

Donalda Jean McGeachy:

Pioneer in the Professions in North America

“Without communication, there is no true rehabilitation.”¹

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Introduction:

Like Ruth Lewis², and Isabel Richard³, Donalda McGeachy had an earlier career before she started working in speech therapy in her forties. And yet the contributions she made to the professions, the educational program at the University of Toronto and the provincial, national and international professional associations were accomplished in a relatively short time. During the time she practiced, she had a greater impact than many who had much longer careers.

Donalda’s⁴ Early Life and Careers:

Born in 1908, her early life is described in a book about her sister, Mary⁵. Mary worked for the League of Nations in Geneva, and later was a diplomat. Perhaps this influenced her younger sister who, it appears, alone among the early speech-language pathology pioneers in Canada, had an international focus. In the book is a wonderful photo of Donalda on the porch of her retirement home in Beaverton, Ontario.

Her father was an evangelist who traveled around southern Ontario and beyond. There were three daughters and one son. The daughters all had unusual careers. Donalda was the youngest, born in 1908 and named for her father. She maintained her last name was pronounced to rhyme with ‘Becky’ not ‘peachy’.

Kinnear states that Donalda worked as a nurse for many years but also worked as an actress in New York during World War II. Her interest in aphasia began during her work as a nurse. In 1950, she went to the University of Minnesota for her undergraduate

¹ McGeachy, Donalda J. (1961) Speech therapy in a general hospital. *Modern Medicine of Canada*, April, p. 61-70

² See *OSLA Connection*, Winter 2009-2010

³ Martin, V. (2009) The Five Petitioners on the Legislation. *Hearsay*. Fall 2009 and Winter 2010.

⁴ Her full name was Margaret Donalda Jean McGeachy but she never used her first name in any professional directories. Information from a family member via email Jan. 2010.

⁵ Kinnear, Mary (2004) *Woman of the World: Mary McGeachy and International Cooperation*. U of Toronto Press

degree in speech therapy. It is likely that she chose Minnesota because Hildred Schuell who specialized in aphasia was on the faculty.

Schuell⁶ was internationally known for her work in research, evaluation and treatment of aphasia. She was the first author of the book *Aphasia in Adults* and of the Minnesota Test for Differential Diagnosis of Aphasia.

Donalda was granted her bachelor's degree from Minnesota in 1954. She continued in graduate school and received her master's degree from The University of Iowa in 1955. She did additional graduate work at Iowa. Her first listing in the ASHA Directory is in 1957.

Surprisingly, Donalda is not mentioned in Eldridge⁷ although the beginning of the program at the University of Toronto is noted (p.170-171).

The Professions in Canada in 1950

In 1950, there were no educational programs in the professions in Canada nor any provincial nor national associations. The Ontario Speech and Hearing Association was founded in 1958 along with the Manitoba and Saskatchewan associations. The earlier ones were British Columbia (1957) and Quebec (1955).

The post-graduate diploma program that the University of Toronto started in 1958 was the first English educational program in the professions in Canada. Donalda was involved in the beginnings and is recognized as an early faculty member.

The Ontario Association had seven founding members.⁸ Donalda is not listed as a founder of the Ontario Speech and Hearing Association (OSHA)⁹. She apparently joined later.

In 1950 there were services in only six provinces and none documented in the territories. The services were primarily in major centres in each province.¹⁰ There is no published estimate of numbers of professionals working in Canada. The first published estimate was that in 1961 there were between 100 and 125 professionals in speech therapy and audiology working in Canada¹¹. That report did not differentiate the numbers between what are now considered two professions.

⁶ Kuster, Judith (2009) Accessed on line September 15, 2009 Foremothers of the speech pathology profession. www.mnsu.edu.comdis/kuster/history

⁷ Eldridge, Margaret (1967) *The history of the treatment of speech disorders*. Cheshire, Sydney, Australia

⁸ Bentham Christie (1998) the origins of OSLA (OSHA). *The OSLA Connection*, p.1. Jan vol. 25 no. 1

⁹ In 1986 the name was changed to The Ontario Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists with the acronym OSLA.

¹⁰ For founding dates of services in each province, educational programs and provincial associations, see Martin (2007) *The history of speech language pathology and audiology in Canada*. Martin. Winnipeg

¹¹ The estimate was in Hall, E. (1965) *The Royal Commission on Health Services*, Vol 2, Queen's Printer, Ottawa

There was no national association, although professionals working in Canada met at the American Speech and Hearing Association (ASHA) Conventions from 1952. The Canadian Speech and Hearing Association (CSHA) was not formally established until 1964. Meetings continued at ASHA conventions until 1966 when it was decided to hold future meetings in Canada.

Donalda's Professional Career as a Speech Therapist in Canada

Donalda returned to Canada about 1956, and began working at Toronto Western Hospital. Reportedly she had worked there, earlier as a nurse. As far as is known she worked at that facility during the remainder of her career. In her 1961 article in *Modern Medicine in Canada*, she is identified as Director of Speech Pathology, Toronto Western Hospital and Lecturer in Aphasia, Course in Speech Pathology and Audiology, Faculty of Medicine, University of Toronto.

Donalda is not listed in the first, June 1965 CSHA directory, but in the next 1971 Directory, she is listed as joining in 1965. She must have joined later in the year since the Directory was published in June and would have been tabulated some time earlier. Her 1971 listing includes that she was a consultant in aphasia for The Workmen's Compensation Board, Neurology Unit.

In the 1973 Listing of Personnel Working in Canada¹², there is with no employment listing with her name. Her membership in 'Inst of Logo and Phon' is not in the list of abbreviations for the directory. However it is clearly the International Association of Logopedics and Phoniatics. She is the only one in the Directory that is listed with that affiliation. She also listed her membership in the Academy of Aphasia.

She is documented in the history of the Academy of Aphasia as one of the group that "launched the ship" in 1962. She remained a member until 1975. The only documented record of her presenting a clinical paper was one she co authored, presented at the 1963 meeting of the Academy of Aphasia. Authorship of the paper titled 'Problems and Approaches in Aphasia Therapy' was shared with Ronald Tikofsky and Daniel Boone. Other papers at the session in 1963 were by such well-known professionals as Norman Geswind, Jon Eisenson, Eric Lennenberg, Harold Goodglass and Joseph Wepman.¹³

When Wendell Johnson, the pioneer in the professions at the University of Iowa, visited Toronto in the early 1960s, Donalda arranged for all of the five students at the University of Toronto educational program to have Sunday brunch with him. Johnson discussed the early days of the profession with the students.

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¹² Personnel working in Canada (1973) *Human Communication*. No. 2, Autumn

¹³ Information from Sarno, Martha Taylor (1986) *Academy of Aphasia: A twenty-five year history, 1960-1985*. On the website of the Academy of Aphasia, accessed November 4, 2008.

Offices in Professional Associations¹⁴

Donalda was active in three professional associations. In 1962 served as president of her provincial association, The Ontario Speech and Hearing Association (OSHA). She joined the CSHA early and served as its second president from 1966-1968. She was a founder of the Academy of Aphasia and served on its Executive as Secretary its first five years, 1962-1967.

She wrote the CSHA "President's Newsletters" during her term in office and the author believes that she was instrumental in planning the CSHA meetings in 1967, 68, and 69. All of the featured speakers at these three meetings were colleagues of hers from the Academy of Aphasia.

She is recalled as attending at least some of the meetings of professionals working in Canada that were held at the ASHA conventions from 1952 to the founding meeting in 1964 and the following two meetings in 1965 and 1966¹⁵. She is not documented at the 1964 founding meeting.

At the 1966 meeting, when Donalda assumed the office of President of CSHA, the group decided to hold its future meetings in Canada. Isabel Richard, the first president, marked this decision as being a milestone. Isabel later reported that with this decision, she knew then the association would continue.

The first CSHA meeting in Canada was held May 27, 1967 at Expo in Montreal, chaired by Donalda. After the CSHA annual meeting, the featured speaker was Wilder Penfield. His topic: The Second Languages and Brain Capacity¹⁶.

This author had written previously that all future meetings were held in conjunction with provincial association meetings. However in the President's Newsletters of 1968 and 69, recently made available, there are two stand-alone conferences in Toronto and Montreal. The major speakers at these meetings were colleagues of Donalda in the Academy of Aphasia. She not only participated in international associations but when she was president, invited professionals from other countries to speak at CSHA meetings.

¹⁴ The names of professional associations in North America like those in other places have changed over the years. The now American Speech-Language-Hearing association (ASHA) began in 1927 as the American Academy of Speech Correction and went through several name changes until its current name was adopted in 1978. The current Canadian Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists (CASLPA) was founded as the Canadian Speech and Hearing Association (CSHA) in 1964 and the name changed to its current one in 1985. The Ontario Speech and Hearing Association (OSHA) became The Ontario Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists (OSLA) in 1986.

¹⁵ Although there is no list of those who attended the meetings convened by Isabel Richard, certainly Donalda was at the 1965 meeting when she vice-president and at the 1966 meeting when she was elected president of CSHA and received the fellowship award from ASHA.

¹⁶ The program for the meeting is in the Archives of the Manitoba Speech and Hearing Association with notes in Isabel Richard's handwriting.

From 1970 to 1975 all CSHA meetings were held in conjunction with provincial meetings. In 1976 CSHA again held a 'stand alone' meeting in Halifax. The meeting is described as being sponsored by the then Atlantic Provinces Speech and Hearing Association.¹⁷

All the past presidents were contacted in 1984 to write a recollection for the 20th anniversary issue of *Human Communication Canada*¹⁸, the only CSHA periodical publication at the time. Unfortunately, there is none from Donalda although there are responses from Isabel and Mary Cardozo, the first and third presidents. Donalda moved after her retirement so perhaps the letter with the request did not reach her.

Publication

Her only publication¹⁹ she is known to author is the earlier cited "Speech Therapy" from 1961. Although she is identified as Director of Speech Pathology, the title uses the earlier terminology 'speech therapy'. The article is a philosophical discussion of her view of communication and begins: "Man (sic) is a talking animal."

"...Only man, of all the animal kingdom, has been given this ability; the ability to use symbols and therefore to be able to bring distance and space into the "Here" and "Now"; to tell succeeding generations about the past and to make plans for the future...speech...is a form of human behaviour which utilizes physiological, psychological, neurological, semantic and linguistic factors so extensively that it may well be considered man's most essential social and economic tool". (p.61)

Donalda discusses her role and responsibilities in the hospital and comments on the different types of patients seen. "...In the years since our department was set up seventy-five percent of the patients seen and treated have recovered speech and language which is functional. The percentage recovery of those patients who have been referred to Outpatients' Clinic from other centres and therefore at a later date is much lower..." Her article ends with "Such results are not achieved easily. They come only after the continued efforts of a group of highly trained specialists in the field of "rehabilitation"-of which the Speech Pathologist is only one. To this end all members of the medical team are dedicated-to heal the sick. Let them also be dedicated to the belief that the sick, once healed, shall be restored to their world again-that they shall indeed be rehabilitated. Man is a talking animal -and each person has the inalienable right to communicate with his fellow man." (p.70)

¹⁷ The Atlantic Provinces association was founded in 1963 and dissolved in 1978. The only published description is in the 1969 publication, Kuttner's *Speech Pathology and Audiology in Canada*. There is no written history nor available publication of the association that this author could locate. In 1978 when the association was dissolved, each Atlantic province subsequently formed its own association.

¹⁸ In 1981 the executive of CSHA amalgamated its two publications, the newsletter *HearHere* and the journal *Human Communication* in one, *Human Communication Canada*. This title was changed to the *Journal of Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology* and later Canadian was added.

¹⁹ The author is indebted to Frances Ezerzer, a student of Donalda, for the reference of this article.

Honours

Donalda is the first professional working in Canada who received the designation of “fellow” from the American Speech and Hearing Association. She is not listed as a fellow on the ASHA website. However, in the new ASHA national headquarters there is a meeting area designated the Fellows’ Room. She is listed on a plaque in the room with the date 1966. She is also listed in the February 1967 issue of ASHA Journal as being elected the previous year.

On the ASHA website the description of the award states: “The ASHA fellowship recognizes professional or scientific achievement and is given to members who have made outstanding contributions to the professions. The award is one of the highest honors that ASHA can bestow and is retained for life.”²⁰

Later in 1981 along with the two other early presidents, she received the Medal for Outstanding Professional Achievement (now the Eve Kassirer Award for Outstanding Professional Achievement) from CSHA. The citation published in *HearHere* June 1981 states “The Medal for Outstanding Professional Achievement may be given to a member in recognition of outstanding contributions to the profession in the area of education, organizational service, administration and such other areas as may be deemed appropriate...”

Donalda joined Isabel Richard and Mary Cardozo at the podium in Edmonton to receive the award and a photo was published in *HearHere*. At that time, it actually was a medal and the hand printed calligraphy citation was signed by the then president, Margaret Roberts.

The Executive Committee Resolution read:

- “Whereas: Founding of the Canadian Speech and Hearing Association established a National organization filling the needs of the communicatively impaired; and
- Whereas: the success of the Canadian Speech and Hearing Association is in large part due to the efforts of its early leaders and founders; and
- Whereas; Three founders of the Association provided leadership, dedication and encouragement to the profession by serving as president; and

²⁰ ASHA website accessed October 1, 2009

- Whereas; The Association desires to recognize the contributions to the professions of its first three presidents;
- Therefore be it resolved that: The Canadian Speech and Hearing Association confers its Medal for Outstanding Professional achievement on,

Isabel Richard: President 1964-66
 Donalda McGeachy: President 1966-68
 Mary Cardozo: President 1968-69”

In the CSHA Directory for 1977-79, Donalda is listed as ‘retired’

CASLPA does list that she received its silver certificate in 1989. The certificates were given to professionals who had practiced twenty-five years or more. After she retired, Donalda moved to Beaverton, Ontario. She died in 1991.

The Heritage of Donalda McGeachy

Donalda deserves the designation of pioneer in the profession in Canada. She was a pioneer in establishing services and she was a pioneer in the establishment of the educational program at the University of Toronto. She was a pioneer in the establishment of three professional associations. She is the first professional in Canada to extend her influence both inside and outside the country.

As a founder of the Academy of Aphasia and on its executive for its first five years, she made a significant contribution. As well she was an early president of OSHA and of CSHA. She no doubt had an influence on the early students at the University of Toronto. Her name and contributions are remembered in the Donalda McGeachy Scholarship Funds and in the Donalda McGeachy Memorial Lectures, both at the University of Toronto.

The scholarship award is given every year to an incoming student in the professional degree program in speech-language pathology. The primary criterion for the scholarship is academic excellence. The remainder of the fund has been reserved to provide bursary funds for students who require financial assistance. The primary criterion for the latter is financial need.

The Donalda McGeachy Memorial Lectures occur on a semi regular schedule every few years. The department chair and an advisory committee make the decisions on the timing and the speaker. The lectures are open to the speech-language pathology community at no charge. There have been three to date.²¹

In a tribute to Donalda in 1994, Margaret Stoicheff said,

²¹ Information on the scholarship and lectureship received from a faculty member at the University of Toronto in an email October 14, 2009

“...Those of us who were fortunate to know her, will remember her for her dedication to the profession, to her clients and to the students...”

All of the current professionals owe a debt to Donalda for her contributions to the clinical practice, to the educational program at the University of Toronto and to the professional associations. We can repay that debt by insuring that the professions that we leave for the future are stronger than the ones we inherited from those pioneers represented by Donalda.