



Perspective

By JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

Dr. Bacon Hardee's death was more than the passing of a great physician. It symbolized the passing of an age as well.

Medicine today has become specialized, automatized, computerized and, consequently, impersonalized. The era of the family doctor is rapidly fading. Most modern families are serviced by at least four doctors on a regular basis: one for the wife, one for the small children, another for the big children, and perhaps one for the husband. Then there are those called in for special occasions. Very few know their doctor personally. They can't. He's just too busy. Most of us drag our sick and broken bodies to the emergency room or the doctor's office where we wait in line much as you would wait to have the bent fender on your car repaired.

Dr. Hardee was not this kind of physician. Granted, he lived in a slower age. A skilled surgeon who could just as well have been classified as a pathologist, internist or obstetrician, yet he will be remembered by most of his patients as a warm, compassionate friend. A family doctor, he practiced medicine not as an end to making money, but as a means to the greater end of helping suffering people.

He once estimated he had delivered more than a thousand babies. I was one of those, delivered in a garage apartment. Many others of my generation, still living in Vero Beach, owe their health to the spank of Dr. Hardee's hand across their bottoms. To my knowledge, my 15-year-old daughter was the last baby he delivered — and that was as a personal favor to her grandparents.

But Dr. Hardee was the kind of man who did personal favors. I remember one lonely night, almost 30 years ago. My Dad was out of town and I had been left home with my mother, who had gotten sick. Her condition grew worse as the night dragged on, and, some time, about midnight, I got scared. Crying and shaking, I finally dialed Dr. Hardee's number. Within minutes he was at our house, and after he looked after my mother he put his arm around my shoulder and gave me the strength and confidence I needed to make it through the night.

Today, I would be lucky to get an answering service if I dialed at midnight.

I remember that little upstairs office on 14th Avenue where he looked up my nose trying to find a safety pin. I remember his electric needle burning warts off my fingers. I remember his gentle hands twisting a dislocated elbow back into place. It was those same hands that put the plaster of paris cast on my leg after I broke it in a high school football game. He lanced boils, stitched up cuts, doled out medicine and gave advice.

Doctor? Yes, but far more. Friend.

His constant encouragement to my younger brother, John, was one of the major factors that saw him through medical school and into his own practice of medicine in Tampa. To many of us he symbolized all that was right and good in the practice of medicine.

Dr. Hardee will be missed by many of us — for with him goes an era of the family doctor that will probably never return to our society.