

McGill Class of Medicine 1963: *A Tale of two Davids and a Lily*

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David H.K. Chui and E. Fuller Torrey.

In the fall of 1959, when the Right Honourable John Diefenbaker was the Prime Minister of Canada, a group of 110 young men together with fewer than 10 young women came to McGill Faculty of Medicine to begin their four-year journey to be educated to become physicians and surgeons. They were a diverse group of young people: Many had grown up in Montreal and Quebec; others came from across Canada; many came from the USA; and a handful came from the UK, Bermuda, Guatemala, Hong Kong, and Eritrea.



Portrait of McGill Class of Medicine 1963 at graduation.

Life after graduation

In the spring of 1963, 95 graduated with MDCM. Half were Canadians; 37 were Americans; and 11 were from other countries. Now 61 years later, we have excelled in our chosen field, having benefited from our McGill education. We have provided outstanding clinical care to our communities and beyond, from neonatology to geriatrics, and organ transplantation to psychiatry. In recent years, many have also engaged in philanthropy.

Many of us pursued academic medicine. Haile Debas was Dean of Medicine and Chancellor of the University of California at San Francisco and was elected to the U.S. National Academy of Medicine. Arturo Quevedo in Guatemala trained more than 200 ophthalmologists from Central and South America.

In biomedical research, Martin Raff made fundamental discoveries in cell biology and immunology, and was inducted to be a Fellow of the Royal Society (London) and to the U.S. National Academy of Sciences. Bernard Forget in molecular genetics was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

Patricia Baird in clinical genetics and reproductive health care was inducted to be a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada and awarded the Order of Canada. David Chui in hematology, Bernard Forget, and Samuel Refetoff in endocrinology were elected to the Association of American Physicians, an honorific society founded in 1885 by Sir William Osler (MDCM 1872) and colleagues.

Nicolas Steinmetz was the CEO of the Montreal Children's Hospital, and architect of the McGill University Health Centre. An endowed Nicolas Steinmetz and Gilles Julien Chair in Community Social Pediatrics was established in his honor.

We are especially proud that in 2005, Haile Debas and Martin Raff, and in 2016, E. Fuller Torrey were bestowed honorary doctorates by our Alma Mater. Torrey, a distinguished psychiatrist known for his advocacy for schizophrenia treatment, founded the Stanley Medical Research Institute. Both Debas and Torrey delivered convocation addresses in 2005 and 2016, respectively.

Exceptional Class

The McGill Class of Medicine 1963 is known as an exceptional class. In 1998 at our 35th class reunion, we started a Scholarship Endowment Fund to help McGill medical students who are in good academic standing but with demonstrable financial need. Since then, members of the class together with some of their relatives, friends and colleagues have so far donated a total of \$1.5 million (CAD), which has provided \$687,000 to 190 medical students since 1999.

There were several one-time large donations. But the Fund was built mainly by annual small and midsize gifts. No less than 80% of our class members have participated in this venerable project. In recognition of these efforts, in 2011 the McGill Alumni Association gave the class the prestigious D. Lorne Gales Award.

David Boyd

Many have asked how we did it — what has made this medical class of 95 graduates unique? The answer is: two Davids and a Lily. The first is David Boyd, who came to McGill from Seattle. Following graduation, he moved to Chicago, where he was trained in surgery at the Cook County Hospital. While there, he also organized a model system for Emergency Medical Services (EMS), which was subsequently adopted for use by the State of Illinois. In 1974, this EMS model was adopted for nationwide use in the USA and Boyd was appointed as its national director by President Gerald Ford.

By 1983 David Boyd had had much experience in organizing programs, so he decided to organize a 20th reunion for our class. When asked why he did so, he responded: “I did it because we should have had a twenty-year reunion and nobody else was doing it”. Under his leadership, there have been class reunions every five years since, totaling nine to date.

Class Reunions

The reunions have been a great success, attracting close to half of the class each time from Halifax to Vancouver, Miami to San Diego, even from

Guatemala City, Bermuda, London, UK. Each reunion has been highlighted by a morning brunch meeting and a class dinner at the University Club. Both events included a full program of speakers and other entertainment organized by David Boyd. All program participants are called “volunteers,” a process which consists in receiving a Boyd-O-Gram from David, telling you what you have volunteered to do. “No” is not an acceptable reply.

Programs have included talks by the Dean and McGill-related subjects such as the new medical centre; clinical issues; hobbies of classmates such as travel and photography; and musical performances by song writer Stan Blicher, band leader John MacFarlane, Charles Abbottsmith, Stephen Goodman, Duncan MacCrimmon, Richard Petrie, Eric Rennert and others.

The dinners are enhanced by a poem written for the occasion and read by the class poet, Saul Levine. The reunions have been strongly supported by classmates living in Montreal, including a Sunday “farewell brunch” at the home of Peter Gillett. The reunions have thus played an important role in keeping the class connected. For his efforts, David Boyd was acknowledged as the “Class Czar” by his classmates. In 2011, David was given the McGill Medicine Alumni Global Lifetime Achievement Award.

David Chui and Lily Cheung

The other David is David Chui, who came to McGill from Hong Kong. After graduation, he married his classmate Lily Cheung, also from Hong Kong. Lily raised a family with three children and went on to be trained and become a Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians of Canada in internal medicine and in occupational medicine. For over a decade, she was the Corporate Medical Director of the largest steel company in Canada.

David was trained in internal medicine and hematology. For the next 52 years, he undertook research and laboratory medicine at McMaster University and Boston University. His work was focused on hemoglobin and its related disorders, thalassemia and sickle cell disease. He achieved an international reputation in his field. In 2002 shortly before joining the Boston University, he was recognized by the Thalassemia Foundation of Canada with a special award.

Class Scholarship Endowment Fund

In 1998, prior to our 35th class reunion, Lily suggested that the class should collect money for a class gift to McGill. The McGill Alumni Office recommended that the class appoint a five-member committee to help bring Lily's idea to fruition. To move forward, David wrote personally to each member of the class regarding the proposed gift. In doing so, David realized that such communications could be done much more efficiently by electronic mail and thus the class listserv was born.

After much discussion, it was decided that the class gift would be an endowed need-based scholarship fund for McGill medical students, with the recipients selected by the McGill Student Aid Office. At each class reunion, a meeting open to all was held, chaired by John Lohead, to discuss the progress and future of the Scholarship Endowment Fund.

The Fund got off to a good start in its first year with 65 classmates contributing \$52,900, exceeding the initial goal of \$35,000 commensurate with our 35th class reunion. James Alexander then proposed a more ambitious goal of \$1 million. Today, donations for the Endowment Fund total \$1.5 million. This is by far the largest scholarship fund established by a medical school class at McGill's Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences.

The two Davids and Lily have used the class listserv to remind everyone annually of the importance of the scholarship fund and by setting an example with their annual donations. The scholarship fund resonates with many class members who themselves benefited from McGill loans and from McGill's relatively low-tuition costs compared to most American medical schools at that time. As Anthony Morrison noted: "We remembered that McGill had provided some members of our class with career-saving financial aid."

During our 60th reunion year (2023-24), we collected the second largest sum ever for the endowment, second only to our 50th reunion year (2013-14). These speak volumes for our classmates' generosity and sustained commitment towards the Class Scholarship Endowment Fund.



McGill Class of Medicine 1963, 60th reunion in Montreal, October 2023.
We were joined by two McGill medical students in this photograph.

Class Listserv

The listserv has played a more important role than simply reminding classmates to donate to the scholarship fund. It has been used to communicate with members of the class on all kinds of subjects including clinical issues; travel; hobbies; accomplishments of our children and grandchildren; where to buy the best bagels and smoked meat in Montreal; and many other subjects except politics.

Moreover, the sharing of family milestones, the eulogizing of the deaths of classmates and the communal spirit of charitable giving has been an important emotional support as we have transitioned to elders. As David Chui has noted: “We could not have imagined that the fund would become the catalyst to bring us closer together.... The importance of the electronic mail to help us stay connected cannot be overstated. We now know each other better than when we were at McGill.”

Conclusion

In conclusion, four main things appear to explain why the McGill Class of Medicine 1963 is exceptional. The first is the two Davids and a Lily and the excellence and longevity of their leadership roles. The second is an idea that had broad appeal to classmates. The third has been regular class reunions. The fourth has been an active class listserv with which existing friendships were maintained and new friendships were formed. And lastly, we shall not forget the indispensable role of the McGill Alumni Office, and the support of the Deans of Medicine. With these elements every class could become exceptional.

Acknowledgements

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**AN OCTOGENARIAN CLASSMATE REFLECTS BACK IN 1959,
AND LOOKS FORWARD, IN 2023**

1959...

McGill Medical Students in Our Early Days' Dawn,
Eagerly Yet Anxiously, Awaiting Our Time in the Sun...
We All had Dreams, Fears, Hopes, Convictions,
Yet We Evolved Uniquely, Beyond Predictions...

The Teachings of Wise Elders, Lessons and Homilies
Could Not Predict Our Paths, Careers, Loves or Families,
Nor Our Accomplishments, Joys and Successes,
Nor Sadly, Our Losses, Regrets or Excesses...

We Young Women and Men, Thought We Knew It All,
But Inner Existential Doubts were at our Beck and Call...
Nascent Careers, Hopes for Happiness, and Unknowns Loomed:
Questions Abounded: What, When, How, Where, With Whom???

We Discussed, Debated, Considered with Obsession,
Yet there Remained that Seminal "Ultimate Question":
Were Our Lives Determined Solely by Chance, Serendipity...or,
Were We Guided by a Deity, or by Fateful (Bashert) Synchronicity?

Six Decades Later, 2023:

We Still Indulge in Acts of Giving, and We Certainly Enjoy Getting,
What We All Experience, However, is the Phenomenon of Forgetting!
Oh, We Can Still Cogitate and Contemplate, sometimes Even with Ease.
BUT, Where Are My Glasses, my Wallet, My Credit Card, My Keys?!

Octogenarians Now: Physicians, Personages, Parents and Grandparents,
We've Hopefully Gained Wisdom, Patience, Understanding and Forbearance...
We've Experienced Losses, Setbacks, Sadness and Bereavements...
We've Achieved Fulfilment, Joys, Accolades and Achievements,

We've Endured Pandemics, Global Warming, Wars and Insurrections,
Yet We're So Enriched by the Sciences, Arts, Nature, Cosmic Expressions...
Our Lives Are Especially Enhanced by Loves of Family and Personal Friends,
Giving Us Purpose and Meaning, with No Expectations for Personal Ends.

By Saul Levine