

## Delbert G. Wollin, 1913 – 2002

Neurology and neurosurgery lost a good friend on January 26, 2002, with the passing of Dr. Del Wollin, at 88 years of age, in Kingston, Ontario. One of Canada's first neuroradiologists, Del helped introduce the specialty to the Toronto General Hospital and later the Kingston General Hospital. Del was an astute radiologist, an avid learner and teacher of clinical neuroradiology, an ever-helpful colleague, and simply a wonderful man.

Born and raised in Ingersoll, Ontario, Del attended medical school in nearby London at the University of Western Ontario. After graduation in 1939, he interned at the Hotel Dieu Grace Hospital in Windsor and Victoria General in London before enlisting in the Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps. It was during his years of service that Del was sent to a course in diagnostic radiology at the Toronto General Hospital organized by Dr. G.E. Richards, then Radiologist-in-Chief at the Toronto General Hospital (TGH). From that point onwards, including service overseas at Basingstoke and the #24 Canadian General Hospital, Del did nothing but diagnostic radiology. After the war between 1946 and 1947 Del trained in neuroradiology at the Montreal Neurological Institute with Dr. Donald McRae.

Towards the end of this time he received a call from Dr. Richards with an offer to replace Dr. Douglas Eaglesham, Toronto General's first neuroradiologist, who was moving to



*Figure 2: Del Wollin and Harry Botterell, Kingston, 1992*



*Figure 1: Del Wollin, circa 1969*

Guelph. Del accepted and started at the General in July 1948.

At TGH Del joined some of Canada's pioneers and giants of the clinical neurosciences, including neurologists Rick Richardson and Herbert Hyland and neurosurgeons Ken McKenzie and Harry Botterell. Botterell was especially keen on neuroradiology and cerebral angiography in particular as adjuncts to neurosurgery, and was the main force in establishing the specialty in Toronto.

Neuroradiological practice in those early years consisted of pneumoencephalograms and ventriculograms, the cerebrospinal fluid drainage and air injections done on the ward or in the operating room by the neurosurgical staff and the patients then transported long distances, floors and buildings away (TGH being a sprawling, horizontally organized institution), to the radiology department for x-rays. It was a dreadful experience for everyone involved but especially for the patients. Cerebral angiography was done by direct carotid puncture using steel needles, contrast injections done by neurosurgical and neurological residents and staff (including Dr. Henry Barnett who joined the medical staff in 1952 after training at Queen Square and Oxford), investigating only the supratentorial structures. Del would analyze the films. Botterell would call Del to the famous neurosurgical "D.O.R." after exposure of brain tumors and aneurysms so that he could see exactly where the

lesion was, and how it correlated with the x-rays. It meant a lot of running for Del, from one end of TGH to the other, but he considered it well worth the effort. Del often lamented that that kind of opportunity and relationship with patients and clinicians no longer existed for radiologists. But however much Del profited from Botterell's teaching, it was more than repaid in the instruction he provided the neurosurgery and neurology trainees. Films to be reported piled high around him, he would always drop everything to review x-rays with a resident, every encounter a teaching session all in itself.

In 1959, Del left TGH to head up neuroradiology in Calgary at the Foothills Hospital, but not too long after brought his family back to Kingston, Ontario, where he took over neuroradiological duties at the Kingston General Hospital and joined the Faculty of Medicine at Queen's University. Del practiced and taught in Kingston until retirement in 1981. Coincidentally, Harry Botterell became the Dean of Medicine at Queen's in 1962, and the two men, again colleagues but now also neighbors, resumed their friendship.

I met Del in 1992 when researching some articles on the history of neurosurgery at the Toronto General Hospital, and visited him almost annually afterwards, at his house on Sheiling Crescent in Kingston. He would marvel at the CT and MRI images I would be taking to the Royal College Exams, sometimes the occasion of my visit. His particular talent and art, recognizing the subtleties and inferences contained in plain skull

and spine x-ray shadows, and divining the presence of a mass lesion from slight vascular displacements on angiography, are now long lost in our field. Del knew personally almost every early figure in the development of Canadian neurosurgery and neurology, remembering them often and always generously. He remained keenly interested in medicine and its changes (mostly for the worst, he reckoned), and worried about the careers and choices of colleagues and acquaintances in his regular correspondence. Stricken with degenerative thoracic kyphoscoliosis, Del's cardiopulmonary status kept him virtually housebound in his final years, but his mind remained razor-sharp. With the help of family and other special people he and his wife of 60 years, Mildred, were able to maintain a loving relationship in their own home. Del and Mildred had four boys, David, Kenneth, Peter and Andrew.

Typical of Del, he wouldn't hear of me "writing him up", thinking himself too insignificant compared to his contemporaries, the men he admired so much, but to whom he himself was invaluable – something he never seemed to fully appreciate.

The final package from Del, containing answers to a few questions posed, and some of his reprints, was allowed me only after he died, which he did, peacefully, in his home, on a Saturday morning last January.

*J. Max Findlay  
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