

# John G. Humphrey, M.D., F.R.C.P.C.

## A Remembrance

(1928-1991)

John Gilchrist Humphrey died on January 8, 1991 at the age of sixty-two of complications of a cardiomyopathy that he had suffered, with pluck and fatalism, for nine years. His death deprived Canadian neurology of its pioneer electromyographer and an immense experience in neuromuscular disease.

John was born in the Toronto General Hospital where he spent his entire career and where he died. His Father had been a general practitioner in central Toronto and had maintained his professional association with the Hospital into his 90's. John attended the Toronto Model School and University of Toronto Schools. His early interest was sports and he obtained a degree in Physical Education before graduating in medicine from the University of Toronto in 1954. He interned at the Toronto General, spent a year in internal medicine at Sunnybrook Veteran's Hospital under Ian McDonald followed by a year as a fellow in endocrinology with Calvin Ezrin. He began his training in neurology in 1958 under Herbert Hyland at the Toronto General, spending time with Clifford Richardson. At that time, the program in Toronto was approved for only one year of training and like many Canadians, he proceeded to the National Hospital, Queen Square for further clinical experience as a clerk recalling later the teaching of Roger Gilliat, Ian Carmichael, Chris Earl and John Paterson in particular. The experience with Gilliat encouraged him to pursue training in neuromuscular disease which he completed at the then National Institute for Neurological Diseases and Blindness in Bethesda with Milton Shy.

In 1960, he returned to the Neurology Service at the Toronto General re-constituted on the Eleventh Floor of the Urquhart Wing and headed by Clifford Richardson, to establish the first neuromuscular service in the country. He set up a neuromuscular pathology laboratory service with the technical assistance of Ruth Gallacher, later to be taken over by the Division of Neuropathology and his long-time associate, Barry Rewcastle. At one stage, the lab was handling ninety muscle and nerve biopsies a year, to be reviewed at a regular Thursday morning conference. He also set up the neuromuscular physiology laboratory with vacuum tube apparatus in air-conditioned, screened quarters, lights dimmed so that he could view and photograph potentials on the oscilloscope for later development and measurement. Many neurologists, now working in virtually every province and elsewhere received advanced learning as fellows in his laboratory.

He was the "Dean" of neuromuscular neurologists in Canada and was widely known and consulted, particularly for diagnosis

and management of myasthenia, inflammatory neuropathies and myopathies. He played a major role in the development of neurologic intensive care in the hospital, continuing to consult in the medical ICU until his death. He was expert in the management of myasthenia and with the thoracic surgeons Griffith Pearson and Joel Cooper, established transcervical thymectomy in its management. He was the major contributor to the North American trial of plasma exchange in acute Guillain-Barre syndrome.

As clinician, he was intensely devoted to his practice and to his patients and it was the interest of the patient that dominated his approach to academic neurology. Although he was fully "geographic", he never accepted full-time status in the University. He was fiercely independent, eminently practical and not always sympathetic to those holding uninformed or opposing opinion. To the end of his career, he remained a devoted and personal student of his discipline and he judged his students and fellows for a similar capacity to learn for themselves. For his colleagues, it was always innervating to share the enthusiasm and fascination for neuromuscular disease that he enjoyed throughout his career. It was a commonplace to find him at seven in the evening, feet up on the desk, dictating and shaking his head over remarkable things learned that afternoon with his patients.

John assumed important extramural responsibilities as examiner for the Royal College, Councillor for the Canadian Neurological Society and the Canadian Society for Clinical Physiology, Councillor and examiner for the American Association of Electromyography and Electrodiagnosis and Chairman, Section of Neurological Sciences, Toronto Academy of Medicine. He was an advisor for many years to the Ontario Ministry of Transport, to the Canadian Muscular Dystrophy Association and to a number of patient support groups. He was elected to the American Neurological Association in 1976.

The energy and enthusiasm devoted to his practice was extended to his several other interests. He was intensely loyal to his roots in Toronto and Ontario. To the end he enjoyed the Ontario outdoors at his cottage in Muskoka and the ski hills at Collingwood and around the world with his daughters Hope and Margot. He was a car "buff" with a collection of old and new vehicles and a fan of the "big bands" of the 1940's and 1950's with an extensive collection of 78RPM recordings. He leaves behind his wife Jane and his long-time secretary and companion, Christine Jones.

*John R. Wherrett*