A TREASURE TROVE OF MEMORIES FROM

Uncle Wallace

BY AGNES DODDS KINARD

ALTHOUGH MY UNCLE WALLACE DID NOT LEAVE ANY CHILDREN, HE DID LEAVE A BUNDLE OF MEMORIES—AND A RICH CACHE OF CLIPPINGS, POSTCARDS, LETTERS, AND NOTES OF OBSERVATIONS WHICH DESCENDED TO ME. LOTS OF PEOPLE HAVE FAVORITE UNCLEs, AND HE WAS MINE.
Miss Ruth Rodgers
613 N. Clayton Ave.
Washington, D.C.

Just as I am!

Brother Whela
Camp Meigs
Washington, D.C.
Indomitable traveler, principled professional, of quirky personality, Dr. Wallace Templeton Dodds lived a remarkable life with which I, as an adult, became closely entwined. His unflagging, optimistic approach to life, despite adversities, was an inspiration to me.

An avid golfer, he vividly recalled each of the nine holes of the Highland Club Course in Pittsburgh's Highland Park—including the hole he was at when he heard that President McKinley had been shot. He was not a horseman but did record the names of the favorite steeds of famous men. He noted that Alexander the Great was born in Europe, died in Asia, and was buried in Africa. His favorite horse was “Bucephalus,” a milk-white stallion.

Born in 1885 as the sixth child in a string of 11, Wallace graduated from the University of Pittsburgh Medical School and by the mid-1910s was a practicing physician. His Depression years were among the most memorable of his career, and though my family did not suffer physically or financially, the Depression had a deep psychological impact on me—and on him.

Here's what Uncle Wallace wrote about the origins of a privately run Pittsburgh relief organization called "Helping Hand":

Third year of depression, conditions striking bottom. Starved out by long unemployment, thousands of men would go anywhere on rumor of work. Idea of Dr. C.B. Schedler, West Penn Hospital [staff physician] was to enlist oilman Joseph C. Trees and 23 other prominent persons and doctors including [me] and four nurses. Trees was chairman of executive committee, Rev. Alexander Gibson, general manager. They set up transient quarters in vacant building 439-449 Water Street, just opposite the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad [terminal downtown].

At first it was a shelter for the wandering men. Until blankets could be secured they slept on newspapers supplied by the Press and other newspapers. Two meals a day: breakfast was boiled rice, oatmeal or mush, with milk, bread and coffee, and occasionally prunes. Supper might be boiled beef, potatoes, kraut, bread and coffee. In season, Mr. Trees supplied immense quantities of fruit from his Treesdale Farms near Mars, Pennsylvania.

Dec. 11, 1931. Dr. Schedler, realizing the danger of infection posed by the influx of tired and sick men, rallied a group of his medical friends. Opened free clinic at the Helping Hand. For 18 months we donated evenings from 9 to midnight.
So, that was how the organization started. A February 24, 1963, feature in the *Pittsburgh Press* included memories from Uncle Wallace about Helping Hand. He noted that it was created to meet a specific need, and once that need was met, the organization disbanded. Wallace was a urologist for many years at West Penn Hospital. His revered chief was Dr. Charles Schildeckter.

**HIS DESCRIPTION OF THE ORGANIZATION’S ACTIVITIES CONTINUES:**

For months the men came in an endless stream, by freight and by foot ... an endless stream of hungry, hopeless, bewildered, discouraged, penniless humanity ... a new crowd every day. They had everything humanity could have and still travel: colds, pneumonia, asthma, frostbite, sprains, eyes, eyes, eyes .... The seriously ill were sent to hospitals, but others went on as soon as they were treated, rested and fed. After the daily arrivals dropped from around 8,000 men to 250 in late May 1932, the volunteers turned the work over to social service agencies and closed the work with a picnic at Treesdale.

Wallace maintained an office in the Peoples East End Building (now demolished) at Penn and Highland avenues in East Liberty. Always fit and trim, Uncle Wallace collapsed and died during his daily run, on Emerson Street, March 12, 1965.
Throughout most of his life, Dr. Wallace Dodds kept up a steady correspondence with Dr. Félix Martí-Ibáñez, editor of MD Magazine. On a postcard dated February 6, 1951, from Thailand, Wallace wrote in pencil: "Here I shook hands and examined a man with leprosy."

He explained the incident in a letter to Dr. Martí-Ibáñez:

While six or eight of our group were walking along a street I noticed a couple coming toward us; the lady seemed well but her husband had deformities of the fingers and nose—clearly leprosy, or, as we now call it, Hansen's Disease. I stopped them by giving the lady a cake of hotel soap and her husband a packet of matches. They stood perplexed. But as usual a gang collected and one of them told this couple I was an overseas physician, so he allowed me to inspect his unattractive features thoroughly. After rubbing my hand over his finger stumps and near the void where his nose had been, I placed my unwashed hands on the corresponding areas of Mrs. Dodds and four other ladies which caused the loudest screaming ever heard in that placid land.

From a Life article in the '60s about the heyday of the Saratoga Race Track in New York, Wallace saved clippings of photographs of actress Lillian Russell and flamboyant super-salesman "Diamond Jim" Brady. James Buchanan Brady, who started as a bellboy but made a fortune selling railroad cars, was a bon vivant who loved good food (and plenty of it), good wine, good cigars—and the company of chorus girls and actresses. A diamond collector, he earned his nickname through imaginative uses of the gems (as embellishments, for instance, on his dog's eyeglasses and on the collar of Miss Russell's dog).
The Life article's captions read: “Lillian Russell, queen of U.S. stage, made Saratoga her August playground. She was usually seen with Diamond Jim Brady and a Japanese spaniel with an $1,800 collar.” She is holding the bridle of a horse, and wears long white gloves and a big-brimmed fancy hat. Her hour-glass figure (courtesy of a tightly laced corset) is encased with a lacy, puff-sleeved tunic over a matching floor-length white skirt. The corpulent Diamond Jim is more casually garbed but wears spats and a derby or “bowler” hat, while a gent in the background sports a “boater” straw hat. The caption reads: “Diamond Jim Brady, flashiest of Saratoga’s regulars, once arrived with 27 Japanese houseboys and so many cigars that one houseboy went into business with the left-over cigars.” (The photos are neither dated nor credited.)

Uncle Wallace, an urologist, no doubt also knew that Brady (1856-1917) had established the Urology Institute at Johns Hopkins University.

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*The Nonunion Era*

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**Now available in paperback at $19.95**
Mr. Alexander Moore, editor of the Pittsburgh Leader, asked my chief [Schildecker] to hasten there and consult with her local physicians. Acute appendicitis was the diagnosis and he accompanied her to this city and she was placed in my hospital—The Western Pennsylvania Hospital—on Pavilion 3D, Room 7. Miss Russell avoided any publicity while ill and stipulated the fewest numbers possible be in the operating room. Those present were the anaesthetist, two RNs, Dr. Schildecker and myself. She excluded the regular intern, because “they talk too much.” Right rectus incision revealed no pathology in the gall bladder or tubes; appendix easily removed, stump inverted, and Dr. S. asked me to close the skin as a neat mattress suture was one of my own design. She and Mr. Moore were married in our local Hotel Henry not very long after. Her French maid was Miss Lenoire Bouvier, now a widow nearby, and her brother is Marcelle Bouvier, one of my most loyal patients, who brings me a choice cut of venison each fall. This group of French-Swiss individuals was the nucleus of my early zestful practice.
Dr. Schild decker, Wallace recounts, "died of a coronary 14 years ago (I sat up five straight nights at his bedside), so I may state I am the only man living who had his hand in Lillian's abdomen, but may I wonder (and this is a bit indelicate) how many a gentleman had his hand on her abdomen."

My own eyewitness experiences in Pittsburgh take me back to marathon dance contests at Motor Square Garden during the Depression. Now the home of West Penn Automobile Association in East Liberty, the building had opened in 1889 as the Liberty Market, advertising "electric lighting, refrigeration and fan-circulated air." Many different productions, auto shows, expositions, six-day bike races, dance marathons, food fairs, dog shows, professional lacrosse matches, and even circuses and boxing occurred in this venue, which was named to remind everyone of Madison Square Garden in New York. Hard times in the 1930s ended the sports bonanza and Motor Square was dark half the time.

It had an arena with spectator seats around a boxing ring and it still had that set-up during the Depression. It was there that dozens of exhausted couples shuffled around the floor hour after hour, night after day, desperately hoping to win the prize—not a fortune, but some money anyway. In effect, the marathon dancers became performers. People came at all hours day and night to watch, throw coins, and cheer their favorites. I don't remember the rules, but I think there were breaks so one performer could take a brief leave from the floor while the other partner continued moving.

It was an unforgettable scene of hope mixed with desperation.
September 16, 1932.
Crawford, McGregor & Canby Co., Dayton, Ohio.

This letter also showed up among Wallace's papers.

Gentlemen:

There is being returned to you by parcel post one of your products of excellent workmanship of which you may well be proud. This is a driver, presented to me by Mr. Henry C. Fownes while I was caddying for him in 1899 at the old Highland Golf Club, in Highland Park, Pittsburgh. It has served me well on many courses from San Diego to the White Mountains; in the early days it was my favorite club and did its share in winning three nice cups, one of which is solid silver and highly prized. This faithful friend has been in my bag all these years and it seems to have exerted a benign influence over the other clubs, for when one is on his drive the approach and putts are not difficult to control. It has been the cornerstone of all my later equipment.

Mr. Fownes was president of the Highland Club when he gave me this present, and I can return even now to within a foot of the spot where he handed it to me as a brand new club. Upon the abandonment of the Highland Course, Mr. Fownes became president of the Oakmont Country Club and has enjoyed that honor continuously to this moment; he is the father of W. C. Fownes, Jr., former U.S. Amateur Champion, and these two gentlemen were paired in a foursome that day, playing with a gutta-percha Ocobo ball.

Please observe the unusually good condition of the leather on its handle; likewise the straightness of the shaft and unspoiled beauty of the well formed head. I wonder if any of the master workmen who fashioned this driver are still in your service, for it is undeniable evidence of their skill and art. Time has been kind to my companion as its sleek lines and youthful finish do not suggest years of service but, alas, style and man's ingenuity have caused it to be a veteran, and as such I return it to its maker. It has never lost its grip nor has its sole been scarred in a third of a century, which is a refreshing tribute even to an individual or corporation in these troublesome times.

Farewell, Comrade, Farewell; fare thee well.

Respectfully,
Wallace Dodds