The history of the Dr A Ross Tilley Scholarship

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Dr A Ross Tilley

In April 1988 Dr A Ross Tilley of Toronto passed away after a long and illustrious career. He was born in Bowmanville, Ontario in 1904, the son of a country doctor, and graduated from primary and high school there. He then pursued medical studies at the University of Toronto, graduating as an MD in 1929.

He did postgraduate studies in New York at the Roosevelt Hospital in 1930-31 and pathology in Vienna, Austria with Sternberg. In 1938-39 he worked with Dr E Fulton Risdon at the Toronto Western Hospital. He was thus ideally placed to be available to work at the Queen Victoria Hospital at East Grinstead, England.

He worked there with Archibald MacIndoe. It was there that the patients themselves adopted the name 'guinea-pigs' since so many new operations were being tried. Ross Tilley headed the Canadian wing as Group Captain. There is no doubt that Ross Tilley's modesty and caring attitude was the prime motivator in the recovery and transition back to civilian life of so many burned airmen. His acceptance and encouragement of his patients to come into the operating room to watch, help and decide themselves which operation they would choose to have next was a great morale booster. Ross Tilley always said that it was the patients that were the heroes not him. We know, however, that a great deal of heroism belonged to him, since he had that one attribute essential to the real surgeon – he never gave up, no matter how desperate the situation, and his patients loved him for it.

When he returned to Canada he set up practice in Toronto at the Wellesley Hospital, and travelled to Kingston to be the first Professor of Plastic Surgery at Queen's University. In 1984 the burn unit at the Wellesley Hospital was named the Dr A Ross Tilley Burn Centre in his honour.

Those of us who trained with him were indeed fortunate, for we were able to appreciate his attitude which was always tolerant of our youthful mistakes as long as he could see that we cared that our patients got the best treatment we could give. He would only get angry very occasionally, and only when he could see that someone was capable of greater effort, but for some reason was slacking off or didn't care. This was

the essence of the man – caring and following the 'Golden Rule.'

After his death Mrs Jean Tilley established the Dr A Ross Tilley scholarship for the purpose of helping plastic surgeons just after their FRCSC examinations, and before establishing their practice. The award of \$5000 is given annually at the meeting of the Canadian Society of Plastic Surgeons. It is to be used to help fund a fellowship, with particular emphasis in reconstructive plastic surgery.

The first scholarship was won in 1990 by Dr Steve Morris, now of Halifax, Nova Scotia. Dr Morris did his fellowship with Dr Ian Taylor in Melbourne, Australia in microvascular anatomy.

Dr George Sandor was the 1991 winner and spent his fellowship time in Paris with Dr Daniel Marchac and in Switzerland with Dr Joram Raveh. He is now in practice in Toronto with a special interest in craniofacial surgery and facial trauma.

In 1992 Dr Tassos Dionisopoulos of Montreal won the Tilley scholarship and spent time in New York at the Sloan Kettering Cancer Centre studying free flap reconstruction of the head and neck and surgical oncology.

This year at the Canadian Society meeting in St John's Newfoundland, Dr James Bain was the winner. Dr Bain plans to spend his fellowship with Dr Susan Mackinnon and Dr Paul Weeks in St Louis, Missouri in nerve construction.

This scholarship committee comprises Mr Budd Sugarman, Mr John Milnes and Mrs Jean Tilley, Dr Leith Douglas, Dr Peter Wyshynski, Dr John Taylor and the President of the Educational Foundation of the Canadian Society of Plastic Surgeons. Application forms should be received before March 31 each year and sent to Ms Sandy Brioux, Scholarship Secretary, 89 Humber College Boulevard, Suite 114, Rexdale, Ontario, M9V 4B8. Applications should be accompanied by a letter describing in detail the fellowship and career goals of the candidate, particularly how the scholarship could further the candidate's career in reconstructive plastic surgery.

This scholarship is indeed a labour of love and Mrs Tilley is to be commended in funding this lasting tribute to a truly great man, Dr A Ross Tilley OBE CM MD FRCSC FACS.