

The Goodmans of Virginia, Minnesota

Dr. Charles Goodman finished his medical training in 1913 in his home town of Chicago, and in 1915 he heard that a sawmill in Virginia, Minnesota needed a doctor to replace the one on its staff who had departed on a one year sabbatical leave.

Dr. Goodman arrived on a train in Duluth in the dead of winter, wearing a thin overcoat with the temperature hovering in the minus 30 degree range. Needless to say, he almost took the next train back to Chicago. The doctor he replaced never returned, and Dr. Charles Goodman was officiously hired.

The lumber camps in northern Minnesota consisted of dozens of lumberjacks, a rough and tough breed, I imagine similar to those pictured in the history of the American west. Often on Saturday nights, Dr. Goodman was called out into the deeply forested areas to attend to the victims of numerous accidents, stabbings, shootings and other "health" issues.

Esther Gomberg, prominent in Duluth music circles, whom he married in 1918, often went along to keep him company. I asked my mother, who had absolutely no formal medical training, what she did on these occasions.

"Oh", she said matter of factly, "I held the flashlight."

During World War I, Dr. Goodman enlisted in the Army Medical Corps. He had received his commission and his uniform, and was preparing to leave for active service. However, because of the country wide flu epidemic, he decided the northern Minnesota communities needed him more than the army did, so he persuaded the army to send him home.

One day, our dad came home after one of those sawmill "house calls" sporting a bleeding head wound, and the beginning of two huge black eyes. It seemed that he was ambushed somewhere far from town, and his medical bag and everything in it was stolen. The drugs it contained were part of the equipment carried by doctors in their field of expertise. He had carried that bag for decades, so it was a major tragedy to lose it..

Essie, his devoted wife, realized the importance of a medical bag to a doctor, so she took it upon herself to order him a new one. Here it came, all resplendent in shiny black leather, with built in compartments to hold little bottles of medicine, needles and thread, and huge rolls of bandages and tape.

My sisters and I realized how much dad missed his old medical bag when months later there was a knock at the door, and a policeman stood outside holding a miserable torn and hardly recognizable filthy medical bag with a missing handle.

"This was found in a ditch miles out of town, and we knew it belonged to Dr. Goodman", he explained. The next day his office nurse was given the job of washing and repairing the old medical bag, and the brand new one was stored in the back of a closet never to be used again as far as I know.

During the serious epidemic of infantile paralysis (polio) in northern Minnesota during the early thirties, the doctors of the St. Louis Medical Society selected Dr. Goodman to attend a seminar given at the University of Minnesota by the Australian nurse, Sister Kenny dealing with her controversial methods of treatment of the paralysis suffered by

the young victims of this devastating disease. Dr. Goodman realizing the effectiveness of the Sister Kenny methods, subsequently became the go-to guy in northern Minnesota on how to treat the paralysis of children.

During the years of his medical practice in Virginia, Dr. Charlie Goodman delivered dozens of babies. One of those, we discovered much later, was Robert Mondavi. (long before his wine industry claim to fame.) My sisters, Winnie and Barbara and their families, visited the Mondavi winery in California's Napa Valley at various times in ensuing years, always getting a big hug and a bottle or two of wine from Mr. Mondavi himself.

During WW II, Dr. Goodman served on the St. Louis County Selective Service Board examining draftees's physical fitness for service in the armed forces. Esther rolled bandages for the Red Cross. One day during the winter, even though the sidewalks were icy, she was determined not to miss her turn. The result was a nasty fall which fractured her coccyx. (tailbone)

Dr. Goodman was the Virginia schools doctor for thirty-eight years. This half-time position paid him at the most \$350 per month. He visited every school's nurses office once a week, taking care of student health issues, and conducting eyesight and hearing tests. If a family found it difficult to financially provide glasses or hearing aids for a child, Dr. Goodman provided them at greatly reduced prices or at no cost at all.

Dr. Goodman's office bills were legendary. People paid them if and when they thought they could. This caused Mrs. Goodman no end of frustration. She would visit homes or places of employment once a month to ask for "something on the bill." I rode along with her many times when she accepted a \$2.00 or \$3.00 payment.

I especially enjoyed visiting the man who worked for a local mortuary. While the financial business was being conducted in an office up front, I would slip away to a back room to look into coffins and tables laden with a dead body or two in various stages of whatever is done to dead bodies preceding their funerals.

Esther Gomberg Goodman grew up in Duluth, Minnesota. Her sister, Jeanette's best friend, Senta Berger, lived in the neighborhood, but the passing years drew them apart.

During WWII the name Senta Berger drew much criticism when rumors circulated in Duluth that Senta and her husband, living in Basel, Switzerland, had become very involved in the German Nazi movement.

In 1965, Herb, Peggie, and their three children were living in Wiesbaden, Germany, while Herb was stationed there with the US Air Force Band. Peggie's mother, Esther, during a visit asked Herb if we could drive the 100 or so miles to Switzerland to possibly find Senta Berger.

After many hours of fruitless searching, we were ready to return to our home in Wiesbaden. On an impulse, Herb found Senta's address listed in the Basel phone book. The gold-lettered name plate on the door said "Senta Berger Professor of Voice". Our knock produced no movement from inside. So reluctantly we returned to our parked car, and resumed our homeward bound trip.

After traveling an hour or so on the return trip, I knew how disappointed my mother must be, so I asked Herb if he would mind driving back to Basel on the chance that Senta had returned home. So we turned around, and proceeded back to Switzerland.

This time the apartment door opened in response to my knock, and there she stood! Esther identified herself, and the years melted away as the two old friends hugged each other. Never one to shy away from asking questions of a personal nature, Esther inquired, "Senta, during World War II, the rumor floating around Duluth said that you and your husband were Nazis, and guilty of numerous acts of aggression against the United States."

Senta, with tears streaming down her cheeks answered, "O Essie that is so untrue. My husband and I saved dozens of US airmen prisoners of war from capture by hiding them in our basement, and furnishing them with maps and contacts to help them escape their captors. We acted as Nazis to preserve our secrecy. Please clear my name when you return to Duluth." And my mother made it her mission. and did as Senta asked.

Esther visited us several weeks in Germany, and on one occasion I took her to Paris. One evening we strolled down a back street, and decided to enter a middle class style restaurant to have dinner. The place was crowded with French diners, and we waited patiently for our dinners to arrive following the placing of our orders. Esther noticed a piano off in a corner, and much to my embarrassment, seated herself at the instrument.

She decided to play the French national anthem "Le Marseille", so started the introduction, and motioned for the French customers to stand as Americans do for the "Star Spangled Banner." No one understood the introduction or her gesture, and remained seated. She started the introduction again, and this time she gave the stand up signal with much more vigor. Finally a few Frenchmen got the message, rose to their feet, and began to quietly mouth the words. Gradually more did the same, and soon everyone in the dining room was standing, singing their national anthem at the top of their voices. I wanted to crawl under the table, but when various diners stopped at our table on their way out to say "Merci " to this wonderful American, I realized my mother deserved my pride.

In 1940, the world renowned symphony orchestra conductor, Leopold Stokowsky, decided to hold auditions for selecting an All American Youth Orchestra (AAYO) to record and tour, partly to combat the propaganda touting the wonders of Hitler youth. Five auditions were to be held at major music schools across the country, and especially at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis. Announcements for the 1940 group generated 15,000 applicants.

The Virginia band teacher, Vernon Malone, was especially proud of two of his teen age students, Kenneth Ahola on oboe, and Sherman Walt on bassoon. He felt they were more than capable of being recognized for selection in the All America orchestra.

Kenneth's family was able to finance his musical education, but Sherman needed a helping hand financially. Esther worked many hours coaching and playing the piano accompaniments to prepare Sherman to master the music in regard to the audition requirements. With Mr. Malone in the background, supervising and arranging the details of the auditions, Esther drove Sherman from Virginia to the University of Minnesota

several times to play before Leopold Stokowsky. Esther paid all the fees, and in addition, hired a professional piano accompanist for the finals while she waited out in the hall.

The entire process was repeated in 1941 by recruiting and training a new All America Youth Orchestra, which became renowned for its amazingly rich and liberating sound. Further recordings produced performances that are among the greatest orchestral recordings ever made. Unfortunately, everything came to a halt with America's entry into WWII.

Kenneth Ahola was several years older than Sherman, and was able to progress farther in the auditions. He decided to spend more time on his medical studies, leaving Sherman Walt to jump-start his career in music.

Sherman suffered a serious injury to his lip due to combat war service, and for a time it seriously threatened his career. The army doctors did all they could, but for a long period of time, he returned to Virginia for more successful treatments at the hands of Dr. Goodman.

Sherman graduated from the University of Minnesota, won membership in the Minneapolis Symphony, the Chicago Symphony, and the Boston Symphony. Quite a resume for a young boy from Virginia, Minnesota!

The Goodman auditorium was named for Dr. and Mrs. Charles Goodman, who lived in Virginia, surrounded by immigrants and their families who had come to America searching for new homes. The Goodmans of Virginia, Minnesota provided, by their example, the utmost in living lives dedicated to the goals of brotherhood, service and dedication of purpose.