

## Dr Robert Malcolm McFarlane:

**May 28, 1927 – February 27, 2006**

Jim Roth MD FRCSC FACS, Bing Siang Gan MD PhD FRCSC FACS

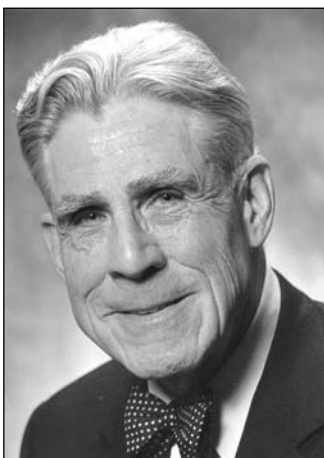
On February 27, 2006, Dr Robert (Bob) McFarlane, considered one of the pioneers of hand surgery and one of the giants in the history of Canadian plastic surgery, passed away.

Bob started his academic career in 1946 at the University of Western Ontario (UWO) in London, Ontario. During his undergraduate years from 1946 to 1950, he was a stellar athlete and played for the UWO Mustang football team. His team won the Yates Cup in four of those five years. Bob kicked the field goals and was the league's leading scorer in 1947 and 1949. Bob also excelled on the track team at UWO. He competed both indoors and outdoors against the world's best. He was the holder of five Canadian records and was the flag bearer for the Canadian Olympic team for the 1948 Summer Olympics in London, England. In subsequent meets, he twice defeated Arthur Wint, the 1948 Olympic champion at 400 m. In 1947 and 1950, Bob won the Norton Crowe Trophy as Canada's best amateur athlete. In 1950, Bob was also the unanimous selection for the Lou Marsh Trophy, which is annually awarded to Canada's top athlete as judged by a panel of journalists. Other, more recent, Lou Marsh Trophy winners have included hockey players Maurice Richard, Bobby Orr, Guy Lafleur and Wayne Gretzky, as well as golfers Sandra Post and Mike Weir. The 2005 winner was the National Basketball Association's Most Valuable Player Steve Nash. Bob was recognized as UWO's Athlete of the Century and will be inducted into the London Sports Hall of Fame late this year.

Bob chose to turn down an offer to play for the Montreal Alouettes and he voluntarily ended his track career at the age of 24 to fully concentrate on his surgical training. Inspired by his father, who was a professor in eye, ear, nose and throat surgery at UWO, Bob graduated from UWO with an MD in 1951. After medical school, Bob did a rotating internship at the Montreal General Hospital, followed by a residency in general surgery in London, Ontario under the legendary Dr Angus McLaughlin.

In 1954, he completed an MSc in surgery and in 1956 he became certified by the Royal College in the specialty of general surgery. Advanced training in plastic surgery was completed at the Mount Vernon Centre for Plastic Surgery in London, England, St James Hospital in Leeds, England and the Passavant Memorial Hospital in Chicago, Illinois.

In 1959, Bob returned to London and started his practice. He served as the Chairman of the Division of Plastic Surgery at the UWO from 1959 until 1994. He gave compassionate care to his patients and set high standards for himself and those he trained. During his tenure, he trained more than 40 plastic surgeons, who now practice all over North America. Bob was Chief of Surgery at Victoria Hospital in the mid 1980s. He was elected to the Council of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of



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Canada and became Chairman of the Specialty Committee on Plastic Surgery.

Throughout his career, Bob maintained a research interest and he became a world expert on Dupuytren's contracture. In classic publications, Bob changed the perception of Dupuytren's contracture by demonstrating that the disease follows anatomical structures and was not an amorphous fibromatosis. In his later years, he became very interested in the genetic background of the disease and his later research involved analysis of the migration patterns of the prehistoric tribes of Northern Europe as it related to the incidence of Dupuytren's contracture. Other research contributions include the description of the McFarlane rat flap, a model still in use in many laboratories all over the world. He was the author of 51 papers and 53 book chapters, and he was the editor of two books.

Bob was a sought-after speaker at major hand meetings worldwide. He served as president of the Canadian Society for Surgery of the Hand, and was one of only two Canadians to ever become President of the American Society for Surgery of the Hand. He is the only Canadian to ever serve as the President of the International Federation of Societies of Surgery of the Hand. For his lifelong contributions, the International Federation awarded him the Hand Surgery Pioneer Award in 1998 and the Canadian Society of Plastic Surgeons awarded him its Lifetime Achievement Award in 2004. Bob was founder of the Canadian Society for Surgery of the Hand Foundation (Manus Canada) and was on the board of the foundation until his death.

In 1992, Dr McFarlane co-founded the Hand and Upper Limb Centre, a combined plastic surgery and orthopedic surgery upper extremity unit. This unit, the largest of its kind in Canada with four plastic surgeons and seven orthopedic surgeons on staff, has become a nationally and internationally recognized centre of excellence for upper limb patient care, teaching and research.

Bob is survived by his wife Pat and daughters Janie, Wendy and Laurie, sons-in-law Cope and Brian and grandchildren Kristin, Robbie, Charles and Tommy.

One of Bob's favourite books was entitled *On the Shoulders of Giants* (1). It was written by Dr Joseph Boyes, a friend and colleague hand surgeon. This book documents the careers and accomplishments of notable hand surgeons from the 16th century to the mid 20th century. Dr Boyes emphasized that we have gained from the knowledge and experience from those who went before us. Certainly, this tenet holds true for us who have benefited tremendously from the shoulders of the giant, Dr Robert McFarlane. Bob will be missed and never forgotten.

### REFERENCE

1. Boyes JH. *On the Shoulders of Giants: Notable Names in Hand Surgery*. Philadelphia: JB Lippincott Company, 1976.

*The Lawson Health Research Institute, St Joseph's Hospital London, Ontario*

*Correspondence: Dr Bing Siang Gan, Hand and Upper Limb Centre, St Joseph's Hospital, London, Ontario. Telephone 519-646-6097, fax 519-646-6049, email bsgan@rogers.com*