

# Edward Bruce Hendrick

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It may have occurred to more than one neurosurgeon while operating on a cerebral Galenic venous malformation that it was “like sitting beneath Niagara Falls in a basket of quivering serpents”. At least that is how E. Bruce Hendrick once described his experience with the lesion. There are few surgeons who have been able to articulate their surgical vistas or instructive bon mots in quite the colorful but memorable terms as this founder of Canadian pediatric neurosurgery.

Bruce Hendrick, even today, is a rare Torontonian who was actually born in the city in which he practiced, retired and died. Apart from a brief absence during his residency, his unflagging Canadian loyalties had been sustained through his high school and University of Toronto education, the postgraduate surgical program at that university, and a brief military career. He travelled to Boston in 1952 to begin a two year neurosurgery fellowship at the Children’s Medical Center and Peter Bent Brigham Hospital, where he studied under Franc Ingraham and Donald Matson. About this decision, he confessed that “I knew very little about Ingraham and Matson and nothing about pediatrics.” Even in those years, Bruce brought originality to the daily conduct of pediatric neurosurgery, as typified by a question to one of Dr. Matson’s patients with a spinal cord tumor and paresthesia who was asked if, “your legs feel like ginger ale looks?” The Hendrick aphorisms will remain with students and residents longer than the logical sequences of thought which the rest of us teach.

Having completed his Boston experience Bruce Hendrick returned to Toronto in 1954 to begin neurosurgical practice at The Hospital for Sick Children. Although he also held responsibilities at the Toronto Western Hospital, it was clear that his joy came from caring for children’s neurosurgical disorders, as he swept about Sick Kids entrancing students young and old with the mysteries of pediatric neurosurgery. Bruce became Neurosurgeon-in-Chief at HSC in 1964. During the next twenty-two years he attracted many young men and women from all parts of the globe for training in pediatric neurosurgery. Several neurosurgical units have been established in North America and overseas as a direct result of his stimulation of these young surgeons. His management style followed Alexandre Dumas’ maxim, “All for one, one for all, that is our device”.

Forever the generous Good Samaritan, Bruce opened his wallet and his home to a variety of old friends and new visitors to the city and his favorite hospital. Newly arrived residents who had not yet found accommodations would be housed temporarily at Leggett Avenue. And, if later on one of them or their family suffered from a winter illness, they would likely find Bruce at their doorstep ready to reactivate his family practice skills. At the conclusion of their academic year, all the residents and their families would be invited to Leggett for a pool party. On these

occasions some of the Argentinian residents would repay their master with the preparation of fresh meats barbecued to perfection, on the lids from the Hendrick garbage cans. Throughout all these times, Bruce enjoyed the tremendous support of his wife Gloria, to whom he had been married for 54 years and who he described as “always being there for me”.

Over the years, the relationship between Bruce and his resident staff had been quite special, if not predictable. Eschewing complete reliance upon gadgetry for clinical decisions, he exhorted residents to adhere to fundamental Oslerian principles of history gathering and physical examination or, as he said in a 1993 editorial, “Whatever mother says!” He advised residents to be prepared to defend their own conclusions and not to be influenced by the “reckless courage of the noncombatant”. While still assimilating such ward teachings from their respected mentor, many a resident would miss the change of mood and find himself suddenly caught in the crossfire of a water pistol fight between Bruce and his patients. It was a serious business on Friday afternoons, when nurses, parents and child life therapists joined the patients to develop strategies for these sessions. The children wore green garbage bags; “Uncle Bruce” – the “Green Machine” – took the soakings in his OR scrub suit. Syringe barrels did duty for patients who didn’t have their own water pistols and all of them tried to outdo Bruce’s escalating level of armaments.

Bruce had been part of the nascence and maturation of the specialty of pediatric neurosurgery. He was on the founding committees of the International Society for Pediatric Neurosurgery and the American Society of Pediatric Neurosurgeons. He was a past President of the Canadian Neurosurgical Society and was a Board Member of the American Association of Neurological Surgeons which organization in 1998 honoured him as the first recipient of the Franc D. Ingraham Lifetime Achievement Award. An avid skier, he received a lifetime membership in the Canadian Ski Patrol and in recognition of his voluntary activities for that organization and others, he was awarded the Queen’s Jubilee Medal by Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II, in 1977. Many of these activities and the awards, as well as his collection of military miniatures were found at home in his den to which all visitors naturally gravitate – truly a man’s room, personal, historical, comfortable and, messy!

Certainly Bruce was a teller of stories, in many of which he was the victim. On the night of his 60th birthday, his medical friends arranged a surprise dinner. His arrival was scheduled for 7:30pm. It turned out to be the snowiest night of that winter. Undaunted, he and Gloria set out from Leggett Avenue to arrive at the Granite Club, strategically after all the other guests were in position to welcome him. The snow held up the Hendricks so that

upon reaching the Club's parking garage, they found it filled. Relying on the adaptable actions of a surgeon, Bruce left Gloria at the Club and drove down Bayview Avenue to the MacMillan Centre where, he correctly surmised, there would be ample parking. Then he realized that somehow he had to get back to the Granite. A taxi would be the solution. As mobile phones weren't available at that time, he tried to gain access to the telephone on the inquiry desk of the MacMillan Centre. Its front door was locked and the security guard was notable for his absence. Bruce eventually arrived, three hours late, for his milestone party. The experience no doubt strengthened his own view of "milestone birthdays" for as he said, "Any man who says he can do at 40 what he did at 20, didn't do much at 20."

Bruce's greatest and lasting devotion has been that to his small patients. He has brought joy to the children for whom he has cared, and their gratitude in turn has showered him with crayon drawings, stuffed toys, small soldiers and large cigars. A not unfamiliar hospital sight late at night was that of Bruce sitting in his office with arms folded across numerous open books on his desktop, providing fatherly counsel to young parents who seek hope and reassurance for their child's illness. From time to time he had to disappoint, and in expressing his frustration he has been heard to say, "If I had distilled essence of moonbeams to give, I would."

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