

Betsy (Foote) Pope
Friday Harbor, WA

Dr. Brad Walker was certainly part of Cornwall's identity for many decades, and I can't imagine a Cornwall resident whose life wasn't touched and improved by him. As if he, as a country G.P., didn't have his hands full with all of us and our accidents, illnesses, births, loved ones' deaths, and various needs night and day, he had his Torrington hospital work as well. I remember a story about how Goshen had to leave enough space through its Route 4 rotary posts so Dr. Walker, who drove like a fiend, could fly right through the center of the rotary as he rushed to the hospital. Maybe he also needed to make up time from the early days when that road was just rutted dirt

It was always more of a comfort than a fear to go to Dr. Walker's office as a child. I knew he'd fix whatever it was, and sometimes there was a bit of fun or stories of something amusing I'd remember as I sat in the waiting room, like someone – I think it was one of the Calhouns – who once brought a specimen jar not filled with the requisite liquid but with apple juice. Sitting next to Dr. Walker's desk, my legs swinging under the straight wooden chair while one of my parents sat in the nearby armchair, his large, quiet presence alone would seem to begin the healing. His gentle manner, his bush of white hair, his soft, brown hands and face with blue eyes behind those little spectacles, his audible breathing, and that eternally dangling cigarette ash were fascinating and assuring (except for wondering when the ash would drop, and, later, worrying about his smoky lungs). My mother told the story of how one of his patients lay dying and asked Dr. Brad for one last little thing: Could she please run her fingers through his hair?

Besides the comfort, there were also times of pain he had to cause me so that my appreciation was temporarily withheld, as when he met my father and me at his door and, with no further ado, took my hand in his and quickly realigned my dislocated, broken finger. Or when he arrived at my bedside once at the crack of dawn (I was 11 and had just spent a miserable night), and with one strategically placed probe, determined I had appendicitis and needed an operation immediately. (His son, Dr. Tom Walker, did the surgery that morning and declared, about the tiny incision he'd carefully located in a crease, "She can still wear her bikini!" I'm sure he was well taught by his father.)

I can only imagine the far more serious work and care Dr. Walker delivered to others around the clock. I hope his passion and dedication were rewarded, not just by knowing he was doing his best and was highly affective, but also by knowing how deeply grateful the generations in our community were to him.