

THE LIFE OF DR. BRUNO COOK, MD

Good to see all of you! If you're over 50, you may remember me and perhaps I brought you into the world. If you're under 50, you've probably have heard of me. I practiced medicine in this community for 43 years – from 1930 to 1973.



I was born in Hubbardston on November 22, 1902 to Dr. Henry Cook and Pauline Hauck. They grew up in Pewamo and lived across the Stony Creek from each other and both attended St. Mary's school. Back in those days, my father walked to and from school while my mother lived in town and was fortunate not to have to walk such a long distance to school.

My father was the doctor in Hubbardston from 1900 to 1911. Our family moved to Fowler in 1911 where my father established his practice. I remember the flu epidemic of 1918 well. My dad was gone day and night making house calls to severely ill patients. Because there wasn't a treatment nor vaccine for this horrific epidemic, several people lost their lives from the flu during the course of that long and hard winter. We resided on Main Street until 1916. That year, we moved to our new house on Maple Street, which is located cross from Most Holy Trinity church. I attended Most Holy Trinity School until 1916 and graduated from Fowler High School in 1920.

As a young boy, I was not the picture of health and spent my time reading and studying everything that I could get my hands on. My mother had a dear friend, Anna Smith Wilhems, who was a school teacher and an excellent educator who never had children. She was always loving and kind to my family and me. Later, while I was in college, I went to work on her farm for a summer.

As a child, I enjoyed magic and considered myself a bit of a magician. I had some equipment for the job, wore a black suit, top hat, magic stick and performed! Additionally, I had a sidekick who helped me with my magic.

I have one brother, Dr. Reynold Cook, who was born on December 9, 1905 and passed on November 29, 1959. Reynold practiced medicine in Lansing his entire career. He was the father of five children, which included two sets of twins.

When Reynold and I were young, my dad decided it was time for my brother and me to learn to swim. Little did he know my brother and I had been to the dam and were no strangers to the water. Since we did not want him to know we could indeed swim, we pretended to drown as we yelled, "HELP! HELP!" I suspect he knew all along we were able to swim.



Reynold and I were very close and, like most brothers, got into a little trouble once in a while. One day I decided it would be fun to parachute. Being the bigger, smarter brother, I convinced Reynold to go along with me. We grabbed a blanket, climbed on top of the barn roof and each of us held the two corners to create a parachute. There were only two of us, but we decided to jump on three. I counted, "1-2-3 JUMP!" I jumped; however, Reynold didn't and I landed on a pile of manure. Judas priest; I wondered who is the smarter one now!

These were many stories of the Cook boys' antics. As we grew into teenagers, the stories didn't stop. One day, my brother and I were driving home from playing a baseball game in St. Johns and the motor fell out of the car. Of course, we kept driving while Reynold held the motor in place. They were a lot smaller back then.

In the summer I worked for Joe and Anna Wilhems on their farm in Portland. Of course there was always time for baseball and fishing which were my favorite sports. If time permitted, I loved to play cards and read - I loved to do this throughout my life.

I had a deep passion for math and chemistry. I wanted to be Chemical Engineers and had a chance to attend West Point but my father was not in favor of military service after WWI. His father had fled Germany to escape compulsory military training so he encouraged me to select another route. When my Dad encouraged, that left few options!

I was accepted and attended the University of Notre Dame in South Bend as a pre-med student. Those were exciting years at Notre Dame. It was the time of the four horsemen that made history on the football field. In those days train travel was the best mode of transportation. I took the train from Durand to Notre Dame.

Playing cards on the train helped pass the time. I may have even won a dollar or two along the way! My mother would pack my trunk with all my belongings for the semester. Years later when my daughter Maureen attended St. Mary's College at Notre Dame, I loved going back to football games. There is no place like Notre Dame to experience a football game, even to this day.



I lived in Walsh Hall Room 106. I graduated from Notre Dame in 1924. At that time the University gave a gold watch for the highest grade point average. I lost out to a law grad by one tenth of a point. To this day, I feel like I was number one since a pre-med curriculum was far more difficult than that soft pre-law stuff!

After graduation from Notre Dame I enrolled at Wayne State University Medical School and graduated in 1928. Following medical school, I accepted a one year internship at Detroit Receiving Hospital followed by a year of residency in Orthopedics. Over the years, that training came in handy as many of you folks broke bones and I could set them with the best of them!

In 1931, I married the prettiest lady that I ever saw, Marie O'Leary, at Holy Trinity Church in Detroit. Marie and I met on Valentine's Day when I was in medical school. Flowers were in order for that day; preferably, gladiolus which were my girl's favorite. The flowers were always placed in a beautiful vase in the picture-window in the living room. I asked Marie if she knew the difference between and vace and a vase and told her... ten bucks!

It was quite an adjustment for Marie moving from urban Detroit to Westphalia. By golly, she did a heck of a job! She didn't speak German and found it lonely not being able to converse with many people. She didn't even like beer! My German was limited but I understood a little because my parents spoke it when they did NOT want my brother and me to understand what they were talking about! Those days many people did not speak a word of English although I managed to converse with my patients through my limited German language and help of the patients' families.

Not only was Marie the prettiest girl I ever saw, she was my rock. She supported me in every way, always having a meal ready for me at all times of the day and

night. Marie kept the house quiet when I had to sleep during the day after being up all night doctoring. She was a loving wife, mother and my best friend.

HIS PRACTICE IN WESTPHALIA



In 1930, I opened my office on West Main Street in Westphalia. Joseph Wieber furniture store to the west and Bertram drug store to the east. Behind these buildings was a house that still stands belonging to the Wiebers. We rented an apartment in their home until our house on West Main Street was built by Mathias Scheuller. We moved in 1934 where I lived for the remainder of my life. I loved it here. A couple of years later the office was build next to our home, which made it very convenient for me and my patients.

Marie took charge of the family when I was so busy with my practice. Marie answered the phone, took messages, and tried to contact me if there was an emergency. I sure could have used a cell phone! Some people did not have a phone and if they did it was a party line with MANY people on one line. Westphalia Telephone Company came into being in 1923. Sometime the lines were down and patients would have to come to my house to summon me for a sick family member or to deliver a baby.

Most babies were born at home those days. I estimate I delivered twenty-five hundred babies over the course of my career. Back then, it was called a confinement, which would include Prenatal, (if they came to me), delivery and post natal. The fee was \$25 and it was my responsibility, as the attending physician, to register the birth of the babies at the County Courthouse. Could you imagine your doctor doing that today while dealing with Obamacare and all of the other non-sense?

It was depression time and everybody was very poor. Most people didn't have a pot to piss in or a window to throw it out. But that did not matter to me. There were times when my patients were unable to make payment. But since most of the patients were farmers they paid me with pork sausage and other kinds of food. Even dear Sister Notburga would send a loaf of her wonderful homemade bread for seeing the sisters when they were ill. Diagnostic equipment was non-

existent and, therefore, my senses were paramount to making proper diagnosis.

My office hours were 2-4 and 7-9 p.m. or until all patients were seen. No hours on Thursdays. It was a first come, first serve basis and no appointments. I was a one man show. I ran my office by myself and when I was done with one patient, I would call out "NEXT"! For many years, office calls were \$2 plus the cost of medication. I dispensed medication to help my patients as pharmacies were not



common and people needed help right away. The medications that I dispensed were purchased from the finest pharmacological companies in the world including Upjohn, Ciba and Wyeth. There was one compound that was very popular called P.A.C., which was manufactured by Upjohn. It was for headaches and better known as the "pink pills." It was a wonder drug and some of my patients thought it was a cure all.

My father being a physician for so many years in the area knew family histories. He was a huge help to me learning about my patients. I kept all the family history in my head until later years when I started to keep records.

In the early days of my practice people did not seek the help of a doctor like today. Insurance did not exist. You were on your own to pay the doctor and hospital. At first I took my patients to the St. Lawrence Hospital in Lansing because it was Catholic and the best hospital around. As time went on and I became busier it was not practical so I sent people to Clinton Memorial Hospital in St John's. Dr. Sherwood Russell was the surgeon and we had a close personal and professional relationship. He was a good man and doctor despite not attending Notre Dame!

I made house calls for many years. When Margo was a little girl, she kept me company on rounds in the summer time. I think it inspired her to be a nurse and a darn good one at that! The winters in the 30s were very cold and snowy. Most farm houses were cold since central heating was not yet invented. Often, when called to deliver a baby, I was instructed to leave my car at a certain road and I would be picked up with a horse and sleigh. I felt a little like Santa Claus bringing new bundles of love to the community. Mary Goodman was often attending the mothers during deliveries and Mrs. Gensterblum in Portland opened her home to some mothers to deliver their babies.

It could be a challenge to get to some births on time. One day, there was an article in the *Clinton County News* about my race with the stork.



Westphalia Doctor Beats Stork With Team and Wagon

This week's blizzard didn't stop babies from arriving on schedule in Clinton County and Dr. Bruno Cook, of Westphalia, was hauled by team and wagon to officiate at one birth, north of Westphalia, Wednesday morning.

The stork was winging his way toward the Clem Snyder home, 2 miles north of Westphalia at about 7:00a.m. Wednesday. The highway was plugged so full of snow that Dr. Cook's Jeep couldn't get through. So Robert Goodman, a brother-in-law of the Snyder's, got out his team and wagon and drove to town to pick up Dr. Cook.

The physician won his race with the stork and delivered a healthy new daughter for the Snyders. Her name is Linda. Dr. Cook was hailed as a hero going to such great lengths to make sure that his patients got the best care.

HIS FAMILY

It may have been during the depression, but we were excited and blessed to have our first daughter Margo who was born on January 2 at home in the Wieber's house. She was the cutest baby you ever did see. She was a good sleeper and loved to cuddle. She was very smart and I taught her all I could. She loved to read and learn and I knew that she would be something special some day. I was real proud of her and she was a real pioneer going to college and graduating from Nazareth College with a Bachelors Degree in Nursing. She met the love of her life in college, Paul, were later married, and moved to New Jersey and gave me five wonderful grandchildren, the second one being my favorite! There were four boys and one girl. In 1960 her husband, Paul was transferred to Cherry Hill, New Jersey. They came every summer to visit dividing their time between Westphalia and Detroit. Marie and I would fly to see our grandchildren at least once a year. I

would take fresh sausage and eggs on the plane to share with my family and they always loved it.

Our second daughter Maureen was born on June 1, 1935. Maureen played piano, had a beautiful singing voice and had a lead role in a play at Sienna Heights. She attended St. Mary's in Notre Dame, graduated from Sienna Heights in Adrian. Maureen was a music teacher for many years.



Our only son, Henry John was born December 31, 1937. Henry was a graduate of LCC with a degree in Computer Science. When he learned to drive, Henry would drive me on my house call rounds.

One day, I took Henry fishing with his friend, Bill. Bill was from Detroit and was unfamiliar with country living. It was a disaster. Bill couldn't bait the hook and had never fished before. To make matters worse, our minnows got away, lunch fell in the river and drinking water was spilled. By golly, we didn't catch any fish that day but the boys loved it!

My father died suddenly on Easter Sunday morning in 1944. It was both a huge personal and professional loss. As my father was aging, he would take time off and I would care for his patients. He had served the Fowler Community for forty years.

My mother passed away February 24, 1958. I am grateful for the sacrifices and support my parents gave my brother and me. We were so lucky to both have such an extraordinary education for the time. Four years of undergraduate and four-year medical school plus internships was extraordinary for those days.

Margo had our five grandchildren. There were four boys and one girl. They came to Michigan every summer for a visit dividing their time between Westphalia and Detroit. Marie and I would fly to see our grandchildren at least once a year in New Jersey.

One time when they visited here, Peter tried some of my homegrown horseradish. He thought it was pretty hot. He asked me if I liked it. I ate about a teaspoon of it and said "Aw hell, that ain't hot!"

I had a new John Deere lawn mower. I let Michael, my oldest grandson, cut the back lawn. I showed him how to drive and watched him drive my new mower head first into a tree. I kept calm as he was ok and there was only minor damage. Henry mumbled, "I would never have been able to get away with that!" Later Mike made a career in the landscaping business, but I sure hope that he learned how to drive a mower better!



One day, I took Joseph to the creamery when they were here. He was in awe of the churning butter. He got a sample and his eyes lit up and he thought that was really great!

LIVING IN WESTPHALIA

I loved living in Westphalia. It always felt like home to me. Our house sat on one-half acre. The back yard was large and it was all garden in the early days before World War II. I grew all kinds of vegetables. We grew potatoes for the winter, canned one hundred quarts of tomatoes along with other vegetables. There were apple trees (one was a transparent apple that made delicious apple pies), a cherry tree, and plum trees. My pride and joy were my dahlias. They grew large, beautiful blooms but weren't as pretty as my Marie and Margo. They had to be dug up in the fall and replanted in the spring but I loved doing that. Gladiolus graced my garden too. I got up at 5:00 a.m. to work in my garden. Harold Spitzley would assist me at times with the plowing and other work in the garden. He was a fine gentleman and great friend.

Westphalia was a great, hardworking town but even hard working folks needed to blow off some steam with a few pranks! One Halloween, I remember going to my car that was parked in my driveway. Nobody locked their cars in those days; you didn't have to. I found my car packed full of cornstalks. I knew who the culprits were, but they never admitted their guilt. I remembered that the next time that they came in for an exam! We'll see who gets the last laugh!

I did not pass the physical for service in World War II; however, several doctors around the area were drafted to serve. It was a very busy time taking on additional patients. During the War gas was rationed with ration stamps.

Everyone was limited to gas purchases. I received more than the average household but not enough for my driving load. People in the community were generous and gave me their gas stamps.

During the war, I was in need of a new car. Cars were not being produced because of the war efforts. It was impossible to find a car anywhere. I was fortunate to locate a Chevrolet in Marion, Ohio. My father and I made the trip to Marion in one day to pick up my new car. After the war in 1947, when cars went back into production, I bought my first maroon Buick. I was thrilled to have a



new vehicle and not worry about repairs. I went on to drive Buicks for the rest of my life and at one point, I had two. My grand kids called it a deuce and a quarter. If one was in need of repair I had another one to rely to be prepared for any medical emergency.

One cold winter's day in the mid '40's, our house caught on fire. Those were the days of coal burning furnaces. That morning the chimney blew out and one of the hot coals became lodged in between the wooden shingles. There had been a heavy frost that morning so it took a while to burn. The children were sledding on the hill on the west side of the house when Maureen looked up and yelled, "The house is on fire!!" Margo ran into my office to tell me that the house was on fire. I quickly called the fire department and the fire was extinguished quickly with little damage to our house. As it turned out, we had a hole in the roof and water damage, but it mostly frightened my children. I gave each of them a big hug and life went on.

I loved playing and watching baseball. I was a huge fan of the Detroit Tigers and would go to the Tigers games at Briggs Stadium when we visited Marie's mother in the summer in Detroit. I loved routing for the Tigers in 1968 when the Tigers won the World Series with Micky Lolich and Denny McClain after being down 3 games to 1 against the Cardinals. What a series!

Later, I was secretary-treasurer of Clinton County Medical Society for twenty years resigning from that position in 1971. I was examining physician for the Selective Service Board from 1941-1947, and Director of Clinton National Bank for over twenty years.

I am proud to be a practicing Roman Catholic and my life is based on those beliefs to be Christ-like, being dedicated to helping others, and to bring joy to souls. I am dutiful in the practice of my faith and applied them to my ethical practice of medicine. Every week day evening a 7:00 p.m., Father Gutha prayed the rosary in the back of the old church. I frequently attended and took my girls with me. When time permitted, even if I had been up all night, I attended Mass on October 6, the feast day of my patron Saint Bruno. His feast day no longer appears on the Church Calendar but I still think about those masses.



My adult life was dedicated to caring medically, emotionally and spiritually for my patients and friends. There were many long and sometimes difficult days but also very rewarding. A doctor desires only the best for his patients, but at times must accept the hardship that sometimes it is just out of his hands.

Over the years, I administered to the young and old bringing new life into the world and seeing it leave, sharing the joys and sorrows of many families. There is a sense of pride in the community that I have wholeheartedly served for 43 years.

My hope is that I will be long remembered for my many years of dedicated service as your faithful and loyal country doctor. I thank you for attending today and for bringing such joy to my soul. Please pray for me and all of the good people of this wonderful community.