

# GOODBYE OLD FRIEND

by Donald E. Brown



A twinge of sadness, like the coastal fog, fell softly across Humboldt County on October 24th, with the passing of the North Coast's patriarch of medicine, Dr. Samuel P. Burre. He will be sorely missed, for countless had come to know, love and depend on him.

Dr. Sam, as he was affectionately known, had truly become legendary in his own lifetime, his medical career alone spanning some fifty-nine years. To the very day that his own illness hospitalized him, he was still seeing around forty patients daily.

Although surely knowing the end was near, he continued to work feverishly on his many projects. He talked of yet another book, his most recent, "Echoes of the Sod", having just come off the press. A copy autographed . . . "To Don and Betty" . . . reposes by my reading chair. A guideline for healthy, happy living, it mirrors his depth of thought and wisdom. The poems therein emphasize the Natural Order of things, as they relate to our pursuit of happiness and a full life. As the fly leaf so aptly states,—"The Doctor Prescribes Nature's Underlying Verities as a Therapy for Happiness."—

But, I'll leave the details of his many professional accomplishments to others, for much has, and will be said on that score. It was Dr. Sam, the colorful personality, the erudite, facile mind that I came to know and respect, as well. A detailed and thorough history spanning most of his lifetime was published in the Jan./Feb. 1985 issue of the Humboldt Historian.

Never idle, always busy . . . this seemed to be his very nature, his credo. Yet today, when the term . . . stress . . . has become a redundant euphemism, almost cliché, he always seemed relaxed. This, in recent years, to the point of equanimity. Perhaps he had found the legendary . . . Holy Grail . . . Perhaps it was peace of mind. I found it relaxing just to share his company, which, I'm sure, was both sedative and tonic to many.

The year was 1968. Mrs. Brown and I were heading north from our home in Orange County when we stopped to chat with the late Bob Madsen, his realty office being on the corner of Fifth & I Streets. We had met Bob while passing through the previous year. Into his office strode this "jaunty" gentleman wearing

a black tam. We were promptly introduced to Dr. Samuel P. Burre. The good doctor had just returned from Ukiah, where he had appeared before a Health Council group to seek approval for putting in a 160 bed convalescent hospital in Eureka. This was not to be, and it was a great disappointment to him, but he quickly moved on to other projects.

Bob regaled him with some of my background, for I had just recently resigned from a similar such body in Orange County, had served on the Health Facilities & Service Committee. The ensuing conversation resulted in an invite to the Burre residence that evening.

So it was, that we opted to stay over, and headed for a local hostelry. A close bond of friendship spanning some twenty-one years had begun. Those locals met that memorable evening are valued and respected friends to this day.

When some of his younger colleagues seemed too busy to attend medical lectures and seminars, Dr. Sam was not. We well recall his attendance at such a series at the University of California, Irvine.

Mrs. Brown and I would pick him up each evening in the lobby, or in front of the Newporter Inn, (readily recognizable, wearing the black tam,) then squire him to different eateries around the Newport/airport area. One being Victor Hugo Inn overlooking Laguna Beach. He was pleased when a famed harpist played near our table, for the doctor was, himself, a talented musician. The vegetable soup at Hof's Hut evoked comment from him years later.

Dr. Sam's encouragement played no small part in our moving to God's Country, Eureka, in 1977. Our residence but a short walk from the Burres.

And memories of the Hof's Hut soup must have lingered. For it soon became almost habit on Saturdays, or Sundays, when passing the Brown hacienda on Buhne Street hill on his way to and from the hospitals, that he would stop. For seldom would a weekend pass that I didn't have a big pot of soup simmering. I once remarked that he and a neighbor friend across the street must have caught the aroma, as our kitchen vent was on the street side of the roof. Those were halcyon days I'll not forget. Likewise, our periodic luncheon sessions, during which his sense of humor was unailing.

It has been said that Sam had a considerable ego. Perhaps. But if so, I would view the trait to have been more a virtue, than a fault. Who would want a doctor lacking in self-confidence to operate on them, or a timid engineer to build a bridge they would have to cross? It brings to mind other legendary figures who strode across the global pages of history, . . . Teddy Roosevelt, Gen. Douglas Mac Arthur, Winston Churchill, Napoleon, to name a few. Like those giants who changed the course of history, he could . . . back it up . . .

In his lifetime, he was a respected medical practitioner-surgeon, a prolific writer, an accomplished artist and musician. All this, while prospering in real estate investments and development. He had been made custodian of ability in far greater measure than most. Those talents were not wasted. Dr. Sam's family came from Sicily. They had a long lifeline. He lived his to the fullest.

What's more, Sam cared for his fellow man, and loved to entertain, which he did lavishly and on a grandiose scale. His parties will long be remembered in this community, and reflected his generosity. But the countless good deeds performed on behalf of those less fortunate, those often hurting, were done with

quiet dignity. There were legions in this community who will sorely miss him.

Although trenchant almost to the point of being pungent, at times, the twinkle of the eye was always there, and the compassionate side continued to shine through. He always seemed to remember the little things . . . the acts of kindness, words of encouragement, the reassuring hand on the shoulder, and the numerous thoughtful amenities.

A positive thinker, (and doer,) it was not in the good doctor's make-up to dwell upon any slight, or wrong, or to wish anyone ill. Nonetheless, his philosophy, particularly of late, pointed up a truism . . . that most of us create many of our own problems . . . That we get out of tune with the Natural Order of Things.

As the years marched by, I never ceased to marvel at the dimension of his mind, for we conversed about many things. As Secretary of War Stanton said of Lincoln, "He had an uncommon amount of Common Sense."

It had long been my opinion, and observation, that his love of parents, their expectations, the work ethic and values they instilled served as his rudder throughout his lifetime . . . his motivation, his compass. That he lived his life, hoping it would please them. Copy of a card he had in his office has long been conspicuous in my study . . . **"WOULD THE CHILD YOU WERE BE PROUD OF THE PERSON YOU ARE?"** . . . This was the Samuel P. Burre, M.D. whom I Knew.

Verse taken from a marker in a small Oregon cemetery years ago seems appropriate . . . . . "A light is from our household gone . . . . . A voice we love is stilled, . . . . . A place is vacant at our hearth, . . . . . Which never can be filled."

His passing has closed another chapter in my life, but I feel fortunate to have been his friend.