

PAPER VII

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF H.J. WINDSOR AND HIS FAMILY

This presentation deals with “Influence - the effect of parentage” -the meeting and marriage of a rather stern, disciplined man from Ulster, Harry Windsor, and a gentle, simple and devout colleen from Waterford, Norah Carroll.

They emigrated, proliferated and died after some sixty years of endeavour in this land of their adoption. My father’s influence being strict discipline, always pleased with any success by his children, but very sparing in praise. My mother’s being love and respect for everyone, great devotion to God, and in times of paternal crisis, protection of us from Dad’s wrath, for he always bowed to her gentle requests.

These two people who reared and directed us five children were a great combination. We loved Bidy and respected Dad. She grew old prematurely from Alzheimer’s Disease, and Dad in full surgical flight, was a widower for the last twenty-three years of his life - an extraordinary man whom I was privileged to know for fifty-three years.

The first recorded Omagh Windsor was Captain William Windsor who arrived in 1600 with the English army to suppress the troublesome Irish. As Mayor and Chief Constable of Londonderry, he ruled with terror as a weapon for twenty-five years. With the destruction of the Public Records Office in Dublin in the 1922 Rebellion, a century of history was lost. However in 1800 William Windsor, a farmer, was living in Omagh, my father’s great grandparent.

In 1898 the new church in Omagh was consecrated by the Cardinal, my father being one of the altar boys. A photograph of the occasion was hung in the sacristy and sixty years later when Dad, with my sister Mary returned to his birthplace, the home was still there, and so was the photograph hanging as he said, “Unaffected by age, in the exact spot I left it. Mary recognised me at a glance - in the front row, wearing glasses and holding a candlestick.”

Norah Carroll’s life on the farm in Waterford with her eight brothers and sisters,

was a happy one, full of religious fervour, work and play. Her young life was blighted by a chronic infection of the femur as a result of a fall, for which over her life time she had multiple operations.

When I visited Waterford in 1947 with my brother Harry and the late Monsignor English, one brother and three sisters, all single, were living in the farmhouse, unchanged, I should think since the day Bidy left.

Dad graduated in medicine at the Glasgow University in 1909 and after a series of residencies was appointed House Surgeon at the Cheltenham Hospital. Of his meeting with Bidy and the subsequent romance he writes:

On my first day at the Cheltenham I was rostered to the Casualty Department. As I entered the sister in charge was speaking to a nurse in a very beautiful Waterford accent, and I beheld a graceful figure with beautiful rosy cheeks with her sister's cap, sewed by the neatest of little bows, peeping out from below her chin. Her gay welcoming smile made me feel at home. Her name was Norah Carroll, and in my duties she assisted me so gently and efficiently, I regarded her a super sister whose lovely brogue was music in my ears. When she knew I was a Catholic we went to Mass together, and I watched her pray with the tail of my eyes, her head bowed, her hands joined, all so devotional and such an example to me. Soon Mass in the morning and a walk in the afternoon became our usual Sunday activity. It was her Rosary day - at Mass, on the way home and on our walk. Sometimes we walked only in prayer, and I began to know the mysteries by heart. I often wondered why she saw anything in me, with a Scotch accent, a Glasgow degree, and English name, and a weak, hesitant moustache.

Later he writes: "Her leg often troubled her; usually it would settle, but she would limp a bit more. However she was as gay as ever and never a complaint passed her lips."

They were married in 1913 in Our Lady of Victories Church in London - a very quiet affair with a two-day honeymoon, about which he writes: "On our first evening we went in search of a wedding feast, and I purchased a beautiful peach on which we dined. It inaugurated our honeymoon, which indeed became a peach of a honeymoon for it lasted fifty years."

Years later at their weddings he gave to three of his granddaughters a peach - beautifully made and mounted by the Carmelites of Ormiston - to express his hope to them for a peach of a life-long honeymoon.

Our Lady of Victories Church was bombed in 1941 and when I visited it post-war, only the walls were standing.

While studying for his Fellowship in Surgery at the London Fever Hospital, he contracted Diphtheria which prevented his sitting for the examination, and it was during this time of enforced inactivity that they decided to emigrate. Bidy decided for him what country, for three religious relatives already being there, it had to Australia. They had a tearful farewell at Paddington Station in London, Bidy taking the boat train home to await her baby, and Dad the train to Liverpool to join the Scottish Shire line ship, RMS Shropshire, as a one way only unpaid ship's doctor, bound for Sydney via the Cape - a voyage he greatly enjoyed until in the Southern Indian Ocean the ship's Marconi radio transmitter picked up the news of the outbreak of WW I. His diary comment was: "And I thought that everything in the Northern Hemisphere was quiet except in Ulster." The family separation was now to last for eighteen months.

He had one immediate purpose on arrival in Australia - to find a suitable place for practising his art, where his wife and future family would be content. Bidy's three relatives in Armidale made him very welcome, and armed with their letters of recommendation he travelled north to Queensland, appraising the various towns. He was delighted with the countryside and its inhabitants, and it took him just two weeks to decide on Toowoomba. He describes the trip to Lismore as follows"

The motor service runs for a distance of 120 miles, on a slow journey. The cars are first class, powerful and take eight passengers comfortably. It was the most delightful run you could possibly imagine, the scenery absolutely new to me - no fences or hedges, the road simply a track cleaved through the bush, very tortuous, over high mountains and through typical bush country, clothed in thousands of ringbarked trees.

Everyone we met was riding horseback, the women riding astride like the men. When two cars met, one invariably drove into the bush to allow the other to pass, and the horseback riders did the same. We passed numerous teams of up to twelve horses yoked to large, loaded carts, and large droves of cattle controlled by riders with stock whips.

Cockatoos, magpies and jackasses infected the trees and the noise of the locusts was deafening. Every little village has two or three hotels - called pubs - and even in the outlandish place we stopped for lunch we got as good and well served a meal for a shilling, as you would get anywhere on earth. The Sunday sweet everywhere in Australia is plum pudding and they make it very good and edible. It is not the heavy stuff you get in the Old Country at Christmas time.

Besides that the people in the bush are not the great clumsy people with awkward manners you see in the country in Ireland. THEY are as towny in the bush here as they are in the town.

To Bidy he wrote: "Toowoomba is a beautiful garden city, with the finest climate in Australia, which is saying much. I am sure you and Harry will be delighted with it when you arrive. I am joining another Irishman, Dr Morgan Lane who has been here for three years."

Bidy with Harry, now a year old, arrived in Queensland after a perilous war-time voyage in the autumn of 1915, accompanied by Josephine the nursemaid. Dad's

parents, Ellen and Harry joined them in Toowoomba, but sad to relate, for whatever reason, Harry elected not to stay in Australia and soon returned alone to Omagh. He was never to see his wife and family again. Ellen died in 1918 and is buried at Nudgee Cemetery.

In Toowoomba the family multiplied with the birth of Morgan and Mary and Dad prospered, but the town was too small and isolated, so they moved to Brisbane where Gerard and I were born, and he practised his art to the day of his death sixty years later.

Dad had a tremendous respect for and love of people and appeared to have unlimited time for everyone. He had rigid religious convictions and was totally non-sectarian. Rarely did I see him kneel or bless himself, but woe betide us if we played up at Mass, or when Biddy was saying the Rosary. She was our rock and buffer against this strict father who often settled mealtime problems with a dong on the head with a spoon. His practice among Religious of all denominations was enormous and totally without payment.

Surgery was his love and forte and he became visiting surgeon to the Mater group of hospitals. He had a very gentle touch and never spared himself or others. He could be a terror in the theatre where he demanded absolute perfection from his beloved Sisters of Mercy. At the end of the day he never left the theatre block without an apology and a kind word of thanks.

He built a beautiful home "Knock Bria" (Biddy's Hill in Gaelic) on Gregory Terrace, from where we boys went to the Brothers and Mary to All Hallows. We kept a cow in the backyard until the neighbours complained of the smell, and we let it loose in the large area of bushland which is now Victoria Park. Every day Gerard and I would round it up for milking. We loved drinking the warm fresh milk out of the bucket.

Biddy held court with her afternoon tea parties, and Dad was forever bringing somebody home for dinner, the front door always open for priests, nuns, lay friends and particularly the Brothers from Terrace.

A great confidence and friendship gradually developed between Dad and Archbishop Duhig, and every Saturday night after Confessions at the Cathedral, His Grace would turn up at "Knock Bria" for a meaningful discussion with Dad, but more importantly a noggin of hot rum and milk prepared by Gerard and myself, the amount of rum increasing and the quota of milk decreasing with each visit, because of our ministrations and our desire to see the Archbishop show any side effects, which he never

did.

In 1928 was the year of the Holy Name Cathedral, intended to be a small replica of St Peter's Basilica. There was much clerical discussion on our home about the pros and cons of the project. My father gave £2,000 to have built one of the recessed fountains still visible in what remains of the wall. Whatever the reasons and failed oil wells near Roma made prominent headlines, the construction came to a grinding halt, and the site has remained barren to this day.

In 1938 on their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary, the grateful Catholic religious of the Brisbane Archdiocese presented Dad and Bidy with a Packard car. I remember the occasion at "Knock Bria" very clearly for Gerard and I were drinks waiters, and were told not to spare the reverend gentlemen, some of whom were great whisky drinkers. That car was special to him, a constant reminder of many friends and happy times. Over the years it became troublesome, for spare parts were difficult to obtain during and after the War.

In England I learned of its problems by mail. Harry wrote thus: "the Packard has become a mechanical horror, but sentiment reigns in the old man's heart, and even with all the stuffing out of the seats, he will keep it and drive it. Besides he gets no end of fun out of annoying us over its unpredictable antics. He has a great sense of fun and humour."

Dad to me: "Morgan is learning to drive the Packard which is rather tricky owing to defects in the clutch, the brake, the accelerator and the steering wheel which now acts as a fly wheel to trap young drivers. He has almost reduced the old car to a jalopy, and soon it will go to the garage for a transfusion of parts and pieces."

Despite its problems he would not relinquish it and eventually with four flat tyres it took up a permanent position, gathering dust in the garage.

On his seventieth birthday, Mary and the three sons gave him a Holden car, with which present he was delighted because the family had given it to him. We were pleased that at long last he was driving a safe vehicle, and finally and reluctantly he agreed to the Packard's being towed away to the wrecker's yard.

The onset of the Second World War destroyed our family unit. Mary married in 1939, Harry and Morgan went to the A.I.F. and Gerard to the R.A.A.F. and death. Gerard was the finest of our mob - handsome, outgoing and fiercely independent. He enlisted in 1939, did his flying training in Australia, Canada and England and finally began his operational flying in 1942. Four months later, aged twenty-one years, he

disappeared without trace, flying a Beaufighter aircraft on a Norwegian reconnaissance. At the end of the war he was officially declared "killed in action" and we received a letter of condolence and gratitude from George VI. His memory is preserved in the beautiful memorial at Runnymede on the Thames for those 20,000 allied airmen killed, but having no known grave. The Canberra Memorial and the beautiful R.A.F. church of St Clement Danes in London also preserve his memory. Bidy, slowly failing, mentally wore her mother's bereavement badge with pride and prayed for his return.

Dad took over the surgical load of the staff-denuded Mater Hospital and worked day and night. At home he and I became great mates, discussing anatomy and surgery every night, and having a disciplinary swim every morning, summer and winter at the baths. I gained much from this close association and came to know and understand what a great father and man he was.

From the Pacific Islands Harry and Morgan both gained post-graduate surgical degrees, Harry the FRACS and Morgan the MS - extraordinary successes achieved without the benefit and stimulation of wards, teachers or facilities. In 1946 they departed for England and training in cardio-thoracic surgery. I joined them a year later as a member of the 1947 Wallabies - a tour lasting ten months to the British Isles, France, Canada and America.

Back home "Knock Bria" became too large for Bidy and Dad, so it was sold, and sadly eventually his masterpiece was demolished, and in its place arose a large concrete structure for the S.E.C. - the only visible evidence of our residency there being the tall palms planted in 1928 by Bidy and myself.

Having achieved my Rugby ambitions I spent a further six years in my surgical training before returning in 1953 with a young English bride on a cargo ship via the Cape. I think Dad was delighted for he saw a comparison between his marriage and emigration, and my own travels forty years later on the same route. Bidy showed me no signs of recognition on my return. She was totally dependent on her loved ones and spent the last years of her life in her own little world in the Mater Hospital, showered with care and attention from Dad, the family and a devoted host of Mercy nuns. She died on the Feast of St Joseph (the patron of a happy death) and, I believe, became the only lay person ever to be buried from the Mater chapel. She had never returned to her native land.

When I returned home I became Dad's operating surgeon, and he never actively operated again. He was my assistant always, and such was his standing that no patient ever queried the son doing the surgery, provided the father was present. For

me this was a wonderful surgical entree - to him an enormous sacrifice, given with much pleasure to a very grateful son.

In the fifties honours were showered on him - by the Pope, K.S.G. -the Queen, C.B.E. - and the Australian and English Colleges, Fellowships in Surgery. After Bid-
dy's death, he made the pilgrimage with Mary, to Rome and England, and on his return, to Melbourne to receive his accolades.

In Rome, dressed in the regalia of a K.S.G. he had an audience with Pius XII, who said to him, "You are my knight Dr Windsor, you are a great surgeon and I bless your hands." He always wore the insignia colours on his lapel. After his death the regalia, suitably enclosed, was presented to the Sisters of Mercy and adorns the foyer of the Mater Public Hospital.

In London he was invested by the President of the College of Surgeons with the Fellowship - the most prestigious honour in the surgical world. With his Australian Fellowship award, received on his return, the Windsors had achieved what no other family before or since has emulated - four members all with the highest surgical qualifications which two royal colleges can confer.

In Sydney, Harry, a man of immense ability, with tremendous enthusiasm and initiative, was instrumental in having a cardio-thoracic wing built at St Vincent's Hospital, unofficially known as Windsor Castle, where he concentrated exclusively on cardiac surgery. For respite from surgery he studied Mandarin, for he was a Sinophile, and when he became fluent in that language he made many visits to China, lecturing and demonstrating his cardiac art.

In 1968, after telephoning his father in Brisbane and paying a visit to St Mary's Basilica, he performed Australia's first heart transplant. He became an instant celebrity and via the media, public property. As one would expect he remained calm and collected throughout his ordeal, and his integrity, Christianity, and respect for his fellow man were obvious to all who read the papers, listened to the radio or watched the television screen. He was described in the newspapers as articulate, unassuming and shy.

On the 4 Corners television programme when asked to describe his feelings after the operation, he said, "I feel a little closer to the Almighty now. When you are so closely associated with the cessation of one life and the giving back of another, you feel a little that way." And to the question Are you religious? he replied, "I am a Catholic. I believe in God. I go to Mass. I talk to God and I say my prayers. If that's being religious, I am."

Like his son, my father in Brisbane took the acclamation very calmly, with great dignity and hidden pride for this was a wonderful further milestone in his life. On the dozens of letters received, one in particular from a Christian Brother, exemplified the public feeling. Inter alia it says:

Since I saw the recent 4 Corners television programme on the heart transplant, I have been impelled to write to you, not because of the wonder of the surgery performed, not because of the skill that the surgeon undoubtedly possesses, but because he had the simple courage to proclaim to the world his believe in his dependance upon God, and further, his undeniable pride and satisfaction in proclaiming to a scoffing and Godless world - I am a Catholic.

The Christian Brothers have every reason to be extremely proud of yet another old boy, particularly a Windsor, who has become what they wish all their pupils to be - good fathers and husbands, ornaments to society, and devout sons of Holy Mother Church.

Congratulations to you, yourself a great man of medicine, on this your son, of whom we the Christian Brothers in particular and Australians in general are this day so proud.

A nun wrote: "Four Corners did me more good than any retreat I ever made."

And Harry in replying to a letter from Frank Forde, the former Prime Minister, said, "It has been a tremendous experience for me, and now that it is over, I believe it all began about fifty years ago, when that great old man in Brisbane, by example and precept, first showed Mary, Morgan, Gerard, Clem and myself the satisfaction and glory of medicine as a way of life."

This first heart recipient, whom Harry described as a man of great courage and determination, died suddenly on the 43rd post-operative day from organ rejection.

These momentous happenings in Sydney and Brisbane were rather lost on me, for I was in Vietnam at the time with an Australian Surgical team - a very chastening business, full of violent death and mutilation in the midst of squalor and poverty. As always I got great literary support from Dad who was on a dignified "high" because of the transplant.

A year later in 1969 the H.J. Windsor Lecture was inaugurated by the Australian College in honour of my father and his service to surgery - an oration to be given by a distinguished Fellow - Harry his son delivered the first one in Brisbane at the A.M.A. House in the presence of his father - a pearl of a delivery. The theme from Shakespeare: "How far that little candle threw his beams".

Fourteen years were to elapse before the late Victor Chang, one-time protege

and resident of Harry's, performed the first successful transplant, rejection problems now being much better understood. By this time Harry had cancer and was to undergo five abdominal operations before his death in 1987.

In his professional life he refused all Australian and Royal honours, but gladly accepted the ultimate honour a university can give one of its graduates - a Doctorate of Medicine (Honoris Causa).

In the last year of his life he wrote his memoirs, published after his death, "The Heart of a Surgeon". Of that last uncomfortable year he wrote to me: "I have completed my book and returned to my study of Mandarin. It keeps my mind occupied despite the unavoidable inactivity. The discomfort can be accepted, though I feel there is much to be said for a nice quick coronary, rather than the inexorable progress of a malignancy. Acceptance, patience, fortitude and resignation all lead to that inner peace which even the turmoil of the body cannot vanish".

Morgan, the "big feller" - a great man with tremendous parental patience, has made a wonderful success of his professional life in C.T. surgery, and for this has received high honours - a Doctorate of Surgery, the premier award from his university, the Australia Medal from his country, and the Queen's medal and M.B.E. from Her Majesty - all received with great humility and pride, but saddened that his parents were not alive to savour their son's success.

Mary, my sister, is the unsung heroine of the family. Supporting Bidy in her protracted illness, Dad's secretary for twenty-five years, and Morgan's and mine for a further twenty, she dispensed comfort and medical advice by doing what the old man always advised and in a multitude of simple ways achieved: "Always by word or deed endeavour to make a patient feel better for your visit." Each afternoon she took him for a walk - a familiar couple on Wickham Terrace - the daughter and the venerable man with a tennis visor to protect his eyes.

It is difficult to comprehend the great rapport and friendship he had with multitudes of religious. The Sisters of Mercy, the Carmelites, the Christian Brothers and the Redemptorists were, I think, his favourite orders. He was made a Franciscan Tertiary and a Redemptorist Oblate -honours he compared with his Papal Knighthood - and was buried in a Redemptorist Habit.

Known universally by the Mercy nuns as Dad, he had many dear friends among them. Srs Gertrude and Barbara were probably his greatest. Gertrude he met as a sixteen years old novice from Ireland, and the latter when she entered the convent. Together, with many other nuns they cared for Bidy in her twilight years, both were

at his death bed in his spiritual home - the Mater, and both continued their extraordinary devotion to us Windsors until they in turn went to heaven.

The Christian Brothers honoured him in many ways, but none pleased him more than the dedication of Our Lady's Floral Carpet to his name - an annual display organised by the St Laurence's boys, and master-minded by his great friend, Br Sherriff.

He made his last public speech at the wedding of my daughter Mary to Peter Myers, and continued his daily routine of walking and consulting until his death. He died in 1976. St Stephen's was packed for his Requiem by Archbishop Rush, and the cortege passed by Terrace where the whole school lined the street in silent respect. He was buried at Nudgee cemetery alongside Biddy.

And to put the icing on the cake, the Windsors received a further accolade in 1991. The Christian Brothers inaugurated the House system at Terrace, and Windsor House, together with five others became a reality. The evidence of who we were and are is displayed at Terrace and our name will live as long as Terrace exists. A total of eighteen sons, grandsons and great grandsons of the old man have been or are being educated at Terrace. The Windsors in heaven and we on earth could not have wished for a greater honour.

Finally, as you can see I have been singularly blessed in my life, not only by my parents, sister and brothers, but also by a marvellous wife, nine daughters and sons and a multitude of grandchildren - at last count there were thirty-six of us.

I will keep you no longer. You all must have verbal and visual dyspepsia.

Thank you

Dr Clem Windsor