

# Obituary

## Family physicians' lives remembered

*Hector Ian MacGregor (1918–2007) and Anna Mary Burditt (1929–2007)*

Brian Hennen MD CCFP, for Jean Gray CM MD FRCPC and Vonda M. Hayes MD FCFP

In September 1974, **Hector Ian MacGregor**, as the College's President, congratulated **Anna Mary Burditt** upon receiving her Certification. Thirty-three years later, their memorial services were a mere 20 hours apart.

We said farewell to these good friends and respected colleagues this past Christmas. Each of them made substantial lifetime contributions to health care and to family medicine in Canada. Anna Mary was remembered in Riverview, NB, on December 19, and Ian in Halifax, NS, on December 20.

Both were College leaders. Anna Mary was the first woman President of the New Brunswick Chapter from 1969 to 1971, and Ian, a founding member of the College, was President from 1973 to 1974. And yet their personal and professional lives were as diverse as they possibly could have been.

After working as a chemistry research technician in New York and Montreal, Anna Mary graduated with a medical degree from Queen's University in Kingston, Ont, in 1961. She practised family medicine first in Saint John, NB,

then in Montreal, Que, where she was a Professor in the Department of Family Medicine at McGill University.

Anna Mary pioneered more than just her presidency. Her formal academic career was shortened by an incapacitating diaphragmatic nerve paralysis, which caused her to move to Halifax in 1984. From her bed in her apartment and aided by computer technology, she continued to teach medical students, family medicine residents, and other health profession students for the next 20 years.

She wore many hats. Her teachings on alcohol dependency were recognized by an Honorary Life Membership to the Canadian Society of Addiction Medicine. She also completed her master's degree in sociology from Dalhousie University in Halifax. At her memorial, one of her Baptist pastors noted that she was so wise and attentive to the challenges of his congregation that he was often uncertain as to who had benefited more from his visitations.

Breast cancer did not hold her back from life. After several rounds of treatment, she returned to New

Brunswick to be closer to her sister Doris, brother George, and 14 nieces and nephews (3 siblings predeceased her). During her last years she continued to write and to assist students.

Ian rode horses well enough to be asked to jump horses for breeders in the regional fairs. He served in the Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps immediately after graduating from Dalhousie Medical School in 1943. He briefly practised family medicine in Newfoundland

after the war, then practised in Halifax for 46 years. Having won varsity letters for football and hockey, he remained active in athletics and coached minor hockey. He was the bass soloist in the church choir. He was a skier and a dancer. Ian enjoyed swimming, playing tennis, salmon fishing, and hunting. His son-in-law, Phil Bagnell, wryly shared that all they could have ever mounted after their hunting trips together was the claim that no animal suffered injury or loss of life.

Judging from the many comments at Ian's memorial, he had clearly made his family

a number 1 priority and his patients a close second. He and his wife, Patsy, (who predeceased him) had 7 children, 12 grandchildren, and 10 great-grandchildren. He was a popular preceptor to medical students in his practice and a wise contributor to Dalhousie University's family medicine development before developing Alzheimer disease in his last decade of life. The packed attendance at his United Memorial Church service clearly testified to how well he will be remembered.

Anna Mary and Ian were inspirational people, as family doctors and as individuals with a seemingly shared fervour for the richness of life. We three—one of us a schoolmate of Anna Mary's, one of us whose children were delivered by Ian, and one of us a physician of Ian's—come away with enduring admiration and gratitude for their effect on our lives. 

**Dr Hennen** is a Professor in the Department of Family Medicine at Dalhousie University in Halifax, NS.



**A chance meeting:** *Ian congratulating Anna Mary upon receiving her Certification in 1974.*