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Body
and Soul



LOOKING BACK

Milestones that made medicine at Michigan

Triumph and Tragedy

The bittersweet life of Roy Bishop Canfield

In 1904, Michigan's Department of Eye, Ear, Nose and Throat was divided into the departments of Ophthalmology and Otolaryngology. Roy Bishop Canfield (M.D. 1899), then just 30 years old, was tapped to head the new Department of Otolaryngology and approached the challenge with the confidence and leadership for which he was known. In 1932, his sudden death shocked the Ann Arbor and U-M communities but the loss was felt perhaps most acutely by a young woman whose life he had saved nearly two decades before.

Bishop Canfield, as he was called, was born in Lake Forest, Illinois, in 1874, the son of a real estate dealer and his wife. In his last year of high school the family moved to Ann Arbor, and Canfield graduated with the Ann Arbor High School Class of 1893. He entered the University of Michigan that fall in the combined literary and medical course. He graduated with honors in 1897 and received his M.D. two years later.

After a brief appointment in the Department of Eye, Ear, Nose and Throat, Canfield left Ann Arbor to complete an externship at the Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary in Boston, then traveled to study at the University of Fredrich Wilhelm in Berlin. After serving as an assistant surgeon at the Manhattan Eye, Ear and Throat Hospital and as an attending laryngologist at the New York City Clinic for Laryngeal Tuberculosis, Canfield returned to Ann Arbor to accept the post of clinical professor of diseases of the ear, nose and throat. Nearly 40 years later, at the first Roy Bishop Canfield Memorial Lecture, Charles S. Kennedy, M.D., who studied under Canfield, recalled him on the job:

"His operating room became a theater of coordination quite like the setting for a fine symphony orchestra. Each one knew his part to perfection (woe betide the one who did not) and the master directed the program to an extreme, meticulous in detail and rapid in

Photos: Courtesy Joanne Roberts



Roy Bishop Canfield with daughter, Barbara

accomplishment. Each operative procedure was carried out with a daintiness, a sureness and dispatch which caused Doctor Canfield to qualify for the four attributes of a great surgeon, so aptly described by his Chief, Dr. DeNancrede, as 'The eye of an eagle, the courage of a lion, the hand of a lady and the heart of a dove.'"

Canfield was the first to establish a training course for four years of post-graduate work in the Medical School, and young surgeons-to-be sought training with him. His renown as a surgeon grew; patients traveled great distances to be treated by him as he worked to improve the outcomes of ear/nose/throat surgical techniques, which were, at the time, crude at best.

In 1907, Canfield married Leila Marchant Harlow, a direct descendant of William Thompson Harlow, a Mayflower Pilgrim. They settled into a large home at 1830 Washtenaw Avenue. In 1914, a baby with a severe ear

infection was brought to Canfield in the hospital. The child was just 5 months old, a foundling, and if not treated soon, would die. Canfield took a chance and operated on the baby — never before having performed that particular mastoid surgery on someone so young. The baby survived but needed round-the-clock care, so Canfield took the baby home for Leila to tend. The couple fell in love with the infant, adopted her, and named her Barbara.

Canfield's work and renown continued to grow. Called to Washington during World War I, Canfield was commissioned as the chief of the Ear, Nose and Throat Section of the base hospital at Camp Custer. When he returned to Ann Arbor after the war, he threw himself once again into his clinical practice, teaching and research. With Albert Furstenberg (M.D. 1915), who would one day become dean of the Medical School, he maintained a large surgical and consulting practice. Stories about Canfield presenting Henry Ford with a bill for \$25,000 for the treatment of his son, Edsel, circulated in Ann Arbor for years afterward.

On May 12, 1932, just after 1 a.m., Canfield was returning home after a consultation in Detroit. Driving at a high rate of speed, as he was known to do, he passed a truck with a trailer a few miles east of Ann Arbor, left the road, and hit a tree. He died instantly.

Just three days before, Barbara Canfield, then 18, had set sail for England with the Furstenbergs, who were close friends of the family. Throughout the previous year, Barbara, a U-M freshman, had become closer than ever to her father. Furstenberg broke the news in stages: on the first day, he told Barbara her father had been in a bad auto accident. The second day, she was told that he was not expected to survive. By the time the ship docked and arrangements were made for an immediate trip home, Barbara Canfield knew that the adored father who had once saved her life was gone.



Barbara Canfield in 1944



Roy Bishop and Leila Canfield

Two weeks later, David Murray Cowie, M.D., professor of pediatrics and infectious diseases, wrote of his friend and colleague: “His opinions were so clearly stated, so honestly given, and so sincere that one felt a sense of security when he was around. ... As one of his staff members has written, ‘To be associated with Dr. Canfield was to be inspired. He was a tireless worker, a brilliant thinker, never satis-

fied until perfection had been attained.’” Albert Furstenberg was named Canfield’s successor.

Barbara Canfield left Ann Arbor at 19 to marry Walter Holden, a Michigan graduate who had been one of her father’s patients during the last year of Canfield’s life; she met Holden accompanying her father on rounds one night. The couple settled in Highland Park, Illinois, had three children and a long and happy marriage.

From Canfield’s early work to advance his field through education, clinical care and applied research, the department he headed has grown in ways he doubtless would have found difficult to imagine. In October 2004, the Department of Otolaryngology celebrated two significant milestones: its centennial as a distinct department, and its 1000th cochlear implant. [m](#)

—Whitley Hill