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Dr. Brian Webb, MD, FRCP, FRCPCH

Obituary, based on an address at St. Augustines Church, West Monkton, Somerset, May 31st, 2017

Brian Wykeman Webb – or Bertie as he was known to many of his friends – slipped quietly away on the early morning of May 21st at the Dunkirk Memorial Home where he had spent the last few months of his life. The past few years had not been easy. His very dear wife, Eve, whom he had married in 1961, died suddenly in 2005. The following year he had the first of a number of strokes. But he remained positive, uncomplaining and always responded to any inquiry about his health with: *'Cheerfulness keeps breaking out'*. Indeed, one of his favourite adages was: *'Happiness is not a destination – it is a way of living'* and he passed on his own happiness to all he met. He was a role model in how to grow old gracefully, supported I should add by his many friends and especially by Angie Cridle, Geoff Hayes and Phil Penny.

Brian had had a distinguished career. Born in Malacca, Malaya, on June 26th 1921, he returned to England with his parents in 1927. His father, Captain Oliver Webb, a civil engineer, had been decorated for bravery in the trenches during the First World War and 20 years later had contributed in the Second World War by building a number of air fields for the RAF in Cornwall.

Brian was educated at Monkton Combe School in Bath where his claim to fame was scoring a century at cricket and winning a half-day for the whole school. He then moved on to Epsom College before training in medicine at the Middlesex Hospital in London. Qualifying in 1945, he undertook two year's National Service as a surgeon-lieutenant in the RNVR at the Port Edgar Royal Naval Hospital near Edinburgh. He then returned to London, obtained the degrees MD and FRCP and trained for the next decade in general medicine and paediatrics at the Middlesex Hospital, the Hospital for Sick Children in Great Ormond Street and at Kings College Hospital. During this time he was fortunate to come under the influence of Sir Alan Moncrieff and Sir Wilfred Sheldon, two very distinguished paediatricians. Next, after a research fellowship in Canada at the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto,



Bertie Webb, aged 90, in 2012

he returned to England in 1957 to take up his appointment as the first consultant paediatrician in Somerset.

As the only consultant paediatrician in a county containing some 60,000 children, Brian Webb had his work cut out but he responded magnificently to the challenge. Based on Musgrove Park Hospital in Taunton, he steadily developed the paediatric services throughout Somerset. He organised a rotating paediatric registrarship with Dr. Kenneth Cross of the Medical Research Council and with the London Hospital, which attracted a high class of trainees.

In the 1960s with funds he raised from the pharmaceutical firm Beechams, he built the first Postgraduate Centre in the South West in Taunton. There he organised annual week-long conferences for family

doctors called 'Fresh Looks'. It was his boast that no one had ever declined or failed to keep an invitation to speak. And he attracted many distinguished lecturers.

As though the paediatric workload in Somerset was not enough, Brian became a member of the British Paediatric Association's Academic Board and made a significant contribution to national paediatric postgraduate education. He also served for many years as President of the South West Regional Paediatric Committee and as such chaired a survey of the Region's Perinatal Services (including 48 maternity units) between 1981 and 1983 which led to many major improvements. In addition, he found time to spend a year in the Sudan as visiting Professor of Child Health at the University of Khartoum.



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As a clinician, Brian will be best remembered as an astute and wise physician, loved and honoured by his patients as well as by his medical and nursing team. He was not only an extremely competent diagnostician but possessed great skills in communication both with the children, their parents and with his own staff. In addition, he was very good at acknowledging and thanking anyone who had made a contribution, however small. His particular satisfaction was in the training of young paediatricians whose careers he followed with great interest.

Bertie and his much loved wife Eve, lived in their home Nigella, in West Monkton where they created a beautiful garden and were renowned for their hospitality. He was a man of great warmth, courtesy, generosity and kindness. His consideration for others knew no bounds. Few people had more friends than he had and, indeed, he spent much time 'patrolling' the bounds of his friendship.

Bertie's earlier love of sailing with Leslie LeQuesne, Paul Jonason and others gave way in time to golf. In truth, he wasn't all that good a golfer except at persuading his opponents to give him bisques or free shots. He also had a much admired golden retriever called Edward that used to race ahead to return wagging his tail with his opponent's ball in his mouth. Still, to Bertie's credit, he managed a hole in one on the 8th at St. Enodoc in Cornwall and in 1974 won the paediatric golf Ulster Cup.

No one was more proud to be British than Bertie. He loved to remind you that this country had not been invaded for 1,000 years and that a third of the world map was – or had been – painted red, that time and distance were measured from Greenwich and that English was the language of international use – much to the irritation and annoyance of the French! He was particularly proud too of his own county, Somerset. Following his stroke, I used to take him in the car over Exmoor and it was such a pleasure to share his enjoyment of the scenery. Even the clouds came in for praise – every one of them being, as he said, unique.

Bertie had a particularly good sense of humour and a great fund of anecdotes



Winning the BPA Ulster Cup in 1974

which he recorded in a small black booklet. Panic doesn't start to describe his state of mind when one day he mislaid it under the table where we had been enjoying a Madras curry at the Pink Garlic earlier that evening. Some of us were up into the early hours hunting for it.

I can't resist recounting one anecdote from that little black book: *'Bertie was speeding through Taunton on his way to a domiciliary visit when he noticed that he had a Police car on his tail. Quick as a flash he slowed down, lowered his window and hung out his stethoscope. At this the Police car overtook him dangling a pair of handcuffs out of their offside window'*.

I also can't resist telling of Bertie's pride on adding a word to the English language. In a shop in West Monkton, he overheard a mother rebuking her young

son for fingering the sweets. When the boy protested and asked why, she replied that it was lowgenic. Bertie immediately contacted the Editor of the Oxford English Dictionary who agreed to accept *'lowgenic'* for the next edition.

One of Bertie's carers during his last days told me: *'He had a gift of making the person he was talking to feel that they were the most important person in the world'*. That was indeed typical of him.

One of Bertie's sayings that he liked to quote was: *'Don't grieve that I have died, rather rejoice that I have lived.'* I think we can all agree with that. May he rest in peace.

Peter Dunn