



Faces and voices of Canadian family medicine

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Landscapes can be deceptive. Sometimes a landscape seems to be less a setting for the life of its inhabitants than a curtain behind which their struggles, achievements and accidents take place. For those who, with the inhabitants, are behind the curtain, landmarks are no longer geographic but also biographical and personal.¹


So begins John Berger's remarkable book *A Fortunate Man: The Story of a Country Doctor*, first published in 1967.

I discovered this book, like most of the important books I have read in my life, by accident. I was a family practice resident waiting for an appointment in the office of the Department of Family and Community Medicine at the University of Toronto back in 1992. Now that I am a practising family doctor, I am usually running behind schedule, but back then if I wasn't 10 minutes early I considered myself late. To pass the time I browsed the shelves of the nearby library and was intrigued by the title of this slender volume. I took it from the shelf and started to read it, then and there. I have long forgotten the reason for the appointment, but I signed the book out, took it home, and hungrily read it from cover to cover that night. I stumbled upon *A Fortunate Man* at a critical time early in my career as a family doctor, filled as I was with uncertainty about my choice. The power of Berger's biography of Dr John Sassall, a country doctor in northern England, combined with my experiences working with Dr Bob Henderson in the picturesque town of Campbellford, Ont, changed my destiny. I have never really looked back.

Berger's book has found an important place in my library, and I have since joyfully shared the book with friends, colleagues, and the family medicine residents I have taught over the years. There are many wonderful things about this book, but none more so than Jean Mohr's powerful and moving black-and-white photographs of Sassall and the landscape in which he goes about his work and his life. We don't even learn Sassall's name until page 44 of the book or see his face until well after that, but by then we are completely drawn in to his life and his story and those of the people he serves.

This issue of *Canadian Family Physician (CFP)* features some considerable changes in the cover and the format of the journal. Inspired by John Berger's book and Jean Mohr's beautiful and intimate photographs, each month we have chosen to feature a photograph of a randomly selected Canadian family physician going about his or her life and work on our cover. Inside the journal there is much more—more photographs and a story about the featured physician written by Dr Shane Neilson, a family doctor himself, but a writer and a poet of considerable talent. Over the course of time, we hope that these images and these stories will create a rich and accurate portrait of the work we do and the people we are.

Once again the January issue of *CFP* also features the winning stories for the 2010 AMS-Mimi Divinsky Awards for History and Narrative in Family Medicine by Dr Pauline Pariser (page 71),² Mrs Magbule Doko (page 73),³ and Dr Nicole Audet (page e35).⁴ We are privileged to also publish a pellucid, to borrow his own word, commentary on these stories by Dr Ian Cameron, a family physician and writer from Nova Scotia (page 66).⁵

There is much change afoot in family medicine across Canada, but the challenges and rewards of looking after Canadians remain constants. We at *CFP* are pleased to give faces and voices to Canada's family physicians on the covers and in the pages of this journal. We hope that you will be inspired by the faces you will see and the voice you will hear. 

Competing interests

None declared

References

1. Berger J. *A fortunate man: the story of a country doctor*. New York, NY: Vintage; 1997.
2. Pariser P. Throw me a line. *Can Fam Physician* 2011;57:1:71-2 (Eng), e31-2 (Fr).
3. Doko M. Why are you here to see the doctor today? *Can Fam Physician* 2011;57:73 (Eng), e33-4 (Fr).
4. Audet N. Le pouvoir de l'écoute. *Can Fam Physician* 2011;57:74-5 (Fr), e35-6 (Eng).
5. Cameron I. The importance of stories. *Can Fam Physician* 2011;57:66-7 (Eng), 68-70 (Fr).

Cet article se trouve aussi en français à la page 13.