

Martin McNamara MD CCFP(EM)

Previous lives. Dr McNamara was a paramedic in a previous life, his first love, but he was doomed when he found a mentor, a family doctor, who recommended he drop the para. Dr McNamara became a family physician and spent time on a Native reserve, Christian Island, driving “across the crack”—how locals refer to the frozen sliver of Georgian Bay—in an old GMC van, the same one he used in medical school, for twenty miles to man the clinic there. (His main tip for such a trip: never take a vehicle with electric windows.) And once there he reimagined one of the four pillars of family medicine: to be community-based. Dr McNamara had a sense of community instilled in him from civic-minded parents, teachers both, and on the island he learned of many previous top-down programs, programs that had their own previous lives, that had failed to take for the locals; so he worked with the band and the administrators to help create a home care program, an ambulance service; he provided systems; and this is the most rewarding part of what he still thinks of as a calling: the satisfaction of having done good not just in his office, but outside it. And part of the calling is representing what one is: he did housecalls on a bicycle as part of an effort to encourage his patients to get more physical activity, and he wore a helmet to encourage the children to do the same, and at lunch hour he’d leave the clinic and play shinny outdoors. And in the office itself? He met an obese diabetic who wanted to get off disability. She lost weight, got off insulin, started to work again, was touched by magic: and community members flocked to the clinic saying, “Do for me what you did for her.” And Dr McNamara, who had rushed to the scenes of a paramedic’s share of traumas, had had the scenes of traumas rushed to him as a doctor, looked at these men and women and said, “I did very little. She was the one who wanted to change. And it’s in you to do the same thing.” It was his gift to them: the offer of making what had come up to that point something they would one day look back on as a “previous life.” ❁

Cover photo: Denni Russel, Toronto, Ont

Story: Shane Neilson MD CCFP, Erin, Ont

Additional photos and the French translation of the story appear on page 624.
D'autres photos et la traduction en français du récit se trouvent à la page 624.

THE COVER PROJECT Canadian Family Physician has embarked on a project to assemble the portrait of family medicine in Canada. Each cover of the journal will feature a family physician chosen at random from our membership list, along with a short essay—a brief glimpse of the person and the practice. Over time, the randomness will become representative and the differences, taken together, will define what it is that all family physicians have in common.

Inside half-cover (IHC)