

“REMEMBERING RUTH”

When Ruth Fortune died, I thought of her vast contribution to Physiotherapy in B.C. and wanted to write an article for the Canadian Physiotherapy Association journal but realized I only knew about a few aspects of her work. I phoned Joan Johnston and she wisely observed that no one person could possibly know about all of Ruth's work and the only way to find out would be to have an event where people who'd worked with Ruth, shared their memories. Everyone here today knew Ruth or has been influenced by her work. So hang onto your hats and fasten your seat belts. We have many stories to share.

Ruth's son Kit Fortune tells us that Ruth came to Canada as a war bride in 1946 and that she lived, worked, taught and volunteered in the Vancouver area for 65 years. He also tells us that early on she worked at The Children's Hospital, the Canadian Arthritis and Rheumatism Society (C.A.R.S.), Shaughnessy Hospital and G.F.Strong Rehabilitation Centre. Unfortunately we know very little of her work during these early years.

We can however picture that when Ruth worked at Shaughnessy Hospital, then a Department of Veterans Affairs Hospital, it would have been packed with veterans from the Boer War, First and Second World Wars. She would have treated men disabled by gun shot wounds, gas and guillotine type field amputations.

In 1949, Ruth was one of four C.A.R.S physiotherapists who pioneered the Bluebird Programme. They wore pale blue uniforms and drove pale blue cars. They treated and educated patients in their homes and spoke on the local radio about arthritis. The Arthritis Society thus led the way in specialization, outreach programs, patient, Health Care Worker and community education. Working for this well organized service early in her career must have greatly influenced Ruth in her later departmental work.

Ruth soon became a Department Head. She was the first person in charge of the C.A.R.S. Physiotherapy in-patient service, situated in the basement of the newly opened G.F.Strong Rehabilitation Centre.

She was Head Physiotherapist at St Paul's Hospital. Dr. McConkie, Head of the Orthopaedic Service, was the Medical Consultant to P.A.B.C. for several years. I suspect Ruth arranged this.

There was little involvement in sports medicine at that time, though in 1954 P.A.B.C. set up a clinic at U.B.C's Westbrook Hospital for the British Empire Games. Ruth probably volunteered there. We all hoped that Roger Bannister and his running mate Chris Chatterway would stop by for treatment but were disappointed as they elected to train in England as long as possible before running the famous four minute mile.

I first met Ruth in 1953 but remember most her later work in the development of P.A.B.C. and as a Physiotherapy Department Director. It was no easy task directing a Department in the 50s

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and 60s, but Ruth had great tact, patience, and foresight, all qualities required to solve the problems of that era.

Ruth would have been aware of the problems I observed when I came to Canada in 1952. McGill and Toronto were the only universities that offered Physiotherapy training. This meant there was a chronic shortage of physiotherapists. Physiotherapy, developed in the 1920s, was a female only profession working under a predominately male medical profession. There was no Health Scheme, departments were poorly funded, situated in hospital basements and were at the bottom of the hospital hierarchical organisational ladder. Many Departments were directed by a physician and the Head Physiotherapist had little or no authority. We worked under an act which dictated we could only treat patients referred for Physiotherapy by a physician. In many hospitals the act was misinterpreted and physicians ordered details of physiotherapy treatment.

For example, at one hospital the Physiotherapy Department had to support itself financially by treating a large number of private out patients. The physician in charge of the department worked hard..... at his stamp collection and wrote standing orders for each patient to receive four treatment modalities, so they could be billed the maximum amount. Whatever their condition, we had to give each patient, long wave diathermy with bare electrodes, ultra sound, massage and a list of pre set exercises. Physiotherapists weren't welcome on some wards where patient's charts were kept locked and only read by the Resident and Consulting physicians.

Another example, is when I looked for a position in Alberta. I talked to a Hospital Administrator who told me a polio epidemic had just started, they were desperate for physiotherapists, but there were no funds to pay my salary. I was sent to see the President of the Alberta Medical Association. He, kind generous man, paid my salary out of his own pocket for the nine months I was in Edmonton.

It wasn't all bad. There were many well organized services where physiotherapists were given full responsibility as team members. For example, V.G.H.'s Orthopaedic Service under Drs Patterson and Preston. In other words standards of practice across Canada were varied.

In 1959, a committee was formed to plan "Congress 1960", a convention of C.P.A, the Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists and the Western International Association of Physiotherapists and Occupational Therapists from B.C., Washington, and Oregon. I was asked to be chairman. I took on the task when Ruth, and Hazel Southard offered me their help, which they continued to do many times in the years to come.

The committee decided to invite the B.C. Minister of Health to conduct the opening ceremonies and give the after luncheon speech. So, I wrote a letter to the Ministry and was pleased to report back to the committee that he'd accepted. My news was greeted with unexpected silence. Then Ruth said:

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"Last week, I represented P.A.B.C. at the B.C. Hospital's Association Meeting. The Minister gave the same awful speech he gives all over town. I suggest Brenda write to the Minister and asks him to give another speech!"

That weekend, I started to write the letter but two hours later my waste paper basket was full and no letter was written. My Australian friend suggested we go for a walk around Stanley Park. I explained I first had to write this very difficult letter. She tried to help me but soon gave up.

"One needs to be a diplomat to write a letter like this." I sighed.

"That's the solution. My boss the Australian Trade Commissioner is a diplomat... he'll write the letter for you."

I went to the next meeting clasping a beautifully crafted, diplomatic letter to the Minister, tactfully suggesting he give another speech. The committee was impressed with my writing and I basked in their praise having sworn to the Australian Government not to expose the true author of the letter.

June 1960 finally came. The Congress Opening Ceremonies were about to begin in the Ballroom of the brand new Bayshore Inn. I waited and waited... there was no sign of the Minister.

Finally I cornered Ruth who was being helpful in the background.!

"Ruth emergency! Help! We can't wait any longer! . Please conduct the Opening Ceremonies."

Ruth, who was respected by everyone, calmly stepped forward made a fine speech and conducted the opening ceremonies to great applause..... Then the doors at the back of the ball room opened and in trotted the Hon. Minister of Health. Ruth leapt off the platform. I stood in front of the audience, willed them not to snigger, and introduced the Minister. He reopened Congress to... faint applause and we all trooped into the dining hall for lunch; after which the Minister gave his usual ghastly speech.

Later in 1960 Ruth, Margaret Hood, myself and others met to write a proposal for Schools of Physiotherapy and Occupational Therapy. We worked with Dr John McCreary, Dean of the Medical School and Dr Brock Fahni, who later became the Director of the School of Rehabilitation Medicine. I recall our excitement when it was announced that a School at U.B.C. was approved.

When Ruth was President of PABC in the early 1960s there were no districts or divisions... just the Branch of C.P.A. Ruth had to work constantly by telephone to communicate with Members all over the Province.

When elected, P.A.B.C. President, Ruth automatically became President of the licensing body, The Association of Physiotherapists and Massage Practitioners of B.C. (A.P.M.P).... A.P.M.P. was invited to join the Association of Secretaries and Registrars of Professional Associations but as there was no Registrar in those day, Ruth represented the Association herself.... Monthly luncheon meetings took place at the Georgia Hotel. The first time Ruth attended she arrived to find all the lady Secretaries and Registrars were wearing dresses, gloves and hats! Now Ruth dressed well but was never seen in high heeled shoes, gloves or hat. After the meeting she had a serious talk with Department Heads as to whether she should buy a hat? They decided she shouldn't. Ruth braved the next meeting bare headed and was surprised to find all the other lady secretaries and registrars in casual dress! They never wore hats again. Such was Ruth's

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influence.

Things began to improve for Department Directors once the School was established. In 1962, The B.C. Directors of Physiotherapy Division of CPA was formed. Jane Hudson, as The Head of School, and the Department Directors met monthly to work on issues related to the School and Physiotherapy Departments.

One of our first decisions was to organise management courses to prepare ourselves to take greater departmental responsibility.

The first course was conducted by the U.B.C. School of Commerce. Our instructor asked us to divide into pairs for a role-playing exercise. One person to play the Dept. Director persuading the other person, a difficult staff member resisting taking on a task. Ruth and I paired up. Ruth playing the Department Director spun me a long interesting tale about a new project. I was so fascinated

I said:

“Ruth I’d love to take on the project.”

The instructor who’d been listening, stopped the class and explained that Ruth and Brenda had misunderstood the exercise as Ruth had persuaded me to take on the task without any trouble. The class then explained to the poor instructor that Ruth and Brenda clearly understood the exercise but Ruth was so skilled, charming and persuasive, it was impossible to refuse her anything.

The shortage of physiotherapists persisted. We solved this by arranging 6 month Canadian work permits for therapists trained in other countries, such as Australia, Germany and Scandinavia. At a C.P.A. Congress Department Director’s discussion group, I raised the problem of getting foreign therapists into Canada, housing them and teaching them how we treated patients; fast enough to make their six month stay worth while. Ruth joined in the discussion and said: “You don’t have problems at G.F.S. Brenda. When I was at C.A.R.S. I had to get them into the country, house them, teach them the management of Arthritis and teach them to drive a car.”

We next studied departmental budgets after which we concluded that presenting a budget, could be the first step to gaining authority to administer our Departments. We decided not to take the frustrating climb up the hierarchal ladder, but to go straight to the top. Ruth was asked to present our case to the B.C. Minister of Health and asked me to go with her to help make the presentation.

We left for Victoria early in the day, enjoyed a walk round the town and went for a leisurely lunch at the Crystal Pool Restaurant, where we sat at a table by the window overlooking a lawn bowling green. Just as our lunch was served, members of the Bowling Club arrived to tell us the rules of lawn bowling so we’d better enjoy watching a game while we ate. The meeting with the minister went well. Thank goodness we didn’t have to meet the same one that gave the awful Congress speech. The minister told us he would discuss our request at his next meeting with the B.C. Hospital Administrators. Later, I was told to prepare a budget ready to discuss with a Ministry of Health Consultant. One afternoon the Consultant arrived, introduced himself and

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we discussed the budget. I was impressed with how much he knew about physiotherapy. Then the penny dropped. No wonder! He'd been briefed by his daughter..... Lesley Bainbridge!

In 1973, The Arthritis In-patient Service, was amalgamated with the G.F.Strong Rehabilitation Centre. The Physiotherapy Section of the Service, which Ruth had started more than twenty years earlier, served as the model for designing similar departmental specialized sections and later after much resistance, inspired the change to a Centre-wide programme model of care.

The Department Directors worked on Quality Assurance for many years. This was a huge project involving hospitals and professional health associations across Canada. It was a complex subject involving many aspects of departmental organization and patient care. We achieved autonomy as we gradually incorporated the various aspects of Quality Assurance into the management of our Departments.

In the early 70s and 80s new Physiotherapy Departments began to spring up out of basements all across Canada. The Directors Group asked Patricia Grohne, Ruth and me to write a booklet on Department Planning. Ruth would pick me up and drive us to Pat's home for lunch where we'd discuss the book content. We decided planners needed to know how to develop a functional plan based on quality assurance as well as understand architectural terms and project planning.

Ruth left us to write the book after she was sure the content was what was needed. "Designing and Renovating Physiotherapy Departments" was published by P.A.B.C in 1984.

In 1985 we prepared a pre Vancouver C.P.A. Congress forum for the National Directors of Physiotherapy Division. The subject was "Futurism". Two major recommendations were made at the forum:

- that future physiotherapists should be more involved in preventive medicine and the maintenance of Canadian's health.
- that specialization and program planning was the most effective way of assuring quality of patient care.

We were shocked to realize that after years of improving our departmental management skills we were now recommending the elimination of Departments and ourselves.... the Department Directors.

Dr George Szasz gave an extraordinarily Congress-opening address, a colourful audio visual presentation on the history of organizations from the traditional British army hierarchical system to workers cooperating in specialized programs. He was given a standing ovation and we knew then, that in the future of health care organization would change.

Ruth, a life member of CPA, played a major role in the development of Physiotherapy in B.C. She was a gifted leader who by her calm resolve encouraged us all to withstand years of frustration and at times tedious work. She was also a team player content to take a minor role while others led the way. She loved to keep everyone happy, make the coffee or entertain us at her Lion's Bay Home. She was a very special person.

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