

Thank You, Dr. Bastyr

Continued from Page 1

strangers developed into sharing of whole life stories that seemed to have a common climax: "...and then I came to Dr. Bastyr."

A pleasant self-effacing man, John Bastyr had a soft

fluttering voice and warm handshake. His questions were often about lifestyle and feelings, and he seemed to pay more attention to those answers than to test results or the opinions of previous doctors.

Dr. Bastyr's touch was

immensely gentle; the undulating quality in his speech was also in his hands. He chuckled frequently, but never to minimize my experiences or perceptions. He was quick to shake his head over my concerns, pat my hand, nod understandingly, or even

throw off the occasional unexpected volley at someone who had given me less good health care.

From the first moment of the first appointment till the last moment I saw him, I felt treated like an admired colleague... and like a favorite child. (I was 21 when I started seeing him.)

An appointment was always calming and reassuring, never stressful or insulting. But Bastyr didn't stint on giving hard assignments to patients. Numerous diet and exercise changes accompanied a regime of supplements, herbs, and homeopathics that were to be taken in most specific ways. It was the opposite of the quick fix or magic bullet approach.

When I came in and shared my concerns about this, Dr. Bastyr wrinkled his forehead with genuine empathy, though he was cheerily unimpressed with a desire to eat something other than eggplant or cauliflower. After I'd spread my well-prepared case before him, he'd suddenly brighten and say something like, "Have you been eating pineapple?" And there it was: a concession without conceding an inch. Pineapples were already on my list of okay foods.

Dr. Bastyr, of course, also allowed exploration room. At one point, with careful directions, I tried some other fruits and discovered he was right, naturally, and that I couldn't tolerate those at that time.

Sometimes, I'd be locked in a whirlpool of anxieties and fears. On those occasions also, I'd share my thoughts and feelings with this man who never made me feel I couldn't speak openly. Usually while I was talking, Dr. Bastyr was silently pattering around me, taking my temperature, feeling the muscle tension in my shoulders, counting my fingers, and taking note of my eye color. This busy work was calming and whether it

pertained or not, it made me feel something was being done, that I was being helped, healed.

dening techniques and raising herbs.

He talked recipes with my mother who adapted his

What to look for in a doctor:

- 1) An office that feels healthy and calm
- 2) Other patients who are pleased with their care
- 3) A doctor who pays attention to your concerns, questions, feelings
- 4) A healer who uses touch as well as words
- 5) No stress, insults, or quick fixes in appointments
- 6) Respect, humor, empathy
- 7) A partner in finding health care solutions

As a "hands on" doctor, Bastyr was also a chiropractor. As he adjusted the spine, Dr. Bastyr gave feedback about how the body before him was responding or resisting his manipulations. Every treatment felt like an intuitive dance. Never wasting adjustment time, Dr. Bastyr asked questions; some were health-related while many were about personal topics. These showed what a good listener he was but were more than random chitchat. They were part of his finely tuned diagnostic ability.

Dr. Bastyr was the consummate educator. Frequently, he took my hand and guided it to a spot to press for pain relief or explained his reasoning behind treatment suggestions. The concepts and vocabulary were never beyond layperson comprehension and never presented in the rapid-fire manner some medical folk use to impress or to discourage questions. Bodies and treatments were discussed in a way that made solutions seem accessible to natural intuition.

Truly, Dr. Bastyr made his patients feel they were special. My whole family saw him, but his relationship with each person was different. He spent hours talking to my father who shared his interests in natural organic gar-

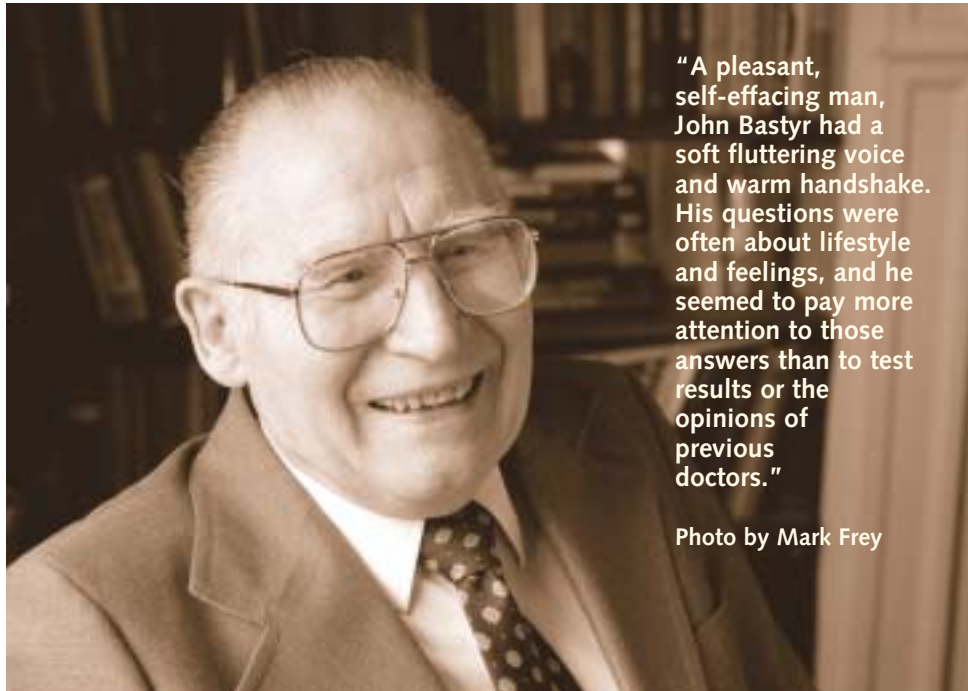
diets into several family favorites, including chicken stewed with tomatoes, "chicken pots" baked with mushrooms and okra, and peanut butter in papaya boats. He often delivered his Socratic solutions as though he was a little surprised we hadn't arrived at them yet ourselves. "You've got dandelion root, haven't you?" Or, "You like toasted coconut, don't you?"

All of this is still only a hint of what it was like to know Dr. Bastyr, to be fortunate enough to have him as a doctor and a friend. My mother and I were trying to quantify what it felt like just to be in his waiting room. She mentioned the feeling of joy that pervaded everything about him. I felt calm and hope. His effect on people seemed almost magical.

I think he would want health care professionals reading this to recognize their own magic; what each of us has to offer if we aspire to give our service to each other lovingly.

Dr. Bastyr's passing was indeed a sad time, but like most of his patients, I feel he left me with so much that it's not like he's entirely gone. I'm left saying, thank you again and forever, Dr. Bastyr.

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Photo by Mark Frey

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