



# PACIFIC MOUNTAIN REGION

**Bob Stewart  
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## **Interview with Dr. Don Watt**

November 27, 2012

## Oral History Recording Summary

Interviewee: Dr. Don Watt

Interviewed by: Blair Galston

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<b>Time Log</b> (minutes)	<b>Description of Content</b>
00:01	Beginning of Interview. Introduction, permission. Information about early life.
03:58	Training in the air force
07:16	Influence of brother, Arthur
08:09	Early aspirations in medicine
09:49	Choice between Grenfell Mission and Board of Home Missions
12:21	Role models
16:37	Brothers Robert and George, United Church ministers
19:55	First experience running a hospital, Queen Charlotte City; training in X-ray
29:52	Dr. Ted Whiting and Bella Coola General Hospital
34:25	Work as Superintendent of Hospitals
36:58	Locum work
41:08	Baie Verte Hospital; asbestos miners and union
44:13	Staff shortages in hospitals
48:20	Surgery on animals
51:25	Most important thing about hospital work in the church
59:50	Words of wisdom to future generations

BG: My name is Blair Galston and the date is November 27, 2012. I'm interviewing Dr. Don Watt of Vancouver—soon to move to Abbotsford—as part of the BC Conference Oral History Program. Dr. Watt, do I have your permission to proceed with the interview?

DW: Yes.

BG: Thank you. Tell me a bit about your early life: your family, the community, and your involvement in the church.

DW: I was the last of seven children, born in the manse. My father was a United Church minister who came in from the Presbyterian Church at the time of union.

My oldest brother, the first child, was a medical doctor and had trained at a time when China needed doctors. He had hoped to get to China. By the time he finished his medical [degree] in 1934, Mao had chased the missionaries out of China. So he needed to find a place for a family physician and went to Port Elgin and was doctor there for a while.

My second brother... all [the] kids were active in our church, wherever Dad was the minister. Archie was Sunday school superintendent, was the next boy, and... What's that big church on St. Clair Avenue...? Doesn't matter. They got involved in the church.

GB: Whereabouts on St. Clair?

DW: It was St. Clair, almost east.

BG: I should mention that we also have Grant Bracewell here, listening in on the conversation, and will be adding a few words here and there.

GB: Probably Deer Park?

DW: No. Bob Burrows was in Sunday school in this church on St. Clair.

GB: I thought he was in Agincourt—Knox, Agincourt.

DW: He knew Archie. Archie was his Sunday school superintendent. Anyway, there were five boys and two girls in our family. Two of my brothers were United Church ministers and graduated from Emmanuel College in Toronto. Both of them were in the air force and after they had already had a couple of years at Emmanuel, Emmanuel looked after their fees (as they did with most military personnel) through the balance of their training. Both my sisters married. And I came along.

I was in the air force and got my wings and whatnot, and graduated from Uplands, Ontario with my wings as a sergeant pilot. We thought we were going overseas and they told us, "No. We don't need pilots now for overseas work. But we're not going to discharge you. We're going to transfer you to Class E. If things flare up in the east with Japan, we'll call you back." We thought we were going on the Spitfires and everything, overseas, once we graduated at Uplands.

So they said to us, "You fellows want to go out and get a job or go on further in

your education, we will cover your expenses for the same length of time you have been in the armed services.” I’d been two years. “If you decide to take more training and can stay in the top quarter, no problem. We pay your way for the number of years you’ve been in school, and if you stay in the top quarter of your graduating class, as long as you’re up there, we’ll pay your way through your course. And so they paid my way all through medical school. Dad didn’t have any money. He ended up at Vaughn Road United Church and then they called him to Grimsby. I finished my high school in Grimsby. Vaughn Road Collegiate in Toronto to start with. All the boys had paper routes. That’s the way we paid for our clothes.

BG: And that was in the 1930s?

DW: Yeah, 1930s. Arthur came home from his first day in medical school, University of Toronto, and he graduated in 1934. I heard him saying, “You know, Mom, I didn’t realize everybody didn’t have patches in the seat of their pants.” (Laughter) Typical minister’s family! All the boys had paper routes when they were growing up.

When I graduated, meanwhile I had gone to see Dr. MacDonald who was Secretary of the Board of Home Missions at that time. My brother Arthur, in his final year, had taken a chance to do summer work with Dr. Darby in Bella Bella, and was so impressed with the Indian work. Every week he wrote a letter home to Mom about working with the Indians and the fish boats and the canneries on the west coast. He thought that would be a good chance—if he was going to go to China, he needed it. So he graduated, and at the time he graduated, China was closed to missionaries. So he went up to Port Elgin.

07:16

BG: So did that inspire you?

DW: Yeah. Those letters—he just thought it was great! When I went to see Dr. M.C. MacDonald, as I was getting close to the end of my high school years, to see if they had a spot in church for me as a doctor, because I wanted to go into medicine. He says, “You come and see me when you get closer to graduating.” So I went and saw him when I had one more year to go in medicine. He says, “It looks like we may need you, but I can’t be sure. It looks like in B.C. we may need you in one of our coastal hospitals. But I can’t be sure of that.”

08:09

So I came away from that meeting and I thought, “Gee.” I had read all these books [from] the east coast by Dr. Grenfell, so I wrote to Grenfell Mission to see if they were going to have any openings. And I got a letter right back saying, “We’re going to need somebody at our hospital on the mainland.”

BG: Labrador?

DW: Yeah, in Labrador. “So keep in touch.” It just so happened that I did my interning at Toronto Western Hospital and one of our senior staff there at the time was Bob Salter, who had had two years in the Grenfell Mission and came back to get his surgical degree. I spoke to Bob and I said, “Bob, you know, I may have a chance to go to the west coast of B.C. in one of our United Church work, or the Grenfell Mission says that they may well have a spot for me in Labrador.” He

09:49

says, "Will you be by yourself in the Charlottes in B.C.?" I said, "Yes I will." He says, "Go to the Charlottes." He says, "You'll learn more there by yourself." (Laughter) "And if you go to Labrador you'll be cutting in time, cutting in time for the surgeon doing all his stuff." And a good experience, I'm sure, but... So I went to see Dr. MacDonald, and he says, "That's fine. If you think you'd like to go, it looks like we're going to need you in the Charlottes, so you keep in touch with me." So that's how I got into that.

I did a couple of years' internship and I did extra obstetrics.

GB: Who did you follow in the Charlottes?

DW: I followed a young fellow who was there for two years and he came from Vancouver, and they were active in our church. I'd know his name to hear it.

GB: Eddie Singer?

DW: Yea, Singer. I went to Eddie's funeral at Ryerson, and that's when I heard our present fellow in the church that just got the ...

BG: Gary Paterson.

DW: Paterson, who was minister at Ryerson. And Eddie Singer died a year after he had been with us, and Dr. Paterson had his funeral. And I thought it was one of the nicest funerals I had ever heard. That's why I would have voted for him. (Laughter)

BG: Before we get any further in your story, I was going to ask you about your education, and if you had had any particular role models at that time of your life, or mentors? 12:21

DW: I think Dr. Darby would be the one that stood out. My brother Arthur, the oldest in our family (the kids)—he was a bit of a role model.

BG: Your own brother.

DW: Yeah, my own brother. Every time we sat down for dinner at night, ten of us at the table (seven kids and Mom and Dad), my two sisters and Mom would get the meal ready. And after the meal, the boys took over. Whose turn is it to do the dishes? (Laughter) And we took turns doing this, but I remember Arthur. "Now let's see, prow, and you're stern..." And Arthur always said, "I'll look after Don." He'd take me into the living room while the other four boys had to decide who ... (laughter). And he'd play the piano. And he'd just go up and down that keyboard, and he was a beautiful piano player and violin player. He played in the symphony orchestra in London for a while.

BG: London, Ontario.

DW: London, Ontario. Because he had a hear attack at Port Elgin after three years. There were three doctors at Port Elgin. One fellow joined the services, and so they needed Arthur to go there and that's where Arthur went. And as soon as Art went up there, the oldest guy retired. So then there were two of them. And then the second one went into the army and Art was alone, and he was going

night and day, and he had a heart attack.

So the Toronto cardiologist told him, “You’ve got about six months to live, and that’s it. I’m sorry, but you’ve damaged your heart.” One of the other staff men, who was also a cardiologist but wasn’t the chief cardiologist, said to Arthur, “Art, I think you ought to go down to Boston and see Dr. so-and-so. And he was the guy at that time—famous: “Leave your car at home and go to work on a bicycle.” Do remember that? [Indicating Grant]

GB: No, or, vaguely.

DW: “You need the exercise. Go and see him.” So Arthur went down and saw him. “Okay,” he says, “you get out of family medicine.” He says, “Get a job where you’re a nine to fiver and that’s it.” Which he did, and he lived for another 15 years, I guess.

BG: Yeah, so he was a big figure in your life at that time.

DW: Yeah, and Dr. Darby. When I got to know Ted Whiting... Ted was a great fellow in our work, too. He was different; he was a tough old Irishman, you know. You knew Ted. [Indicating Grant]

GB: Yeah. He left Bella Coola just before I went there, but I got to know him when I was working on the boats.

DW: Well, he was a great guy. His wife was a nice lady, too. Anyway, I had lots of good examples.

BG: And then when you went to Queen Charlotte City, what was your experience like there?

GB: Just before we leave the family, I think you should name your two brothers who were United Church ministers. 16:37

DW: They were both in the air force, as soon as things kind of erupted. Bob and George, they both went into the air force. George went in a year after Bob went in. Bob had already had two years in theological college, but George had had one, I think. Because when he came out of the services, they paid his fees through theological college. Neither one of them got out of Canada in the air force.

Bob wanted to fly. Went to Goderich for his elementary flying training school. He was okay on the flying—he liked that—but the aerobatics got him. His stomach just... it wasn’t for him. (Laughter) So, they took him anyway and he never got out of Canada. He went to the bombing and gunnery school (that’s where they put him) in Jarvis, Ontario. So he was in the big planes, and they weren’t doing aerobatics and that was fine. He wrote a number of sermons about flying: night flying in the big planes. My dad had kept all his sermons, and both George and Bob got hold of these sermons. His sermon would be on a page like that. [Indicating a piece of paper]

George liked flying, and he got twin engine flying and got his wings in that. So I came along then and had thought I would go into the navy, but with both

brothers in the air force, I thought, “Ah well, I’ll go into the air force.” When I came out of there it was 1945. And they said, “We don’t need you guys now. But we’re not going to discharge you, we’re going to put you in Class E and call you back if we need you.”

BG: So, the brothers’ names that went into the ministry were Bob and George Watt.

DW: That’s right. Bob was the oldest.

GB: George and Robert.

DW: George was out in the prairies and Bob had two years in the prairies but then came back to Toronto and was in several of the Toronto churches.

BG: Getting back to Queen Charlotte City, this was your first experience in running a hospital. 19:55

DW: Yeah, it was.

BG: What was that like?

DW: I enjoyed it up there. I didn’t think I was going to enjoy it! (Laughter) The first week I was there... I’d only been there two days when the nurse came up to tell me, “Dr. Watt, they’re bringing a lady down from Tillet...” (halfway to Masset on the Queen Charlottes) “...and she’s been pretty sick for two days... Abdominal pain... They’ll be here in another hour,” sort of thing. So anyway, they brought her and she had an acute appendix and it had ruptured. Her whole tummy was... Andy she was in her late sixties, I guess, because her son was the highway superintendent for the lower end of the Charlottes. So anyway, we operated on her immediately and got her filled up with what needed to be done and we washed out her abdomen and got most of the pus out of there that we could, and got her a big dose of antibiotics. The old hospital on the Charlottes used to be an apartment building, a two-storey, old apartment building. The cellar wasn’t cemented; it was just dug earth down there. That was my introduction to anybody very sick. (Chuckles) After that, things kind of settled down. I was two years there then.

When I was taking my junior rotating internship—they had come in and announced to the 150 in our class (all ex-service, five women and the rest all fellows)—that Toronto Western Hospital are looking for three doctors (three medical students) in their final year willing to come in and get their room and board rent free if they will take a rotation of one every three nights being on call from five o’clock at night to seven am in the morning for X-ray. “You can go in and spend the first summer as a junior intern if you like on X-ray. Then you’ll start taking calls first of September. We’ll pay your laundry, give you your meals, give you your room.” Two to a room—telephone, in the middle a little table, and cots on both sides, and you had your own room. And it got so that when you weren’t on call—every third night you’d be on call—and the third guy was in a different room. If the phone rang and you were on call, you heard it. And if you weren’t on call... I never heard the phone going off. (Laughter) You got that way! So I had that training in X-ray. And when I had finished there, the top of the

Radiology was a real nice guy—young fellow, graduate. He says, “We’d like you to stay on. If you’d stay on, we’ll train you in X-ray radiology.” Well, I said I promised the church I’d... (you know). So for three years after I left there and two or four at the Charlottes, he had read me letters about Jim saying, “I’m still holding a spot if you’ll come.” So I said, “No, I think I’m kind of stuck here.” He was a real nice fellow. But we had one of these mobile X-ray units—I’ve forgotten how many milliamps now—but about five minutes to get a hand. But I used that up there and I rolled around and I’d X-ray. And we had a lot of interesting cases come in, get X-rays on them. I had lots of fun with radiology; I enjoyed it.

So it was a good experience. Only once did I get a chance to go hunting. They have elk on the islands (on the Charlottes). The Forestry guy and the Fishery guy—these were other professionals that were our friends up there, you see—and a couple of other men used to go hunting every... they wanted me to go hunting with them. But, before that happened, the fellow that had worked my [opposite?] one on call in my fourth year, my training, Dr. Ellingham: I phoned him and I said, “You know, Frank, I’m too busy up here. Why don’t you come on up.” And when I had done some extra training in surgery and radiology in obstetrics, Frank had done surgery. I said, “We need a guy up here.” And I said, “I’ll do the anaesthetics. You come on up and we’ll work as a team.” And he did. He came up for two years. I told him that I’d be here for probably four years. But at the end of two years I got this call. So I left Frank, and he only stayed a year after I left, and we got another person to come in.

BG: And after that, you went to...

DW: I went to Bella Coola. It’s been a great experience and you meet a lot of nice people. We were always close to the minister. We were a unit. Church hospital—most of us sang in the choir (or whatever) on Sundays. We had nurses from all over Canada would come up. Some local ones, but we always had to augment them with nurses from elsewhere in Canada. I did a lot of speaking in churches when I was on my holidays. Wherever I was, they’d hear I was there and [they’d say], “Lookit, how’d you like to...” And I’d fill in for the minister who was on holidays. And that was alright; I didn’t mind. It was a great experience. 27:27

BG: I’m just thinking that, when you came to B.C., that it may have been the first time that you would get acquainted with some of the First Nations people.

DW: Yeah, it was. Arthur had had the experience with the... it was north of where he was in Ontario at Port Elgin... there were Indians...

GB: The Ojibway people?

DW: Yeah! So, he knew them and he remembered his summer in Bella Bella. And we all liked fishing. He was a great fisherman, Archie was. And George and Bob and I were all fishermen, and when I went out west, boy, there was salmon.

GB: Salmon and steelhead.

DW: And steelhead, yeah.



- GB: Yeah, he was a very avid fisherman.
- BG: Is that right? And when you went to Bella Coola, that's where you met Grant?
- DW: Yeah, that's when I met Grant! And the word from Toronto was, "Okay, we've got you covered up there now. Somebody had taken your place on the Charlottes. You fly to Prince Rupert on so-and-such a date and go down and see Ted Whiting at Hazelton. Take the bus. And he will explain what you're going into in Bella Coola, and why we need you." Brief phone call from the Secretary of the Board of Home Missions in Toronto. When I got there, Ted Whiting says, "Now, this is the problem. Okay, you get the bus tomorrow and go to Rupert and the ferry will be in on its return trip to Vancouver from..."
- GB: Well, it would either be the Charlottes or Port Simpson.
- DW: No, I just went back to Prince Rupert.
- GB: Yeah, but the ferry... it was either of those places and then down to Ocean Falls.
- DW: Yeah, from...
- GB: Prince Rupert.
- DW: Yeah, and he says, "When you go to Ocean Falls, the United Church minister from Bella Coola will be over in a borrowed fish boat to meet you at Ocean Falls, and he'll take you to Queen Charlotte City..."
- GB: Bella Coola.
- DW: Bella Coola, I mean. This is when I met Grant. And I remember Grant saying, "This is Sammy's fish boat." (He was an Indian boy, but after in our church married one of the nurses). And Grant knew a certain amount about boats because he was there to take me through the channels and up into Bella Coola. I remember him saying a couple of times, "Gee, I hope the church is still standing." (Laughter) I said, "Why wouldn't it?" Well, he says, "The town's a little upset about their doctor being pulled away when he only had a couple of weeks there (or something)."
- GB: He'd been there two years.
- DW: Oh, two years? Anyway, we got there and the church was still standing and the hospital was still standing. And then I found out when I got there, there were at least three or four people active in logging and whatnot in Bella Coola who had been my patients in Queen Charlotte.
- BG: Oh, you're kidding!
- DW: And they knew me and they were also part of the Board of Trade. I joined the Board of Trade. We had a good time there and they were a good bunch of people.
- BG: You were there for six years? Or you were in that position...
- DW: Six years.
- GB: Were there any particular differences in Bella Coola from the Charlottes? Or was

- it pretty much similar?
- DW: Bella Coola was a two-man stand.
- GB: Not when you first went there.
- DW: No, that's true. It eventually became a three-man stand.
- GB: Hugh came about two years after you did.
- DW: Yeah. Hugh was a returned missionary from... you remember, was it China?
- GB: No, he went to Korea *after* he'd been at Bella Coola. Hugh Rose.
- DW: Anyway, I guess he had gone to Korea.
- GB: He went after.
- DW: Yeah.
- GB: And then he came back and he qualified in...
- DW: Ophthalmology.
- GB: Yeah, because he took Murray's place—Dr. Murray—in Korea. He went back to Korea.
- DW: Yeah. So, we had a good bunch of staff and there were nice people and I enjoyed my time in our hospital work. When we went down... Well, when I took over from what Dr. Darby did, I made a point of going to each of our hospitals for their annual meetings. 34:25
- BG: And that's when you were Superintendent of Medical...?
- DW: Yeah, I was Superintendent. And I got to know the boards at Eriksdale, Manitoba and Lamont, and I got to know the doctor out there—great guy. And I went up to see Margaret, the elderly lady up at the lake there...
- GB: Bird's Lake?
- DW: No, in Eriksdale, Manitoba. That was an interesting doctor up there. These were all people that had come in through Hudson Bay from their place in... Oh, gee. Well, they were a good bunch of people.
- ...Cold Lake, Alberta! Margaret, the elderly lady doctor. Before we left there, we met with the medical staff at the Cold Lake air depot, to say, "Lookit, we're up here and you've got your doctor in town here. Surely he could take clinics in this hospital, because the lady doctor was older and she wasn't too well and eventually died of C.A. [cardiac arrest] (Phone rings, recording paused)
- BG: Dr. Watt, tell us now of some of the locum work that you did in the various hospitals. Whereabouts did you go? 36:58
- DW: Well, I filled in a lot at Bella Bella and Hazelton and Bella Coola. I didn't fill in in Lamont because they had a pretty good staff of three doctors out there. But I went to their annual meetings. They also had a nurses' training school there. I remember having to speak at their graduation. (Chuckles) Morley Young was their senior doctor up there—a great churchman, too. But about then, see, we

were starting our work in Newfoundland. Well, not about then but after I'd been doing it in B.C. and western Canada. I didn't have to do much at Eriksdale because they had a real good Scandinavian doctor there. And about every three, four, five months (I'm guessing), he knew he shouldn't be looking after patients. He would lock his door and he had been celebrating for that weekend. So there was no point in calling him, and he knew enough to know that he shouldn't practise medicine when he had been drinking. And I happened to be there at the annual meeting of the hospital and a lady in labour. And I had to leave the board meeting and deliver this lady in the obstetrics because, I said, "Where's the doctor?" "Well, he's indisposed. And he won't answer his phone or answer the door."

That's the only work I did at Eriksdale, but I used to go to their annual meetings. And he was a nice guy, the doctor.

BG: And you ended up going to Baie Verte.

DW: Well, yeah. You see, Baie Verte were after us—you may remember more than I (indicating Grant)—to come down and have a hospital. They had a spot down there in Baie Verte, which the main industry was an asbestos mine. And they needed the doctor down there. So, I went down there and to help me was a good churchman—an elderly doctor (he was in his seventies), but a good cardiologist—a nice fellow, real nice fellow. Anyway, we ended up with three doctors down there and we expanded the work and we did many trips into the little out ports. We eventually put one of our doctors down in the... do you remember the name of the little fishing village at the far eastern end of...

GB: No, I don't.

DW: Anyway, we put the doctor there. I would go down and I worked at Baie Verte initially for a few months to help us get started, and then we got a dentist to come in. We had three doctors there, eventually, and it was busy. We had a lot of interesting work regarding asbestos. We would take X-rays. One of our doctors was a specialist and he'd look at the chest X-ray and say they got some fading in... of guys who had worked in the asbestos mills for a number of years. We approached the company, and they said, "We'll send it to our man in New York." The answer would come back: Nothing wrong with this man. His X-rays are all right. So we were fighting that sort of thing until finally we won.

41:08

That little trouble with the union down there: the radiologists and... people went on strike. The people in charge, not the medical people, but the X-ray technician and the lab technician, this sort of thing. It was a union. Anyway, this fellow drove 40 miles with his little boy who had jumped off their porch and twisted his ankle. He came in with a big, swollen joint. I said, "We'll have to..." And the dad drove 40 miles from the far end up to the hospital. And the X-ray technologist said, "Doctor, we can't take an X-ray because we're on strike." I said, "Well, you can just keep out of the way." I said, "I'll take the X-ray." And, "Oh no, you can't do that! You'd be strike breaking." I said, "No I wouldn't. If *you* did it, *you'd* be strike breaking." And I said, "I'm the doctor and I want to get a picture of this lad." Anyway, he phoned his headquarters and I went ahead and took the X-ray,

- because I knew all about X-ray. Well, I got a good picture and he didn't have a fracture but, you know, we got him bandaged up and told him to keep his leg up for awhile. I got one of the ministers in St. John's phone me and said, "Don, don't cause problem with the union." I said, "I have no problem with the union. They're on strike, so they're not in the picture, as far as I'm concerned. I've got a patient here that drove 40 miles with a little boy that's in pain, and I'm going to take a picture." So, that was the only little difficulty. (Chuckles)
- BG: That's a great story. (Chuckles) During your career, has there been any particular low point or most challenging part of your work that you might name? 44:13
- DW: Oh... I enjoyed the time with medicine there. It was discouraging at times, if we had shortages of staff. I did a lot of speaking in churches. The ministers... it was great... if there was a guy going to be available, they'd have that Sunday off. Most of them were overworked anyway and gee, "We'll get Don to come in and tell us about the work he's doing now." And I would push the thing: we need nurses, we had doctors come in. I don't know whether you remember... no, Grant, you wouldn't. Anyway, we had specialists from here come up. Fred Bryans, one of the top obstetricians here in Vancouver. Great churchman here. He came up and gave us a week up in Bella Coola. And you'd have clinics with—there were three of us then, three doctors there and nurses—discuss any interesting patient we had in and what we were doing. I took him once... I made clinic trips regularly from Bella Coola up to Anahim Lake. We had to go up this new road to Anahim Lake; it was up in the... very interesting. Which hockey team was it had their goalie from Anahim Lake?
- GB: I don't know.
- DW: Oh, yeah. He was a good goalie and his home in Anahim Lake! I think he was the next...
- BG: We'll have to look that up. (Chuckles)
- GB: One of the main, very important things you did in Bella Coola: we recruited Goldman the dentist to come in on his holidays to give dental work in the village. 46:29
- DW: We did the same in the Charlottes to start with. My dentist here, real nice guy, he was a member of the United Church, he would give us a couple of weeks up there. He'd send his wife up the week before and she was one of these dental assistants, and she would line up a group—mostly Indian—to get their teeth done. And we ran into a lot of this, "Well, it's gotta come out, doc, would you pull it? Just pull it." "No, that can be saved!" I said, "I don't fill things but you should go over to Rupert, unless you're prepared to wait for Dr. Gardiner to come up." He would come and give us two weeks, a couple of times a year. And he was a top dentist down here. I pulled a lot of teeth.
- GB: With the history of no dental, there was one really nice looking 16-year-old girl when I got there, had two full plates at 16 years old.
- DW: Yeah, and the idea was you gotta get rid of them eventually; you may as well get them all out to start with, and then get a nice plate. And I said, "No, you can save that molar or you can save this one." So, that was an interesting part of their

work, pulling teeth and looking after sick animals. This was all part of... Your patients had a dog in trouble or had a cow in trouble. (Laughter) "What do you do?" "I don't know. Why don't you take them to Williams Lake 300 miles...

BG: So far away.

DW: And it wasn't always successful. Gee, I was up there and the baker wanted me to spay his big collie, a nice big collie. She had pups running all over the village, you know. So, I said, "I don't do this." I never charged for any work to animals. "Well," he says, "I have 300 miles to go and then it'll cost me a couple of hundred dollars to get her spayed."

So I phoned the vet in Williams Lake, and I said, "I don't want to cut you out of stuff, but this guy says he's not going in that far. He's the baker. He's busy." He says, "You can do it there, for goodness' sakes." And he says, "You make your midline incision and you reach in and sweep your fingers up the inside wall of the abdomen and you'll feel a couple of little cords running along. Just tie them off. That'll do it."

So it seemed real simple and I had her come in—bring the dog in—and we put her down and made an incision, and gee, I didn't feel what I should have felt. I could feel a number of things in there and I didn't want to cut into bowel or anything else. Anyway, I cut what I thought was the thing. He wanted to know how much... I said, "I don't charge for this kind of work. I like animals and I hope that'll be alright. But I'm no specialist; I've never done this before." "Oh, that's alright, doc." So I don't know, six months? It was probably the following year and my trip in there to Bella Coola. "The baker wants to see you." (Laughter) I said, "What do you think this is about?" And they said, "I don't know, but there's lots of collies running around town!" (Laughter) I said, "I'm sorry." I said, "That's not my specialty."

BG: Thank you for that. Looking back over the years, what is most important to you about your work as a doctor and within the church? 51:25

DW: I think it's a profession. It's a great profession. And in these areas where we have our outreach ministries, they're short of special care, particularly in the medical work. It was worse then than maybe it is now. I think we still have three up in Bella Coola, which wasn't bad. We got a lot of things through, you know, through the Board of Home Missions. These guys should have so many weeks of leave, not for holiday time but for post-grad leave, and we should keep them on salary. The government paid their salaries. And part of my job was to go to Victoria and sit down with the guys. And they were good. They were happy to see us in these outlying areas with our work. They would say to me at the end, they approved the budget and they said, "Are you sure this is enough to cover what you're doing?" "Yeah," I said, "That'll meet our costs." They were very happy to have us doing these things.

And with our housing stuff, I got that under medical services, but I got the government to pay for it. Anything: a new fridge here, a new something there, because is this is the way we had our doctors. And we would say to them, "You

come and work for us, a rent free house, meet your travel to post-grad training, and cost of courses. We'd meet this, and government knew what we were doing and the care we were giving. We got our hospitals accredited, which was an important thing. The government were just tickled pink! That's something.

And you know, a lot of congregations, when we'd go and speak to them about it, would say, "You know, the doctors get their houses rent free," and I said, "You get your manses." Maybe there's a bit of a charge now—I don't know. I'm trying to think what's going on at St. Stephen's [Vancouver]. Anyway, there are a lot of things can be done if the government can plan. That's all they want to know. "This is your budget. That holds you for a year and then you come back in a year's time and we'll see what's going on." And they didn't mind that kind of money.

BG: Because you were filling in a gap?

DW: We were filling a gap they couldn't fill in. I found it very encouraging work and I enjoyed that. If I was doing it again, I don't know if I would do that—I think it was pretty hard on my wife. She was a nurse and we had four kids.

BG: And what's your wife's name?

DW: June. However, things went well and I enjoyed my time there. We'd meet guys like Grant here. We had to straighten them out theologically. (Laughter)

BG: Very good! Now, when you were working up north, there were many more hospitals run by the United Church than there are now, is that correct?

DW: No, there's Bella Bella, Bella Coola—those two. We did have a doctor in the Charlottes back in the 1980s. Then when we went up... We spasmodically had ministers with medical training, early on, in some of these. But then they couldn't all do this. Burns Lake had their own two doctors, but we had to fill in there part-time when they left. And we filled in briefly there.

GB: But are there any United Church hospitals now where the United Church is actually operating the hospital in B.C. or they're all...? We've got medical services that are under the United Church but the hospitals are strictly government hospitals now.

DW: In my time, government would meet the operating costs.

GB: Oh yeah, in your time, but Blair asked about now.

DW: Umm, I think they still do. I just met a couple of fellows from Bella Coola. There's three doctors up there now.

GB: But the United Church isn't even necessarily represented on the board of the hospital now in Bella Coola. Whereas, my time, I was chair of the board.

DW: We got that changed! (Laughter)

BG: Well, I think there are three hospitals now that the United Church supports [in B.C.]

DW: Well, the government asked us about the Charlottes, and they said, "We think

- we've got people who would like to go to the Charlottes as physicians." I said, "That's fine if they want to go in, we won't feel it's our responsibility if you can get somebody." So we got out of that one. If they were stuck, I'm sure we would... Bella Coola, I think one doctor there is in private practice. I think two of the other ones up there are ones that I recruited initially and then the government may have decided, "Okay, we can meet these costs." And they were happy to do that.
- BG: Now, I have a question for you that has to do with the future. Can you offer a word of wisdom to future generations? 59:50
- DW: I think there's always a call for the mission of health within church. Whether it's inner city mission, well baby clinics, that sort of thing. If it can be full-time thing, government will meet the cost of somebody on salary. The guys at BCHIS would say to me, "We don't mind meeting these guys as long as you'll give us a budget. Then we can go to our [people] and say, 'This is the budget. Doesn't matter how busy these guys are, that's the budget. We need to have costs. We know what they are.'"
- You hear various talk about how much money doctors are making. (Chuckles) Oh well, I've had some funny run-ins with Bob Burrows when he was chair of the board in Toronto. And with some of the salaries, our doctors, I think, were always reasonable. And I remember saying that, "The medical services, government is prepared to pay rent free house, medical services would pay for fridge or stove or anything. But this is the salary. Government would go, if you could give them a fixed salary within reason, and when I would go to Toronto I would say, "This is our budget." "Oh, we can't pay doctors more than we're paying our ministers." And Bob Burrows was the guy, you know, he was a real rascal! (Laughter) Bob's here in this presbytery now?
- BG: Yes.
- DW: Yeah, well after he got out with the boat and with a few things, he got jobs with government here and he was making a good salary. (Laughter) He's a good friend of mine. Anyway, I think there'll always be a need for the church to *meet* a need that government isn't meeting that we feel people are suffering *because...* And I think that's a response the church should be willing to accept. Money is always a problem. But if government is prepared to meet this in other people in their ranks... Gee, I look at the budget of your mayor in Toronto and he's having his own problems. So I think that's where I feel the church has a need.
- BG: Okay, thank you. That's well summed up. Is there anything else that I've missed that you'd like to tell me about?
- DW: Oh, I don't know. Grant as well knows what we're doing in our medical work.
- BG: [Addressing Grant] Is there anything you think I've missed or that Dr. Watt has missed?
- GB: What do you think of the fact that Bella Coola Hospital can't do obstetrics anymore because of the government? So people in Bella Coola have to go to

- Williams Lake for their children, for babies?
- DW: I wasn't aware of this.
- GB: You weren't, eh?
- DW: But, gee, I saw a guy from Bella Coola—it was one that we had sent in there. You know that they had a dinner for me here not too long ago? And he came down from Bella Coola and he's up there and he's happy. He was well-trained. I don't know why he wouldn't be delivering babies, but maybe it's the combination of giving an anaesthetic and delivering a baby, and if you have to do a section, send them out if you've got time. But in these places, planes don't fly after dark when they're float planes. They don't land on the water after dark, and we've got single engine float planes—Beavers on floats. They're great aircraft and you can fly them to Williams Lake, although at Williams Lake the doctors weren't too well trained; they weren't specialists, really. It may be different now, I don't know, but it wasn't then. I've been out of touch. They had a big dinner for me here.
- GB: In Bella Coola?
- DW: No, here.
- BG: Here in Vancouver.
- DW: Yeah. Our doctors—senior doctors and their wives—and I was invited and Elizabeth came (my daughter, who's also a doctor now at Abbotsford). I don't make any excuses for what we've done, and I think there's always a spot for people willing to get involved in the peripheries.
- I spoke to one of our groups at the time that they were worried about the downtown drug things here. “Do you think there's a spot for our church taking over medical work down there?” After I was retired, things have really got pretty bad. Oh, they didn't think so. And all I could think of was that the guys that do work down there are on a pretty good income, which they thought the church couldn't meet. Because, even in my time, when I'd go to churches, they'd say, “You know, it's good of you to come and tell us what's going on out there but your people are probably getting almost twice as much as what our ministers get.” I'd say, “No, that's not true.” But I think the church will always have openings in the fringes of where people are living and have problems, which can be looked after by people who are trained.
- BG: Well said. Thank you very much, Dr. Watt, for this interview. 1:06:34
- DW: You're very welcome. I like to know what's going on. Grant knows.
- BG: It'll be wonderful to have this interview as part of our Conference Archives. 1:08:00