in his car to the Mizz hospital for surgery. At this time, Dr. Harry's ancient Ford, Model A Flivver, made it across the high level bridge. Dr. Harry then arranged for Dr. Adamson to give me an anesthetic – this time it was a spinal. Under anesthetic Dr. Harry took my appendix out and I made a complete recovery. Two days later Dr. Harry walked me to the street car stop on 109th Street where I caught the street car for home and he took the tram to his office in the Birks Building. Dr. Harry's Model A Ford had conked out completely. My Dad was glad to pay Dr. Weinlos' professional fee immediately – “with no sutures” attached. I made a rapid recovery.

Dr. Harry and I became friends and we often met by chance, usually in the Birks Building. He always wanted to know what I planned to do. He was disappointed, when I was 21, to learn that I was going to become a colonial officer in Northern Nigeria and had signed on for three years. He tried to dissuade me and recommended I apply to medical school but my mind was made up and I sailed on the Empress of Canada in 1951 to Liverpool and then on the MV Accra to Lagos, Nigeria. Three years later, after being invalided home from Africa recovering from Weil's disease and having lost 80 pounds, I realized that Dr. Harry was right, and I applied to Medical school at the U of A in 1954.

Dr. Harry always encouraged me during the pre-clinical years at med school when I would see him in the Birks building. Later, when I was a clinical clerk assigned to the Misericordia Hospital, Dr. Harry took over the teaching of my clinical rotation. Although he was a surgeon, Dr. Harry had patients on the paediatric and medical wards. He allowed me to do many deliveries of his patients in the obstetrical unit, but under his supervision. His surgical practice was huge, and he had a varied group of general surgical patients as well as orthopedic, urological and plastic surgical cases. Dr. Harry was a whirlwind and many times we were making rounds at 7am or midnight. Dr. Harry was one of the few doctors who looked after the native people from the reserves in West Edmonton and Hobbema. The colour of either a person's skin or his race meant nothing to Dr. Harry: everyone was treated equally, and with respect.

The Nuns at the Misericordia hospital loved him – he was their favourite doctor. He had the ability to get around their rules and religion and get his own way from the staff. Some of his poor patients at home were dehydrated and he used to beg the Mother Superior at the Mizz for special fluids so he could give intravenous fluids to them in their own beds. The nuns always saw to it that he had free meals in the doctor's dining room and a place to sleep in the doctor's lounge; they even did his laundry and ironed the starched wing collars that he always wore. He was a bachelor and seldom went home.

When I interned at the Royal Alexandra Hospital in Edmonton, Dr. Harry had many surgical patients on the wards. He always phoned me to help him with rounds even when I wasn't assigned to his surgical service. He was a fabulous teacher who always related everything to the well-being of his patient. His reasoning was sound and he was knowledgeable and kind – I loved him.



Dr. Harry continued...

One very cold night in February, Dr. Harry phoned me to go on rounds at the the Royal Alexandra Hospital. When I arrived on the surgical floor, after visiting hours, Harry's hands were red and cold-looking.

"Where are your gloves Dr. Harry?" "When it turned cold I gave them to one of my patients. I ran out of gas and had to walk to the hospital – all the way down Kingsway against that north wind. But I'm OK now, apart from having cold hands and missing my supper. "

"We'd better go to the hospital cafeteria and get you some supper now. You didn't run out of gas again, Dr. Harry?" I was calculating that Dr. Harry didn't have any money for supper or gas. I had just cashed my monthly hospital intern's cheque and had \$20 in my pocket.

"Here, Dr. Harry – I'll lend you five bucks for supper and gas. You can pay me back sometime."

"That should get me back to the *Mizz* after we have supper and we do rounds. Thanks Sterling."

It was the end of June when Harry repaid my loan. We met at Mary Samuels's house for a massive Jewish feast honouring Max Wershof's appointment, a Canadian ambassadorship to the UK, and Dr. Harry's humanitarian way of practicing medicine in Edmonton. My wife and I were included as Harry's friends and my mother and dad were long-time friends of the Samuels. I was also being honoured having just passed my LMCC [Licentiate of the Medical Council of Canada]. This was a national examination allowing me to practice in Canada.

Supper was sumptuous, but Dr. Harry was an hour late. I thought Dr. Harry might have run out of gas again and walked over from the *Mizz* When he arrived, all the guests had already finished the main entre. Harry bustled up to the table and was obviously famished and apologized for being late between mouthfuls.

"I'm so sorry to be late Mary," said Dr. Harry. The gefilte fish was marvelous and the soup was a little cold, but... "What did you say Dr. Harry – you are impossible! You arrive late at my dinner party and then complain the soup is cold." "I am so sorry Mary – excuse my boorishness. Thank you very much for having me."

We had a rollicking evening – entertained by Dr. Harry's stories set on 97th Street in Edmonton or at the *Mizz*. Max's eloquent tales of working in European embassies were fascinating. As the evening closed, Mary Samuels told very funny Yiddish stories that her father had brought to Alberta from Europe. But I can never forget Dr. Harry and his humanitarian ways. This is the last time I would see Dr. Harry.

Dr. Harry never sent bills out for all the work he did but he would mention his fee to patients after they were back working. Patients paid their medical bill when they could. Edmontonians loved him for his kindness and altruism.

Medicine was in the Weinlos family blood in Europe and Canada. Manuel graduated from Vienna's medical school and was Harry's eldest brother. Manuel was killed serving in the German army medical corps in World War I. The remaining family came with their parents, Leah and Isaac, from Austria in 1921. The five brothers and sisters were educated in Austria. The two youngest, Harry and Morris, were educated in Edmonton. Dr. Morris graduated from medicine at the U of A in 1929. Dr. Harry, the younger brother, graduated a few years later. Harry and Morris were among the first to enlist in the Canadian Medical Corps in September, 1939. They both served in WW II until 1945 and were both discharged with the rank of Major. While both Weinlos brothers were serving overseas, Dr. Morris recalls the following story:



“Harry was hit in the head by a piece of German shrapnel during a Nazi bombing raid in Yorkshire. But he had the wound patched up quietly and never did report the incident. That was his attitude; he just didn’t want to bother anyone.”

Debby Shoctor, archivist, for the Jewish Archives and Historical Society of Edmonton and Northern Alberta sent me a copy of a postcard written by Dr. Harry and mailed in 1941 from England to Master Billy Lewchuk in Spirit River, Alta. The article was labeled “a postcard from beyond.”

This postcard, according to the archives, was delivered to Billy’s sister in Spirit River, 67 years late, in February 2008. Dr. Harry had treated Billy for a broken leg and other injuries at the Misericordia Hospital but was mobilized for the army overseas before Billy had recovered. Dr. Harry wrote and asked Billy in his postcard: “Hope that when this card reaches you, you will be much healthier and stronger.” Unfortunately, Billy succumbed to his injuries. Dr. Weinlos did not find this out until after the war, at which time he wrote a heartfelt letter of condolence to the Lewchuck family, which they still have. The postcard Dr. Harry mailed from England during the war is in the Jewish archives.

The Edmonton Sun newspaper, in 1960 reported that Dr. Harry made a housecall to a rural farm. “The farmer was paralyzed by acute appendicitis but would not leave his abode because the plowing was not finished. Dr. Weinlos, it is reported, got on a pair of overalls and finished the plowing.” He then drove him to the Mizz and took out his appendix.

Dr. Harry provided free medical services to The O’Connell Institute, The Alberta Protestant Home, and The Good Shepherd Home for orphan children; voluntary services to The Beulah Home for the poor [which he helped to establish]; and voluntary service since 1928 to orphaned children in the Atonement Home. He was active in the Edmonton Community Chest and provided voluntary services to the Home for Ex-Servicemen’s Children according to the Edmonton Sun.

Dr. Harry and his brother Dr. Morris were rewarded by the City of Edmonton when the Weinlos district of Edmonton was named in their honour, as well as a primary school in Edmonton called the Weinlos School. This school provides instruction for students with mild and moderate cognitive developmental disabilities. This is Edmonton’s tribute to Drs. Morris and Harry Weinlos, who were outstanding city surgeons and teachers.

Dr. Harry was my doctor, mentor and friend for twenty years. His happy ways and compassion made him well-loved by me and his many patients in Northern Alberta. I wish to acknowledge the help and support of the City of Edmonton archivists and Debbie Shoctor, archivist for the Jewish Archives & Historical Society of Edmonton and Northern Alberta. Mrs. Florence Weinlos Soifer, of Edmonton, Dr. Harry’s niece, was full of facts and stories about the life of Uncle Harry. Her help and encouragement was exceptional.