

Eliot Cohen (Corday)

By Sterling Haynes



*David Cohen family; Hay Lakes, Alberta, 1926. Courtesy of the Jewish Historical Society of Southern Alberta.**

I first met Eliot Cohen when I was seven. It was during the depression, in the spring of 1935 that Eliot's parents, Katie and David Cohen asked our family, my mom, dad and my sister, Shirley, to a Sunday dinner in Hay Lakes, Alberta. It was a hot noon when we arrived at the Cohen Mercantile store by car from Edmonton. The road East to Cooking Lake was gravel but from Cooking Lake on it was rutted and dusty to Hay Lakes. After 31 hard Canadian miles we were dusty and irritable.

The Hay Lakes Mercantile was a combination grocery, dry goods, farm implement, and hardware store with two 10-gallon gas pumps by the front door. The pumps were hand-operated. The gas flowed by gravity into the car, truck or tractor and was next to the horse trough

filled with murky, alkaline water. There were usually a few teams of horses hitched to the railing in front of the store. The store was open seven days a week. This Sunday afternoon, farmers and church people had gathered at the store to shop, buy gas and gossip.

We had just arrived and Dave welcomed us but was busy selling gas and directed us to the upstairs living quarters where Katie was waiting for us. Dad and I parked and waited in line to gas up our old Ford Fliver. Mother and Shirley walked up the stairs of the store to the Cohen living quarters. David and his three boys, Teddy, Eliot and Hy were standing on the boardwalk by the front door watching Dave chewing on his cigar stump and pumping gas. Dave was a chunky, short man who wore bib GWG red strap overalls. This day his greasy denims were soaked with gas as he attempted to light a large Eddy wooden match on the seat of his pants. There was a little explosion, and before he could light his cigar stump, Dave was engulfed in flames. Dad dashed out of our car. The three sons and Dad each grabbed one of Dave's limbs and threw him in the horse trough. No one was hurt and Dave sheepishly declared that he was "OK" and then went into the store to change his wet clothes. This episode put a bit of a damper on Dave's mercurial temper and he seemed subdued. Eliot, a medical student, at the University of Alberta, tended his father's minor burns to his hands. Then we all gathered in the dining room above the store for a sumptuous Jewish meal. The meal included borsht with lokshen (noodles) and gefilte fish and mounds of shredded cheese, matzos (unleavened bread) and whipping cream. There were honey and figs for dessert and the men drank homemade wine.

I got to know Eliot much better four years later, during the spring of 1939. Eliot was a handsome slim man. His suits were always smart and well pressed and his black hair was combed back. He had a pencil thin black



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moustache. He was always well-groomed whenever we met. Eliot's academic record was always superlative except for Latin. At the U of A he started his studies in electrical engineering but later on he switched the Faculty of Medicine.

Eliot was in his final year of medicine at the U of A when the Dean of Medicine, Johnny Ower, declared that unless Eliot passed his pre-med Latin exam he would not graduate with the class in medicine. My mother, Elizabeth, was a Latin scholar, and three times a week, Eliot arrived at our house for Latin lessons and to have his homework corrected by my mother. His Latin homework was always done and he arrived on time. He had a very rigorous schedule at medical school but he was friendly and polite to me and we talked about his family as well as mine and the practice of medicine. Eliot, after studying with my mother, passed the Latin exam with flying colours and graduated from the University of Alberta medical school in 1940. Eliot married his sweetheart, Marion, in Edmonton after graduation. Then he joined the R.C.A.F. where served as a Canadian air force doctor in World War II.

In 1945, Marion and Eliot moved to New York City to be with his brother, Ted Corday. It was in NYC that Eliot and Marion changed their name to Corday as well. There had developed in Canada and the USA, some anti-Jewish racism in the 1930s. Teddy felt this underlying racism. He was the first to change his name to Corday when he started to write, produce and direct for the stage and radio in NYC. After the name change, Ted worked with NBC. When Eliot arrived, Ted was established in theatre and radio. They both looked Spanish or perhaps French Canadian and the French name of Corday fitted.

Eliot had a medical residency in NYC in cardiology and trained with Dickenson Richards, a Nobel prize-winner in medicine. Then Richards and Corday, along with Dr. Arthur Masters, refined the early Masters Two Step Test, from the simple two-step stair stress test for cardiac function. Eliot, with his engineering experience, developed the modern cardiac stress testing and EKG monitoring performed when walking on a treadmill. Again with Dr. Richards, Eliot developed research studies that led to the development of cardiac catheterization. Eliot was only 32 years old at the time.

In 1949 Eliot and Marion moved to Los Angeles and worked in the Cedars of Lebanon Hospital where he developed radioisotope studies that became the forerunner of modern nuclear cardiology. Soon he was the leading cardiologist in the USA and contributed to four new fields: stress testing, ambulatory EKG monitoring, cardiac catheterization and nuclear cardiology.

Eliot was not only a researcher and teacher but a dedicated physician. He was the cardiologist who looked after William Randolph Hearst, and President Dwight D. Eisenhower when he was in the White House. He was chief consulting cardiologist for the United States Army and looked after many of its soldiers including five star General Omar Bradley, who was supreme commander of the U.S. Army in the 1940s. Busy as he was, he looked after my aging Aunt Iva, when she lived in Los Angeles.



When my Aunt Iva phoned Eliot's office for an appointment she was told by the receptionist, "Dr. Corday is not accepting new patients." Iva said, "I'm a long-time friend of Eliot's family. Would you please tell him Iva Haynes of Edmonton and Hay Lakes, Alberta phoned. I'll leave my phone number and perhaps Dr. Corday could call me." Eliot called the next day and spoke about the Haynes' family with fondness and his Latin tutoring in 1939 by my mother. He said he would be "delighted to see Iva about any cardiac problems at any time." The receptionist gave Iva an appointment.

Aunt Iva developed atrial fibrillation that was resistant to treatment. Eliot spent time with Iva and diagnosed a toxic goiter and thyrotoxicosis. Once the thyroid problem was treated by a thyroidectomy, her atrial fibrillation was relatively easy to control.

Iva was greatly improved and always raved about the great care she had received from the famous Canadian cardiologist Dr. Eliot Corday!

In the 1960s, Eliot was elected president of The American College of Cardiology. Eliot and his close friend cardiac surgeon Michael DeBakey advocated federal funding for cardiovascular research. As a professor at UCLA he was involved with teaching the latest cardiac diagnostic and treatment methods internationally. He also organized live interchanges on television with physicians globally and those behind the Iron Curtain as well. The David Cohen family emigrated from Lithuania to Canada in 1901. I am sure Eliot was aware of his Jewish family ties in Lithuania and Russia. President Ronald Reagan honoured Eliot Corday when he wrote this letter: "Sharing your knowledge and skills with physicians of other countries, you have served as an Ambassador of Goodwill. Your efforts dramatically demonstrate that America stands ready to work with others to help solve common problems."

Eliot Corday was born in Prince Rupert, British Columbia in 1913. He was raised and educated in Alberta, British Columbia and the U.S.A. and died in Los Angeles Feb 10th, 1999. He was a humble man, gave of himself, never forgot a friend and asked nothing in return.

**The picture of the Cohen family [1926] was supplied by Myra Paperny courtesy of the Jewish Historical Society of Southern Alberta. Eliot is the 13 year old boy standing in the centre of the picture beside his mother.*