

# LEADERSHIP

DR. BETTE STEPHENSON



ONTARIO ASSOCIATION OF FORMER PARLIAMENTARIANS

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## **Ontario Association of Former Parliamentarians**

We are pleased to announce that the recipient of this year's  
Distinguished Service Award

is

**Dr. Bette Stephenson**

**Dr. Bette Stephenson** was elected 4 terms (1975-87), during which time she held 4 Cabinet posts, including Treasurer, was Deputy Premier and Chair of Management Board. She was a member of the medical staff, a Director of the Out-patient Department, and Chief of the Department of General Practice at Women's College Hospital. She was also a member of the medical staff at North York General Hospital. She was a founding member of the College of General Practice in Canada, now known as the College of Family Physicians Canada. She was also the first female member of the board of directors of the Ontario Medical Association and the Canadian Medical Association, and served as the first female president of both organizations

In the 1990s, Stephenson was appointed as a Board Member on the province's new Education Quality and Accountability Office, which monitors and reports to the public on the performance of the education system. From 1997 to 2005, she was Chairman of the Learning Opportunities Task Force. She is a founding member of the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research and is involved with the group, the Gwillimbury Foundation who is attempting to build a university in Queensville, Ontario.

In 1992, she was made an Officer of the Order of Canada in recognition for having «made exceptional contributions to society throughout her career». In 1999, she was awarded the Order of Ontario. The Bette Stephenson Centre for Learning was named after her. In 2013, she was inducted into the Canadian Medical Hall of Fame.



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INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

# Leadership

“A good leader inspires people to have confidence in the leader, a great leader inspires people to have confidence in themselves.” – Eleanor Roosevelt

Remembering Ontario’s Leaders is a series of special issues of The InFormer, one which takes a look at the lives of former Members of the Provincial Parliament of Ontario beyond their political accomplishments. These are the special individuals who contributed substantively to many parts of community life; visionaries who were able to blend political skills with the drive to make a difference in other areas such as the arts, culture, business, education, and science.

These special issues look at accomplishments by politicians who used their unique leadership qualities to have a profound effect on our society. The individuals featured in this series are people who embodied the essence of leadership: compassion, vision, courage, accountability, responsibility, self-awareness, and encouragement. They were builders and innovators. They led by example, inspiring others to dream bigger, work harder, and be creative. In my humble view, their unique lives have never received the recognition they so richly deserve.

Our editorial team will explore the lives of former Members of Provincial Parliament who sadly are no longer with us. As you the reader consider the stories we publish, you may think of other former Members who fit the description used here of leaders who went beyond the bounds of electoral politics. If so, please suggest their names to me.

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\* All quotations in this publication, unless otherwise noted, are from “A short history of a long life – A Memoir” by Dr. Bette Stephenson,





# **Dr. Bette Mildred Stephenson**

## **Early Years**

“My father’s often-stated conviction that I could do anything I wanted was powerful. My mother also fostered independence in quiet, day-to-day ways.”

Bette Mildred Stephenson

This story begins in a second floor bedroom of a plain white stucco house on Ransom Street, Aurora, Ontario. There, on July 31st, 1924, Bette Mildred Stephenson, first child of proud parents Mildred and Carl Stephenson, came into this world.

The doctor who helped deliver the baby was someone who did not realize at the time that he would be the role model for Bette when she would become a medical practitioner.

By age four Bette had learned to read. A year later she was clamouring to go to school.

“Whatever I learned about reading before grade one, I learned from watching the words as my mother read them aloud. I found books much more interesting than dolls, and for a person who later would have six children showed surprisingly little interest in playing mommy.”\*

\*pg.9

The barrier to Bette’s fervent desire to attend school was two fold. There was no kindergarten at the local school and age 6 was the entry age for grade one. Bette made the barriers disappear by badgering her father about attending school. Eventually, by the end of Sep-

tember 1929, Carl Stephenson had convinced the Principal of Aurora Public School to admit his bright 5 year old daughter into grade one.

The excitement about being in school was short lived. There had been an outbreak of scarlet fever and Bette had been exposed. She had a step infection, ran a fever and was very tired. Dr. Devins, the Stephenson's family doctor, was called. He had done a paediatric internship in Detroit and recognized the problem. Bed rest was prescribed. Bette's bed was moved to the dining room where she stayed for nearly two months, nursed by her mother and grandmothers, and visited almost daily by Dr. Devins. The experience resulted in the determination of a career path.



**baby Bette, mother Clara Mildred Stephenson, grandmother Eliza May Draper, great-grandmother Sarah Dinah Wass**

“Because of Dr. Devins, my encounter with rheumatic fever left me with a life goal: I was going to be a doctor. I was so impressed with him, his skill and humanity, that I was adamant whenever anyone asked me. I was five and a half but I knew my goal and nothing would stop me.” \* \*pg.13

### Grades Two To Thirteen

The Stephenson family moved from Aurora to Willowdale, a suburb of Toronto, in time for Bette to start grade two at Queen Mary Public School. At the end of that first year in her new school Bette was allowed to by-pass grade three. Her academic life in elementary school is perhaps best summarized by Bette. “My elementary school teachers were an eager group and I was the pudgy little pupil who gobbled up everything they had to offer.”\* \*pg.16

Bette Stephenson was introduced to public speaking in her first year at Earl Haig Collegiate. Winning the grade nine elocution contest encouraged her to vie for the championship each year. Bette joined the school choir, learned German, French and Latin, and excelled in every subject. She was named Valedictorian for the Graduation Ceremony of 1941. Understandably much of her speech was about how the war had affected everyone's life. This perceptive 16 year old offered an astute observation, “We have been taught by world crisis that to make democracy a living force for betterment we must be ready to make sacrifices for it. We must guard against the subtle forces of fascism.”\* \*pg.24 When she graduated from grade 13, at age 16, she had earned a scholarship for university entrance to Honour Science. More importantly, Bette Mildred Stephenson was getting closer to being a doctor.

# Awards and Honours

- Officer, Order of Canada:
- Officer, Order of Ontario
- Officer, Order of St. John
- Canadian Medical Hall of Fame
- Fellow of the College of Family Physicians of Canada
- Canadian Centennial Medal
- Queen Elizabeth II Silver Jubilee Medal
- Queen Elizabeth II Golden Jubilee Medal
- Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal
- Doctor of Letters (Hon.) Nipissing University (D. Litt)
- Doctor of Laws (LLD) University of Toronto
- B'Nai B'rith's Woman of the Year Award
- Citation for Outstanding Public Service by the Council for Exceptional Children (first Canadian to receive this Award)
- Governor General's Award in Commemoration of the Persons' Case



**Bette receives Order of Canada from Governor General Adrienne Clarkson**

## Trail Blazing As The First Woman to be....

- Minister of Labour in Ontario
- Minister of Education in Ontario
- Minister of Colleges and Universities in Ontario
- Minister of Finance in Ontario
- Deputy Premier in Ontario
- President of the Canadian Medical Association
- President of the Ontario Medical Association



# Leadership Medicine

“She was driven by self-determination”  
- Canadian Medical Hall of Fame

It was a remarkable journey. The youthful yearning to be a doctor, in the 1920's, sparked a medical adventure which culminated, more than eight decades later, in Dr. Bette Mildred Stephenson being inducted into the Canadian Medical Hall of Fame.

Even as a newly minted Doctor, at the tender age of 21, leadership qualities emerged. She was an Intern at Toronto Western Hospital in 1946 when...“On one memorable occasion I steadfastly challenged a surgeon's diagnosis of gallstones. There was only one X-ray and I felt it was insufficiently clear to make a diagnosis. My opinion, firmly held and stated, was that the patient did



**OMA Annual Meeting 1969 - Executive Committee, 1969-1970 Standing L to R: Vice President, Dr. J. H. Walters; President Dr. James Small Seated L to R: Past President Dr. William J. Melvin; Board Chair, Dr. Bette Stephenson; Honorary Treasurer, Dr. Louis R. Harnick**

tient did not have gallstones. The surgeon preferred his diagnosis, performed the surgery and was proven wrong. There were no gallstones. I remember overhearing one of his colleagues saying, 'Why didn't you listen to Bette? She knew the woman didn't have gallstones.' I was rather glad I wasn't looking the surgeon in the eye when he answered."\* \*pg.31

Being a family doctor and delivering more than 5,000 babies might not have happened. During Bette's Intern year at Toronto Western Hospital, the possibility of a career in radiology presented itself with the impending retirement of the Chief Radiologist of Women's College Hospital, Dr. Elizabeth Stewart. The prospect was appealing to Bette and she logged it in her 'To Do Book'.

Bette's family doctor was Dr. McAteer. Bette had agreed to work in Dr. McAteer's practice, with an assistant, Dr. McDougall, that summer so that Dr. McAteer could take a long-awaited holiday. As luck would have it, while on holiday Doctor McAteer fell off a ladder and broke his wrist. He asked Bette to take over the practice until he could return to work. It didn't take long for Bette to realize that family practice was the vocation for her. "I loved the chance to know whole families and work with them through their various concerns, and I loved obstetrics. Delivering babies was a joyous experience for me and the parents – each safe delivery was a miracle to be celebrated."\* \* pg. 33

The broken wrist mended, and Dr. McAteer resumed his practice. He and his medical partner Dr. McDougall were



**Dr. O'Donnell, President (concurrent) Irish, British and Canadian Medical Associations presents a Waterford crystal bowl to Dr. Bette Stephenson. The bowl then became part of the C.M.A. archive collection. On the left is Dr. Reginald D. Atkinson, General Council Speaker (1969-1978)**

happy to include Dr. Stephenson. It was the end of the war and a baby boom was underway. An abundance of women patients who preferred a woman doctor to deliver their babies convinced Bette that it was time for her to set up her own practice.

The years 1946 to 1949 were three very active and rewarding years for Bette Stephenson. She got engaged and married Allan Pengelly, a Naval Officer who went to Medical School after the war. The doctor couple established a family practice in their home and Bette became a staff member of Women's College Hospital. Six months later, age 25, she was appointed Chief of Obstetrics.

Bette Stephenson was very busy; an active family practice, hospital responsibilities and starting a family. She had declared at the time of the wedding that she and Allan would have 6 children. In the span of 12 years, 1949 to 1961, 6 children were born. Bette, however,





**OMA Annual Meeting - CMA President, Dr. Bette Stephenson presents the CMA Medal of Service to Dr. Glenn Sawyer, retired OMA General Secretary**

didn't let being busy cloud her vision.

"Being a family physician had always been my dream and my practice in Willowdale (Toronto) didn't disappoint me in any way. I loved the thrill of the delivery room where every healthy baby was a miracle. I felt privileged to share the lives of patients who were willing to trust me with their problems, both personal and medical, and I was challenged every day by the complexities of diagnosis and treatment. Given all these satisfactions, I sometimes ask myself why I was attracted to the larger more public realms of medical organizations. If I was to offer my time and energies, I had to believe that these organizations could improve the practice of medicine for doctors and their patients across the province or country. I had to believe in the value of what they could accomplish."\* \*pg.59

Bette was interested in what the Ontario Medical Association did as an organization. While attending a meeting at the OMA building in Toronto in 1951, she had a casual conversation with a family doctor from Lucknow, Ontario, Dr. Victor Johnston. Dr. Johnston's concept was to ultimately have a

Canadian College of Family Physicians. The Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons was more focused on specialists, with seemingly little interest in family physicians. The idea was to start a Toronto branch of the OMA which would eventually become an Ontario College of Family Physicians. He wanted Bette to have a major role in starting the Toronto branch.

Three years later the Toronto branch became part of a national organization, got a grant from the Canadian Medical Association and the College of Family Physicians of Canada was founded. The main focus of the College was to improve the standards of clinical practice, but there was also a concern about the role of family doctors. Patients were beginning to assume a hierarchy, something reinforced by hospitals which were staffed almost entirely by specialists. Often patients would self diagnose and make an appointment with a specialist without seeing a family doctor first. The result was that sometimes the patient ended up seeing the wrong specialist. Eventually, through the efforts of the College of Family Physicians, referrals to specialists came from family doctors.

## Canadian Medical Associations



**Dr. Bette Stephenson, President Canadian Medical Association 1974-75, congratulated by Past President, Dr. Gustave Gingras**

A public health education exhibit, billed as Mediscope, held at the C. N. E. (Canadian National Exhibition), Toronto in 1959 turned out to be a springboard for Bette Stephenson. She was a member of the Committee which created Mediscope. Not only was it a great public relations success for the OMA, but it focused the attention of the OMA Board of Directors on Bette Stephenson.

The Executive Director of the OMA invited Bette to join the Board. Alas, the all-male board of directors was not ready to accept a woman at the table. The following year, however attitudes seemed to have changed a bit and Bette was elected to the Board. In 1970 she became the first woman President of the Ontario Medical Association. Four years later Bette became the first woman President of the Canadian Medical Association.

Leadership Roles  
Ontario and

1964 – 1972	Board of Directors, OMA
1970 – 1971	President, OMA
1968 – 1972	Board of Directors, CMA
1972 – 1973	Chair of the Board, CMA
1973 – 1974	President-Elect, CMA
1974 – 1975	President, CMA
1975 – 1976	Past President, CMA

## A Decade and a Half Devoted to Medical Leadership 1960 - 1975

Bette Stephenson's juggling act included the following; co-managing a family medical practice with her husband, Dr. Allan Pengelly, being Chief of the Department of Family Medicine as well as Director of Obstetrics at Women's College Hospital, traveling Ontario as President of the OMA, leading a delegation to China as Chair of the CMA, hosting a weekly CBC television series on early childhood education, serving as a member on the Committee on Ethics of the World Medical Association, working with Dr. Fraser Mustard as an appointee to a Task Force on Health Services in Ontario and the demanding executive roles in both the OMA and the CMA.

The executive role came at a time of a vigorous national debate on abortion. In 1963 Bette was invited to serve on a committee that would articulate the CMA's position on abortion and present that position to the federal government. The reality of medical practice was that abortions were being performed in hospitals by qualified doctors, in the interest of their patients. It was a criminal offense, but the government was not enforcing the law. The CMA committee met with the Minister of Justice, Pierre Trudeau. They came away with an understanding that abortion would be removed from the Crimi-

nal Code. When that didn't happen, Bette was angry that the CMA position was not accepted and furious that Minister Trudeau's verbal commitment had not been honoured. "Some years later when I was in Ottawa on CMA business I met Prime Minister Trudeau at an event. In no uncertain terms I reminded him of his failed commitment to the CMA position on abortion. He'd made a promise when we met and failed to keep when the legislation was drafted. He was taken aback at my forthrightness but with very little hesitation said that he might have agreed with us at the time, but had rethought the issue and realized he couldn't support what the CMA wanted." pg.66 Bette realized that political expediency had intervened. The amendments to the Criminal Code allowed exceptions if the mother's physical or mental health were at risk. It wasn't until 1988 that abortion was no longer a crime in Canada, when the Supreme Court ruled that the abortion provisions in the Criminal Code were unconstitutional.

During the tumultuous time of the late 60's and early 70's, Bette Stephenson provided such dynamic leadership to decriminalize abortion that some CMA board members wanted her impeached. Meeting challenges straight on was Bette's preferred style, so when the Board members confessed they didn't know how to impeach her, she provided instruction. In the end there was no move to impeach.

In addition to the myriad of obligations and responsibilities, there were, as of October 1961, six young children for Bette and Allan to raise. Certainly Bette had an incredible juggling act to perform. She did so with remarkable success, both professionally and as a parent. Not that

there wasn't some second guessing on her part. "Perhaps I have a little guilt from time to time that some things have had to take short shrift and I suppose my family feels that from time to time. The quality has been great rather than the quantity. We're a very close family. My mother and father live next door and my brother and sister-in-law next door to them so we really live in a family compound"\* \*pg.6 OMA interview 1976

Dr. Stephenson helped promote medical research in Canada including the development of the Ontario Research Development Challenge Fund, an Ontario government agency with a man-

**"She successfully  
contributed to putting  
the practice of family  
medicine on the  
international medical  
map and, in turn, inspired  
countless women to  
pursue careers in  
medicine."**

**- Canadian Medical Hall of  
Fame**

date to promote research excellence and partnerships between research institutions and business. She promoted the MaRS Discovery District, a not-for-profit corporation founded in Toronto, in 2000, whose goal is to commercialize publicly funded medical research and other technologies with the help of local private enterprises and as such is a public-private partnership. She was a founding member of the Canadian Institute of Advanced Research and a trustee of the Ontario Innovation Trust.

#### A Presence in the Middle East

Combining her knowledge, expertise and passion for education and medicine Bette Stephenson accomplished a number of significant projects in the Middle East. It all started in the early 80's when she was



Minister of both Education and Colleges and Universities, and continued beyond her retirement from Queen's Park in 1987.

In 1981 Minister Stephenson was approached by Canada's Foreign Affairs to be part of a group that would establish a Canadian presence in Middle East education. The goal, linked to Canadian consular services in the region, was to respond to requests for assistance, making use of Canadian expertise. Jordan was first on the list where the need identified was technical education. A medical school was needed at United Arab Emirates University in Abu Dhabi. This project led to developing 6 Colleges modeled on the Ontario Community College system. In Kuwait assistance in developing secondary education programs was needed. In Bahrain a partnership was created between their Institute of Technology and Ryerson University (Toronto). The Sultan of Oman deemed a new hospital essential. These projects were launched in the early 1980's, with most of them coming to fruition after the 1985 Ontario general election. One country which had extended an invitation and was not visited was Saudi Arabia. Bette declined the invitation after she was informed that she would need to be sworn in as a male. "I was born female, and I'll remain female. I will not become an honorary male."\* \*pg.109



“When I was appointed Minister of Colleges and Universities in 1985 I learned of Bette’s educational and hospital projects in the Middle East. I received an invitation to attend opening ceremonies for some of these accomplishments. Since it was Bette Stephenson as Cabinet Minister who had done the ground breaking work I thought it was appropriate that she be invited to join our official group traveling to Saudi Arabia, North Yemen, Oman, The Emirates, and Kuwait. Her passion for education and medicine were at the centre of creating valuable partnerships in the Middle East. Particularly remarkable was the building of Oman’s first comprehensive hospital. Bette organized the various aspects of establishing a hospital; a design which is functional, an effective, efficient administration model and staffing with the appropriate medical professionals.” - Greg Sorbara, former Minister of Colleges and Universities

After Bette Stephenson left the political arena she was invited by the private sector firms to continue in partnership with their educational ventures and she was glad to do so. Altogether there were a dozen or more trips to Middle East destinations. She worked in Jordan, Yemen and the states bordering the Persian Gulf: United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar and Oman.

In 2013 Dr. Bette Mildred Stephenson was inducted into the Canadian Medical Hall of Fame, her peers officially recognizing her impressive achievements in medicine, education and politics.



**Canadian team in United Arab Emirates 1986 L of Bette is Greg Sorbara, Minister of Colleges and Universities**



**PHOTO CREDIT: (Murry/Macleans)**



**Dr. Stephenson at work - 1974**

# In Discussion with Allyson Harrison

By: David Cassels

**“I think [Dr. Bette Stephenson] wanted to make the world a better place than it was when she came into it.” - Dr. Allyson Harrison**

Dr. Allyson Harrison is the Clinical Director of the Regional Assessment and Resource Centre at Queen’s University, where she also holds an appointment as an Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology. She worked alongside Dr. Bette Stephenson on a task force to research best practices for supporting students with learning disabilities as they transitioned into postsecondary education. Through this work she was able to form a friendship with both Dr. Stephenson and her husband Dr. G. Allan Pengelly.

## The Learning Opportunities Task Force

In 1997 Ontario Finance Minister Ernie Eves launched the Learning Opportunities Task Force (LOTF). He felt that too few students with learning disabilities received the help they required to successfully transition to post-secondary education. The task force funded various research projects designed to help students with learning disabilities gain entry into and success in the post-secondary environment. Dr. Bette Stephenson was the chair of the task force.

“When [Dr. Stephenson] was appointed chair of the task force, she sought a group of experts to help advise her. One of her initial advisors suggested that she approach me because they were aware of my expertise in learning disabilities,” Dr. Harrison explained.

“I certainly knew of Bette Stephenson even before then, because my dad, many years ago, had been in politics and had worked with

Bette Stephenson,” Dr. Harrison’s father is the late Dr. Bob Elgie, the former Labour Minister who worked alongside Dr. Stephenson in the Ontario Legislature.

## An Inspirational Woman

Dr. Stephenson’s ascent through medicine and politics as a woman during a time when traditional gender roles were even more rigid than they are today is an inspiration to many Canadians, including Dr. Harrison.

“To go through medicine as a woman in her generation, I can’t even imagine what that was like,” Dr. Harrison expressed, “I think it takes someone who’s pretty confident in themselves and their own ability to do that.

“I grew up with a mother who was a professional and worked outside the home. My mom is 10 years younger than Dr. Stephenson was, and even in those days my mom was one of the very few professional women who worked outside the home full time. When I met Dr. Stephenson I was in awe of all that I knew she had accomplished. To be a married female professional who worked full time outside the home in the 1940’s - that was pretty much unheard of in her generation. Women just didn’t do that, you stayed home and you had babies and were a homemaker.

“There’s another parallel I can make between Dr. Stephenson and my mom, which is that, in those days if you didn’t have a spouse who was willing to support you in having a career I don’t think you could have made it, no matter how much grit

and determination you had,” Dr. Harrison reflected, “it took a partner who was very content and secure in their own personhood to be able to say, ‘I’m not threatened by your success as a woman.’”

Dr. Harrison described Dr. Bette Stephenson’s husband, Dr. G. Allan Pengelly, as a “big fan and big supporter” of all of his wife’s work.

“When she decided to go into politics he was more than willing to support her. If you think that being a doctor and being on call and having office hours is a lot of work, try campaigning for a legislature seat!

“If you don’t have a spouse who is willing to say, ‘I’ll hold down the fort while you go off campaigning’ or ‘you’re not going to be home tonight... I’m happy to stay home with the kids, I’ll read them the bedtime stories’ if you don’t have that it is really hard to succeed as a woman in politics (or in any profession) even if you have the drive, determination and ability.

“[Dr. Pengelly] was one of the kindest, sweetest men I’ve ever met. It wasn’t that he was a pushover... it was more that he really cared about his wife. He wanted her to succeed as much as possible and he would do anything that he could to help.”

#### Working Alongside Dr. Bette Stephenson

“Dr. Stephenson was a very strong-willed, no-nonsense type of person. To give you some idea of what she was like, you’d walk into her office and she had this enormous desk and behind her chair was this big poster with a close-up picture of a lizard’s

head with its tongue coming out and a caption that said ‘save time, see it my way!’

“If she decided that something was going to happen in one direction, you’d have to come up with a lot of good reasons and state your case persuasively in order to have things change course,” Dr. Harrison painted a vivid picture of what it was like to work alongside Dr. Stephenson.

“For someone of her era, she was a force with whom to be reckoned. She was not a shrinking violet at all. Bette Stephenson was very fair, but she was very tough minded and didn’t suffer fools gladly.”

Spencer Harrison was a successful student with a learning disability in the LOTF successful project, and he painted this picture. When Dr. Stephenson saw the picture and the written explanation given about it by the student, she felt that it illustrated perfectly the vision she had for the task force. <sup>1</sup> She then sought permission for our task force to use this picture as our official logo during the course of the project.

“She was very passionate about issues to do with education and educating students with disabilities. Educational equity and inclusivity were terms that were very near and dear to her heart.

“I think she wanted to make the world a better place than it was when she came into it. That was one of the biggest things that motivated her, to do our official logo during the course of the project.

what she thought was right, and to make the world and the services we provide people better. She certainly wasn't in it for her own self aggrandizement or to make money; if she wanted to do that she would have never gone into politics, she would have just stayed in medicine.

"She had this vision of where she wanted to go. And she was so passionate about it that people would follow along with her. They wanted to be pulled along in her wake, because they really believed in the causes for which she fought and the ideals she espoused."

#### Footnote

In our final task force report, we quote this student's description of the painting: "One of the most important components of any special needs department is the sense of belonging that it creates or restores for the student. Being diagnosed as an LD student isolated me from the greater community of students. Once I got involved with the Special Needs Department and accessed the tools I needed to work with my learning disabilities, I no longer felt isolated. In fact, I was now a member of two communities, the supportive special needs community and the competitive greater student body. It's About Belonging is a painting which illustrates these feelings for me. The boat in the extreme foreground of the painting was intended to be a metaphorical rendering of me, or any other LD student, before they join the Special Needs community, represented by the boats in the background. The boat in the foreground could also be read as the LD student, having gained the necessary tools, now a little more enlightened, excelling ahead of the others. In either case, the boat in the foreground is a little different in shape and reflection from the others, but strong, bright and beautiful."



**Christmas at home**



**Wedding June 12, 1948**



# In Discussion with Ruth Briden

By: David Warner

Ruth Briden, now age 88, remembers her family doctor vividly and with great affection. “Doctor Stephenson was the right doctor for me. She was caring, gentle and considerate; there was never a ‘poor me’ approach. Nothing was sugar coated. It might not have worked for everyone, but it was perfect for me.”

“The visits to the Pengelly and Stephenson family practice on McKee Avenue,” explained Ruth, “would almost always involve Dr. Stephenson being late. The office secretary, known simply as Mrs. D, was a formidable force, supplying an effective screen for the extremely busy Dr. Stephenson. Mrs. D. was a great defender of the doctor’s schedule; stating ‘you have an appointment with the doctor, which she hopes to keep’. It didn’t really matter that she would be late. She was usually late because she was delivering a baby. I always felt that I was very blessed to have her as my doctor.”

All of Ruth Briden’s three children were delivered by Dr. Stephenson. Ruth explained that while she always anticipated having to wait for her office appointment, the doctor would never be late at the hospital when it was time to deliver a baby. [Dr. Bette Stephenson delivered more than 5,000 babies.] “I never had a doubt about her [Dr. Stephenson] not being there. I always felt her strong, comforting presence in the delivery room.”

At the time of the birth of Ruth’s third child, the term ‘learning disability’ was not commonly used. When Ruth told Dr. Stephenson that there was something just not right with her son, Dr. Stephenson quickly referred Ruth and her son to Toronto’s Sick Children’s Hospital, and he was diagnosed as having a learning disability. As a result he had to attend a weekly Saturday program at the hospital for six months, an effort which was helpful, but not entirely successful.

Ruth Briden was surprised when Dr. Stephenson announced she would be running for election to Queen’s Park. “I thought at the time that she must have felt she had something to contribute to politics; otherwise he would have remained a family doctor.”

I asked Ruth what she believed was the primary quality which made Dr. Stephenson so successful as a doctor and as a politician. “It was her dogged determination”, she said.



**Bette (on left) with colleague – Mediscope C.N.E. Toronto 1961**



# Leadership Politics

“Up to four months before the 1975 election in which I became an Ontario MPP, I had not thought seriously about entering politics; in fact, I had not thought about it at all. I had been busy doing the things I loved; being a family doctor, participating in professional organizations and raising a family.”\* \*pg.72

Bette Stephenson, following her mother's lead, had joined the local Conservative riding association. Although Bette wasn't politically active, her son Stephen had been sign chairman for Dalton Bales, the local Progressive Conservative MPP. Dalton, a senior cabinet minister, was retiring for health reasons. He approached Bette about her being the candidate to replace him, mentioning that she was the first person he thought of as his replacement. Bette listened politely, then turned down the offer. Dalton returned two weeks later to see if Bette had reconsidered. Bette once again said no. An anticipated September election was just two months away. Dalton Bales needed a change of tactics for his third attempt to land this candidate. He decided to visit Bette after church on a Sunday when the entire family would be at home. His visit sparked a family meeting, with Bette asked to stay in the kitchen. The rest was history in the making!



**News conference with Hon. Flora MacDonald, M.P.**

Everything Bette Stephenson did in life involved total commitment, enthusiasm and vision. Politics was no exception. Bette entered her first election, in 1975, concerned about the welfare of children, their health and education, and the role of women. “When I looked at my female classmates at Earl Haig, I saw how many of them, despite being very bright, had careers that ended with working at Simpsons or Eatons or an insurance company, all on the lower rungs of the company ladder.”\* \*pg.74 She was also interested in the role government could play in the development of science and research.

#### First Woman Minister of Labour in Canada

Shortly after Bette Stephenson’s election, she was asked by Premier Davis if she would like to be Minister of Labour. Bette reacted with surprise. “I couldn’t be minister of anything. I’m brand new and know nothing about labour, aside from delivering babies.”\* pg.79

Premier Davis then outlined why he had asked her. “I have three reasons for doing so. First, there’s never been a woman Minister of Labour in Canada, and I think it’s time. Second, I want to move Occupational Health and Safety to Labour, and your background as a doctor could be very useful. Third, all of my advisors have advised against it.”\* \*pg.79

In the span of a few months, Bette Stephenson had gone from no interest in being elected to having to answer tough questions in the Legislature, a steep learning curve indeed.

Although having to acquire political and parliamentary knowledge quickly and absorbing the requisite information related to the Ministry of Labour, what Bette did have as an advantage was her good decision-making skills. After only a few weeks as Minister, Bette was asked by Premier Davis to select a new Deputy

Minister as George Waldrum left for health reasons. Again, Bette’s decision-making skills served her well. She selected Harry Fisher who had done a major part of the writing of Living and Learning, known as the Hall-Dennis Report, which had a profound impact on education in Ontario. In 1985, Harry Fisher became Chair of the Council of Ministers of Education of Canada.

Leadership skills are often revealed in how someone in a position of authority manages staff. In a media interview, Bette Stephenson said that she would like to hear from anyone who has a concern about education. Not surprisingly, there was a flood of letters. The literally thousands of letters needed replies. Bette insisted that she would read every response prepared by staff. On one occasion there was an exceptionally well-written letter which truly deserved clear, informative feedback. A staffer prepared a reply, one which Bette characterized as ‘bafflegab’. She sent it back 13 times to be re-written. The clearly frustrated staff writer asked Minister Stephenson, “If you don’t like what I’m writing why don’t you fire me?”\*



**Swearing in ceremony 1975 with Clerk of the House, Roderick Lewis**





**Bette and Premier Bill Davis**

\* \*pg.91 Bette's response was to say that she wasn't going to fire him. She told him one should never quit when they're down. Bette then provided instruction on how the letter should be written. The next draft of the letter was acceptable. Her managing of the situation was good for all concerned, including whoever wrote to the Minister in the first place.

Bette Stephenson took her work very seriously, but she never took herself too seriously. She could banter with the best of them in the House, but was also quick with a quip. One time, during a lively exchange, an opposition member quoted from a speech to the O.M.A, which Minister Stephenson had given before being elected, and linked her comments to her new role as Minister of Labour.

Her response: Hon. B. Stephenson: Mr. Speaker, I must tell you that I am extremely flattered that the opposition has taken the trouble to research so many of my old speeches in various other roles. I think that is an honour not usually accorded to a freshman member of this House. Hansard, November 28, 1975

## 1985 Leadership Convention

When Premier Davis decided to retire, there were a number of people interested in becoming Leader of the Ontario Progressive Conservatives. Bette Stephenson was approached about running. Bette and her cabinet colleague, Frank Miller, agreed that if either of them decided to enter the race, the other would not. Frank's heart attack in 1976 suggested he might not run out of concern that the pressure of being Premier would be too stressful on his health. Frank Miller, however, decided to run. Bette Stephenson kept her word and did not enter the Leadership contest. "I had to phone my committee and tell them I was bowing out because Frank was going to run and a promise is a promise. My news was met with great consternation and at least one person resigned from the committee over the issue."\* \*pg.101

Frank Miller won the Leadership on the third ballot, defeating the 3 other candidates, all cabinet colleagues; Dennis Timbrell, Roy McMurtry and Larry Grossman.

"Bette demonstrated leadership from the moment she was elected. She led by example. No task was too daunting. Her straightforward approach and candid responses created loyalty with staff and respect in the House. In every portfolio Bette provided a long term vision as well as an ability to finding solutions to immediate challenges."

- Bill Davis, Former Premier of Ontario

## First Woman Minister of Finance

The result of the May 2nd, 1985 general election was a minority Progress-

sive Conservative government with Frank Miller as Premier. The Conservatives had 52 seats, Liberals 48 and the New Democrats 25. Premier Miller appointed Bette Stephenson Minister of Finance and Deputy Premier. The Miller government was short-lived, being defeated in the House on June 18, with David Peterson being sworn in as Premier on June 26. The New Democrats and the Liberals had agreed to an 'Accord', the terms of which guaranteed support for the Liberal government for a minimum

of two years. Bette Stephenson wasn't in the position of Finance Minister long enough to really get started with this new challenge, let alone have accomplishments.

Bette's eldest child, Stephen Pengelly, observed that her family was very proud of her being appointed finance minister. "However, I think Bette just sort of took it in stride, as she had always assumed, correctly, that a woman could do anything a man could do — and sometimes do it much better." \*Steve Paikin interview on



**On her first campaign trail, 1975**



\*Steve Paikin interview on TVO, July 2019

There are a variety of opinions about Bette Stephenson, politician. Being dynamic and assertive is bound to bring forth an assortment of descriptions. This one is from the second female Minister of Finance in Ontario, Janet Ecker.

“She could be tough without being nasty, firm without being stubborn, direct but always professional. You always knew where you stood with her, but you always knew there was a great human being beneath the professional demeanour. There weren’t a lot of female role models around politics in those days, but she was certainly one of mine.”



**Bette and Steve Paikin, Host of TV Ontario's  
“The Agenda”**





Bette Stephenson and Larry Grossman



# In Discussion With Louise Lebeau

By: David Cassels

**“Dr. Bette Stephenson was most tenacious in pursuing her goals, whatever they were, she never let anyone get in her way, or anything, and when facing adversity she was not easily discouraged.”- Louise Lebeau**

Louise Lebeau knows a thing or two about women in politics. Her 32 years of duty in the Legislative Assembly of Ontario were spent in the Broadcast and Recording Service. In 2016, Lebeau began working on a documentary project focused on women’s suffrage in Ontario. This documentary, which Lebeau directed and produced, is titled “Women Should Vote: A short history of how women won the franchise in Ontario” and was nominated for best writing in a documentary at the 8th annual Canadian Screen Awards. One of the women interviewed in this documentary is none other than Dr. Bette Stephenson, who Lebeau got to spend an afternoon with while working on the film.

## Initial Impressions

“She was 92 years old,” Louise said, when recalling the afternoon with Dr. Stephenson, “and I was impressed at her ability to remember events in her life with great detail, and she remembered these events with a humble pride and a dry sense of humour.”

“Her health was frail, when we interviewed her she had this little oxygen tank sitting next to her. At first, I think that we were all a little taken aback by how frail her health was, but her mind was not frail. She was very sharp witted, and like I said, she remembered things in great detail. I got the sense that she really enjoyed being the centre of attention. She was in a home and I

think that [the interview] was something for her to focus on and to look back. She talked very openly about all of her experiences in politics and didn’t shy away.”

## Thriving in a Male Dominated Industry

“From the very beginning of her political career she faced negative publicity,” Lebeau described. “She told me that the press was critical when she first ran for nomination and they predicted that she had no chance at winning and that she should stick to practicing medicine. But that did not stop her, and she won!”

“I asked her what sort of challenges she faced as a woman being in a male dominated legislature, and she said that most of the men were not used to having women around and she said that they were a bit standoffish most of the time. But she said, ‘I just kept talking!’ and she said that it didn’t bother her.”



“She had a vision about doing things and what she wanted to get accomplished, she just put all of the criticism aside and moved forward.”

### Humour in Politics

“Most of what she said in the interview and in her anecdotes was always sprinkled with humour.” Louise remarked, “One of the ones... is her retelling of the famous pie in the face incident-- have you heard that one?”

For any readers unaware, Dr. Bette Stephenson had a lemon meringue pie thrown into face mid speech at the University of Waterloo in the late 1970s. Stephenson was famously well-composed for someone just assaulted by a dessert, she cleaned herself off, and continued on explaining to the boisterous crowd why their tuition was increasing. When she next made an appearance at a University, the very next day, this time at York University, she came armed with a pie of her own, joking with the large crowd of students, “I have come with my own pie today and I have a pretty good aim.”

“I think that was not only funny, but it was brilliant political theatre. This showed to me that she was able to face strong opposition not only from politicians but protesters in the public and that she had a sense of humour about it.”

“If you come across as a politician and you’re always angry, and yelling, and annoying, people start to tune you out. If you have a sense of humour about things people start to listen.”

### A Character of Resiliency

“In our interview it became clear that she approached everything with convic-

tion and determination,” Louise described, “whether it was to attend medical school when women were still discouraged from doing so, or when she became Ontario’s first labour minister. She was telling me when Bill Davis asked her if she wanted to become Minister of Labour, he said one of the reasons that he wanted to appoint her was that all of his advisors had advised against it. She replied almost immediately, ‘yes, I’ll



**“Premier Frank Miller and Deputy Premier Bette Stephenson don’t let looming defeat in the Ontario Legislature dampen their enthusiasm for new government programs; announced by the Conservatives yesterday. The new measures range from tornado relief to extra hospital funding. (Photo by Mike Slaughter/Toronto Star via Getty Images).”**



do it' and I think that showed that she liked to be challenged."

"She was most tenacious in pursuing her goals, whatever they were, she never let anyone get in her way, or anything, and when facing adversity she was not easily discouraged. This was her character from a very young age, in the interview she talks about how she managed to convince her father that she should go to school at the age of four. And then later she also convinces the Dean of Medicine at the University of Toronto to enrol in medical school, even though she was not of age, she was only 16 years old."



**Celebrating 90th birthday with family and friends**



“She did all this without telling her parents or anybody, she had so much conviction in herself and she didn’t need anybody holding her hand or advising her, she knew best what was good for her and she had ideas and she was just going to pursue them on her own.”

“She stood up for everything she believed in, unless proven otherwise, she was always willing to hear the other side. I think a good leader is someone who is able to consider other opinions and take a holistic approach to issues.”

“I can say that every word she spoke that day reflected the determination and convictions that she brought to all she undertook. She was confident in her opinions and tough when she needed to be, even in the face of adversity, she had all those qualities.”



**Minister of Labour goes down in mine 1976**

# In Discussion with Hon. Ernie Eves

By: David Warner

**“Bette was a formidable force, but with a remarkable social conscience.”  
- Ernie Eves**

It is standard practice for the Premier to appoint an MPP as Parliamentary Assistant to a Minister. The Minister is rarely consulted ahead of time. Such was not the case in September of 1983 when Premier Davis informed Ernie Eves that he would be Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Education, Dr. Bette Stephenson. Premier Davis explained that he would not have heard the last of it had he not asked Minister Stephenson whom she would like as a P. A. The conversation between Davis and Stephenson went something like this:

Premier Davis: “Who would you like as your Parliamentary Assistant?”

Minister Stephenson: “Oh, either of the Bobbsey twins.”

Premier Davis: “Who?”

Minister Stephenson: “You know, those two look-alikes from the north.”

Premier Davis: “Do you mean Ernie Eves and Mike Harris?”

Minister Stephenson: “Those are the two. Either one would be fine.”

Ernie Eves described Bette Stephenson’s style of leadership as follows “When I met her for the first time as her P.A., she told me that her door was always

open to me, that I was welcome to broach new ideas, but I should be fully prepared to defend my proposals. She had a direct candid approach. She certainly didn’t have time for those who hadn’t done their homework. While she didn’t suffer fools lightly, she had an honest, principled approach to issues. I was always given a lot of latitude, an opportunity to explore my own leadership abilities. Bette always led by example.”

## Achievements in Education

In Ernie Eves estimation: “Bette Stephenson was a truly remarkable Minister of Education, one of the best in the history of the Province. Bette totally revised the education curriculum in Ontario. She expanded the Community College system with satellite campuses, bringing post-secondary practical education to smaller communities throughout the Province. Bette passionately championed the right of children with lear-



**In conversation with Cardinal  
Carter**





**Ernie Eves, Bette Stephenson receives Women of Influence Award**

ning disabilities to receive assistance needed in school, an effort that resulted in the passage of Bill 82.\*

My own son, Justin, had dyslexia and benefited greatly from special education assistance through both elementary and secondary levels, thanks to Bette's leadership. Bette even helped Justin's mother, Vicki, and me find a suitable tutor in high school.

However, when it came to post-secondary education for Justin we were shocked to learn there wasn't a university or college in Canada that truly provided the necessary support for students with learning disabilities. We did find such an institution in the United States, Curry College, in Milton, Massachusetts, with a great program where ten percent of the freshman student body were required to be lear-

ning disabled, in line with the percentage in the general population. It's a terrific program and students from all over the world apply. Justin was fortunate enough to be the only Canadian accepted that year. The experience totally changed his life, as he proudly graduated with honours.

Tragically, Justin died in an automobile accident in the fall of 1995 and we wanted to do something meaningful in his memory, something that could change the lives of thousands of others like Justin, so they could be the best they could be in life. Bette and a good friend, Hugh Mackenzie, helped by creating the Justin Eves Foundation to provide the support learning disabled students needed for their post-secondary education. Bette became the Chair of the grants committee and remained



the Honorary Chair through her lifetime. Bette truly made a difference in the lives of hundreds of students through the work of the Foundation.

### Learning Opportunities Task Force

In 1997, I asked Bette, long retired from politics, to Chair the Learning Opportunities Task Force -which was the world's largest program to assist post-secondary learning disabled students. Bette, in her own unrelenting manner, convinced four Canadian, question mark universities and six Canadian question mark community colleges to participate in the pilot project. 1242 students were accommodated in the program which had a tremendous 95 percent success rate. Bette was ecstatic and emotional about changing the lives of these young people. As a result, now every college and university in Ontario is required to give learning disabled students appropriate assistance.

This is another example of how Bette approached life and it's challenges- she knew what needed to be done and led by example.

\*Editor's Note: Bill 82, the Education Amendment Act, 1980, received Royal Assent on December 12, 1980. The passage of Bill 82 meant that, for the first time in Ontario, all children with disabilities had access to publicly funded education, and school boards were required to ensure provision of special education programs and services.



**Visit by Queen Mother 1979, on left is Premier Davis**

# Leadership

## Education

### The Power of One

**“I am only one But still I am one I cannot do everything  
But still I can do something And because I cannot do everything  
I will not refuse to do something That I can do.”**

**By Edward Evertt Hale**

As a child, Bette Stephenson had an insatiable appetite for learning. Her appetite was continuously whetted through elementary, secondary and medical school. As Minister of Education, she referred to herself as the Minister of Learning. After retiring from political life, Bette combined her love of learning with the knowledge she had gained over the years to make an educational difference in the Middle East as well at home in Ontario. There was always a passion for learning and a determination to make a difference for students.

Bill 82

The “Education Amendment Act” sounds innocuous. Better known as Bill 82, its passage, championed by Dr. Bette Stephenson, created profound change in the lives of students with learning disabilities. Bill 82, introduced in 1980, required School Boards to provide or purchase special education programs and services for all school age children regardless of exceptionality. At the time, a cautious estimate put the number of children in Ontario with learning disabilities at 100,000.

Work on the legislation started sometime in 1973 or ‘74, before Bette Stephenson was elected. It was Bette Stephenson, however, who exhibited a deep passion and



**Bette, age 16 at Earl Haig Collegiate 1940**

commitment to passing this landmark legislation. “The motivating force was the concern to provide an educational program for children. We have had no other goal in mind....We must ensure that the program is made available to the children; that those children with needs who are designated exceptional receive that program; that there are methods of monitoring and methods of ensuring that program is being delivered; and that those children are being assessed.” Bette Stephenson Hansard Nov. 18, 1980

During her seven years as Minis-





**Part of the team which created the Ontario Innovation Trust gather for Bette's 90th birthday. On the left is Dr. Calvin Stiller (Canadian Medical all of Fame) and on the right is Ken Knox, Deputy Minister of Energy, Science and Technology.**

as Minister of Education, as well as Minister of Colleges and Universities, Bette Stephenson championed the cause of students with learning disabilities. Her passionate determination may have come from an earlier experience as a parent in the early 60's. One of her children was in grade 7, and according to the Principal of the school could speak better than the other kids and had a vocabulary equal to someone in grade 13, but couldn't pass spelling tests. At the time learning disabilities were not readily recognized, nor was testing for disabilities common in schools. Bette was determined to find the source of this learning barrier. A psychometric assessment revealed a severe dyslexia. Two years of dedicated effort with a psychologist enabled Bette's youngster to develop the reading skills necessary to be a successful student.

The importance of this legislation was not lost on anyone. The passage of Bill 82 was during a minority parliament. Bill 82 received unanimous support in the House.

Earl G. Campbell, Director of the Scarborough Board of Education, was appointed to the Minister's Advisory Council for Special Education. At that time Mr. Campbell was President of the Ontario Council of Administrators for Special Education and Ontario President of The Council for Exceptional Children.

"I found Dr. Stephenson to be a committed Minister who was sincere and concerned about the provision of improved programs and services for differently abled children and youth in the school systems. She and her Ministry officials were committed to consult with parents and school board stakeholders when developing significant new legislation known as "Bill 82, Responsibility Legislation".

This new legislation was a change initiative in the province in how special education was broadly delivered and required the introduction and implementation of a new funding model allowing



boards to have greater flexibility in the use of provincial funding. Dr. Stephenson's interpersonal skills along with her focus and determination to move forward resulted in the approval and eventual implementation of the new legislation. This included new training for teachers and administrators because exceptional learners were being integrated back to their home communities and schools for education.

The Minister was respected by the affected stakeholders and because of her interpersonal skills and determined leadership, there was a commitment to support her planning and initiatives on behalf of special needs learners. Dr. Stephenson and her staff were able to bring others along on the journey of change on behalf of exceptional children and youth."

## Learning Opportunities Task Force [LOFT]

"Too few students with learning disabilities get the help that they need to make the transition to college or university. To help these students realize their potential, we will establish pilot projects at the college and university level, to provide real help to learning disabled students in a meaningful way."  
- Ernie Eves, Minister of Finance, May 6, 1997

Bette Stephenson chaired the Task Force. By 2002, pilot projects had been set up in 6 community colleges and 4 universities, with 1242 students participating. Research that suggested strategies likely to improve educational success of those with learning disabilities. There was some variation,



**LLB. at University of Toronto, presented by Chancellor David Peterson, June 6, 2007**

and seek appropriate assistance and to become more independent after first year

(g) teaching students how to organize for living and learning

(h) facilitating a support network

(i) providing one-to-one learning strategies and assistive technology coaching and support.



**Bette and Allan photographed in library**

but generally the following activities or components were:

(a) having students participate in an up-to-date psycho-educational evaluation

(b) helping students evaluate the appropriateness of their chosen post-secondary program and provide academic advising where appropriate

(c) teaching students about their disability and appropriate compensatory strategies

(d) teaching students to self-advocate

(e) teaching students about their educational rights and responsibilities

(f) encouraging students to self-identify

This was the largest research project on learning disabilities ever published. The results were amazing. More than 95% of the students who participated in the final evaluation reported that the project had contributed significantly to their academic success. In fact, their dropout rate was lower than that of the general population.

Bette Stephenson observed, “LOFT was a huge administrative challenge and an inspiring personal experience. Students described not just what they were doing to address their learning problems, but talked about how their lives had changed. I don’t usually cry in public, but the stories I heard brought tears to my eyes. One young woman talked about the barriers she had faced that had led her to drop out of school and take a job that was much less challenging than she wanted and needed. Returning to college as part of the LOFT program she found herself supported in ways that she’d never experienced. Not only were the college staff caring and persistent, they had shown her practical ways to succeed.”\* \*pg.120

It was Bette Stephenson’s dynamic leadership which made it possible for the success of this experiment. Bette’s vision, understanding and determination has made it possible for thousands of students





**Women medical students in uniform, 1944**

with learning disabilities to be successful at post-secondary institutions.

“I had the pleasure working with Dr Stephenson over the years but specifically from 1997 to 2002 on the Learning Opportunities Task Force. Our role was to improve transition of students with learning disabilities from secondary to post secondary AND to enhance service and supports that students with LD receive within the post secondary educational sector. Dr Stephenson was a champion to ensure this work was completed and implemented. It has made a difference in our post secondary education Dr Stephenson was a passionate advocate and walked the talk, especially when it was not popular but it is the right thing to do. Her determination and dedication to make a difference for our students was exemplary.”

- Lynn Ziraldo Retired Executive Director of Learning Disabilities Asso-

ciation York Region

Past president of Ontario and Canadian Council for Exceptional Children, Past Director of International Council for Exceptional Children  
Canadian Institute For Advanced Research

In 1981 the President of the University of Toronto, James Ham, came calling on the Minister of Colleges and Universities, Bette Stephenson, presenting a case for added research in the universities. The proposal, in order to keep Ontario in the forefront of global research, was to establish a research institute to foster basic, conceptual research of high quality, at an advanced level across the full spectrum of knowledge in the humanities, social sciences, natural sciences and life sciences. Not only was Minister Stephenson excited about such a project, but so too was Premier Davis. The Ontario government invested some money and a

a year later what emerged was the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research, with Dr. Fraser Mustard as President and CEO. Bette states in her memoir, “If I were making a list of the most dynamic and memorable people I worked with over many years. Fraser would surely be high on the list. He was a force to be reckoned with, a real intellectual powerhouse.”\* \*pg.116

Although CIFAR was founded in Ontario it quickly became a coast to coast organization. Today, this research entity is known as CIFAR (Canadian Institute For Advanced Research). CIFAR can boast that over 4 decades, more than 1,000 researchers from over 30 countries have contributed to research programs. The impressive community of researchers is regularly recognized with major international research awards.

After Bette had left politics in 1987 she was asked to serve on the CIFAR Board of Directors. “Work on the CIFAR Board of Directors was intense and exciting, involving board members from the academic community as well as business leaders who contributed enthusiastically.”\* \*pg.116

#### Ontario Innovation Trust

In 1999, Ernie Eves as Minister of Finance, concerned that Ontario universities, colleges and hospitals needed to enhance their capacity for scientific research and technology development, established Ontario Innovation Trust to promote large and small research projects based on proposals submitted from institutions and individuals across Ontario. Bette Stephenson was invited to join the board that would review proposals and award funds.

“What made membership on the



**Bette, age 12 at Queen Mary Public School**

board of OIT so rewarding was the commitment of the people I worked with. They were a dynamic group that included 3 deputy ministers, a university president and a college president, all willing to devote time and valuable insights when we were making our choices.”\* \*pg.117 The first Chair of OIT was Dr. Calvin Stiller, an eminent scientist who is in the Canadian Medical Hall of Fame.

Over the years, hundreds of valuable projects, worth more than \$800 million, were approved. In 2001, the OIT displayed a visionary approach by accepting a proposal to fund the Ontario Cancer Research Network. This organization did ground-breaking work to develop increasingly effective cancer treatments, and in 2005 evolved into the Ontario Institute for Cancer Research, with Dr. Stiller as the Chair of the Board. king work to de-



Board.

Education Quality Accountability Office

“One of the most rewarding and far-reaching in its influence was my work with the Education Quality and Accountability Office.”\* \*pg.121

The Rae government established a Royal Commission on Learning in 1993. The Commission’s 1995 Report recommended a province-wide standard assessment of literacy and numeracy at the end of grade 3 and a province-wide literacy guarantee test in grade 11. These would be based on outcomes and standards that would be made available to parents, educators and the public. Thus, EQAO was created. An Advisory Committee was formed and Bette Stephenson was asked to be a member of that committee. “I had no hesitation in accepting the Premier’s invitation to join the Advisory Committee. In the Minister’s role I had frequently been handicapped by a lack of factual information about how our students were doing and where their strengths and weaknesses were. Making decisions about directions for the system would have been so much easier if I had been able to turn to province-wide data that I could count on.”\* \*pg.122

Rae asked Bette Stephenson to be part of this important work by serving on the Board. She agreed, but only if she was not Chair. The first Chair was Richard Johnston, President of Centennial College, former MPP, who had chaired the Advisory Committee. Po-

litical partisanship was checked at the door as two former political opponents collaborated to create assessment tools for curriculum based testing.

After serving on the EQAO bBoard for 12 years, Bette decided to step down. The Board, not wanting to accept her departure, decided to appoint her “Director Emerita” so she could take part in Board activities when she wanted.

Clearly proud of her role, Bette wrote in her memoir, “I was proud that our efforts had created a firm foundation and that our decisions about ‘Made in Ontario’ instruments had stood the test of time.

We received praise from across Canada and internationally for our approach and the quality of our materials. In Ontario EQAO assessments had become part of everyone’s expectations and the data being generated were having their intended results for improvement.”\* \*pg.128



**L-R Joan Green, 1st CEO of EQAO, Bette Stephenson, Marguerite Jackson, 2nd CEO of EQAO**

-nerated were having their intended results for improvement.”\* \*pg.128

“Bette Stephenson was a great fit for the EQAO organization because of her passionate support for children with learning disabilities and her dedication to what we were trying to accomplish at EQAO.” - Dave Cooke, Former Chair of EQAO Board of Directors and Former Minister of Education

“By the time I left Education (1985) I could point to examples of successful programs in elementary schools as well as a few in secondary schools where we were able to help learning disabled students to graduate. We knew something about what could be done, but what we hadn’t really dealt with at all was the next stage, providing support at universities and colleges.”\* \*pg.119

As Minister of Education, Bette Stephenson was not able to accomplish the goal of providing support for post-secondary students with learning disabilities. However, her goal was met when Ernie Eves, as Minister of Finance, established the Learning Opportunities Task Force, with its work resulting in Ontario’s colleges and universities providing the needed assistance to students with learning disabilities.

#### Education projects in Middle East

As described in “Leadership in Medicine”, Bette Stephenson’s work in the Middle East, accomplished after she was no longer elected, drew on her experience and expertise from both medicine and education. The results were 6 colleges built, a new hospital, technical education as well as secondary edu-

results were 6 colleges built, a new hospital, technical education as well as secondary education programs developed, and a new medical school. Whether the challenges were home grown or half way around the world, Bette applied the same vision, vigour and determination to be helpful and successful.

Bette Stephenson applied the power of one  
!



**Summer palace in Oman with Sultan Kaboos**



**Dr. Bette Stephenson Centre for Learning**





**“David Jolley, president of Toronto Star Newspapers Ltd. beams as he receives \$1,500 in donations for the Star Santa Claus Fund from Education Minister Bette Stephenson. More than 500 employees from the ministries of Education and of Colleges and Universities gave to the drive.” - Toronto Star**

# In Discussion with Richard Johnson

By: Cassandra Earle



**(Murry/Macleans)**

Calling from Wellington, Prince Edward County, Richard Johnston explains that he just got inside from weather proofing his grape crops in a winery he owns before a big Ontario storm rolled through.

Despite the cold weather, Johnston recalled warm memories of Bette, telling stories about humorous jokes she would play, and how dedicated she was to her husband.

Johnston mostly knew Bette from the The Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO), as many other people did. Johnston said that the two

got to know each other well over the years as they continued to work with one another.

He said that although Bette was in the medical field, she had a deep passion for education.

“She was a very, very bright woman. And very, very strong,” he said.

A similar story to the one Dave Cooke outlined existed in Johnston’s mind, one that includes a pitcher of water during a meeting. Cooke insists that she knocked it over, but Johnston remembers it differently.



“She got terribly...I think the proper word is ‘pissed off’ with Dave Cooke and the annoying questions he was asking,” he said, laughing. “At one point she walked around the table, picked up a jug of the ice water that we had and dumped it on him.”

He also remembered a time at which Bette’s kind heart and medical background were particularly useful, a time when someone was having a health problem on the floor of the legislature.

“She came over to the Members’ Lounge and was helping our colleague who was having heart troubles. That was something that really changed my view of her,” he said. “I saw her first as a very competent doctor when she was there, but also just a very very humane individual. I saw a side of softness to her when she did that, which I learned to watch for signs of later, and is something I don’t think many people saw [in her].”

Johnston says that she remembered things about individuals and their lives, which was something he liked about her.

“She was interested in the people she worked with,” he said.

He also fondly remembered Bette’s humour, saying it was a “wonderful” sense of humour.

Johnston also mentioned Bette’s husband, and compared her relationship with her husband to that of Vice-President Kamala Harris and First Gentleman Doug Emhoff.

“They had a modern relationship...

in the sense that he, if you think of Kamala Harris and her husband, gave her huge space to do what she wanted to do,” he said. “Her family was hugely supportive of her.”

Johnston also said that Bette was a type of feminist, maybe not so much a hardline feminist, but a type of feminist indeed.

“And she, I think she understood that it was a much tougher road for women than for men, in almost all areas of the economy and power,” he said. “And that the power relationships were pretty distorted. They still are today, but not to the same degree as they were when she was young. That’s for sure.”

As for Bette’s leadership, Johnston says that one of the hardest things about being a leader is being “too mealy mouthed” or “getting too defensive about things” but he never found that with Bette.

“People enjoyed working with her. Deputy Ministers that worked with her always appreciated her direct style because in those days the elected person relied heavily on the longer term knowledge of the professionals in the bureaucracy.”

Johnston said she never once stopped caring about education, even when her health was failing. She always cared.

“She continued her volunteer activities, including serving on boards, right to the very end. She was a very warm person,” he said.

# In Discussion with Dave Cooke

## Former Minister of Education

By: Cassandra Earle

**“Leadership- you can’t do it alone.”**

**- Dave Cooke**

Dave Cooke, a proud New Democrat, was a member of the provincial legislature from 1977 (when he was just 24!) -1997 and later a senior Member of Cabinet. It is safe to say that he knows a thing or two about leadership and what it means in politics.

When asked about what qualities and aspects of leadership are most important, Cooke immediately answered with one phrase: “you’ve got to listen.” “Listening to the people around you and to the experts you hire is extremely important, and trusting these people and what they’re saying is an essential aspect of leadership.” Listening and trusting are clearly the activities he values most.

Later in his career, Dave Cooke brought someone he deeply respected onto the team that managed The Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO). Her name was Dr. Bette Stephenson. The Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO). Her name was Dr. Bette Stephenson.

Cooke detailed how Dr. Stephenson, a Conservative, felt passionately about support for children with learning disabilities, which is why she was so dedicated to her work and such a great fit for the organization. When Dr. Stephenson was Minister of Education she introduced legislation on special

education which “was built to identify kids with learning disabilities and to provide funding at the school board level for kids with learning disabilities. It was a major, major step forward,” Dave recalled.

Cooke also mentioned that she was often a “first”, a type of trailblazer- she was the first female head of the Ontario Medical Association, the first female head of the Canadian Medical Association, the first female Minister of Labour, the first female Minister of Education, and the first female Minister of Finance.

“I told her many years later that if I was ever going to ask her something in Question Period, I was afraid because she was tough and she knew her subjects extremely well,” said Dave Cooke, laughing.

Dr. Stephenson loved young people and having interns around. Cooke describes how she would often take the interns down to the member’s dining room and just sit and talk with them for hours. “I wouldn’t have known that about Bette. It put a whole different light on the way I thought about her, that she had this soft side as well,” he said.



As the years went by, and as Dr. Stephenson's health declined, she had to take a step back from the EQAO Board. One day, they were discussing American politics, a new presidential candidate, another trailblazer in his own right.

"I said 'Okay, so tell me, if you were in the States, who would you be voting for?' And she said 'I'd be voting for Barack Obama'...which showed me that she was not as right wing as people sort of labelled her as being," Dave said.

At another time, Cooke was sitting behind Dr. Stephenson in a Committee room, and as she turned around to say something to him, she lifted her elbow up and accidentally spilled a pitcher of ice water all over him. "That was a giggle for sure," said Dave.

Eventually Dr. Stephenson left the board, but EQAO created the "Bette Stephenson Award" in her memory, given to the schools not with the best test scores, but the schools with the most improvement. One year before the awards dinner, Cooke received a call saying that Dr. Stephenson wasn't doing well, and they weren't sure that she would make it to the awards dinner that night. But when Dave Cooke got to the event, there she was, taking pictures with the students. When Cooke asked why she was here, and so early before the dinner at that, she said she enjoyed taking the pictures with the students more than the dinner itself.

And even though she was a busy, successful woman, Cooke said she loved her husband very much and devoted herself to taking care of him before he passed away. "They were very close," he says.

"She was a progressive person with a good sense of humour. But also a pretty sharp politician."

As for what she taught him about politics and leadership, Dave Cooke said "Don't be afraid to show that you actually care so much and you've got so much empathy, that actually your emotion comes to the top."

It would be a fair assumption that Dr. Bette Stephenson did just that. Her passion and empathy towards certain issues, especially education, propelled ideas forward, and allowed for her leadership to shine through.

At the end of the conversation Dave Cooke told me that it's a shame she passed away and that I would have liked her. I can't help but feel the same.



**Bette congratulates Frank Miller on his leadership victory**







# Determination And Dedication Made A Difference

Bette Stephenson was determined to be the best she could be, and always had a sense of purpose. Whether medicine, politics or education, challenges were examined, and were followed by a course of action. Bette dedicated her efforts to improving the practice of family medicine and to advancing the methods of teaching. There were quite a number of times at which she would be known as the “first woman to...” But Bette Stephenson just saw these events as “why wouldn’t I?” opportunities.

## A Fitting Tribute

In January 2011 the York Region School Board opened the Dr. Bette Stephenson Centre for Learning in Richmond Hill, located not far from where she grew up. Its stated mission is to advance student achievement and well-being through public education, which motivates learners, fosters inclusion, inspires innovation and builds community. The design of the programs and services are as if Bette herself were in charge. Dr. Bette Stephenson attended the opening of this remarkable learning centre. Certainly the objective of the York Region School Board reflects Bette’s philosophy that;

“The public school is the foundation of our social fabric”\*

-Dr. Bette Stephenson \*May 4, 2006, TVO The Agenda, Steve Paikin

The programs and services offered at the Dr. Bette Stephenson Centre for Learning are:

- Adult Day School
- Leadership teams supporting Continuing Education
- Elementary Summer Learning
- E-Learning (Virtual Schooling)
- International Education
- International Languages
- Community and Cultural Services and Funded Services
- Infrastructure for the Board’s large Personal Support Worker Program, which serves as such a strong link to the health sector
- Information Technology Services.

“I have never sought change for change sake, but I can see that change, if it served a purpose, was always something I’d accept and welcome as opportunity. I certainly didn’t flee from career changes, and what I’ve experienced has been exhilarating enough to make any stress quite tolerable.”

- Bette Stephenson pg.129



**Bette with grandson Robert**

siblings would agree. Bette and Allan were basically always available, unless Bette was at Women's College Hospital delivering a baby (not always hers) or Allan was out on house calls. The two of them had very different work routines. Allan was a morning person and very efficient at seeing patients. I don't mean to say he didn't spend the time necessary with each patient. He clearly did, since all his patients whom I knew raved about the treatment he provided them. Bette, on the other hand, was definitely not a morning person, but to compensate would frequently work well into the late evening seeing patients again, for as long as was necessary. When she first ran for office in 1975, I was amazed at the number of volunteers who instantly appeared at the election offices, all of whom were apparently former patients, and every one of them willing to do anything necessary to get their Dr. Stephenson

Bette and Allan had a large circle of friends and regularly hosted social gatherings at our house. My siblings and I learned how to mix drinks in our early teens and frequently were enlisted to bar-tend and serve finger foods at their parties, something all of us enjoyed. One thing that stands out in my memories of life at the old house, was the manner in which we were treated by Bette and Allan's friends and colleagues. We were always dealt with as young adults, more like peers, never just kids. That we were Bette and Allan's children, may have had something to do with that.

And their friends and colleagues were indeed a colourful group of people: a former Navy buddy of Allan's who was now a prominent accountant; a lawyer/physician who was the head of the WCB Tribunal; a provincial or federal MPP, MP or Minister; the developer who changed the face of Yorkville Village,; and even a senior Russian physician, whom Bette and Allan met at a medical convention in Montreal. The physician had expressed an interest in visiting Niagara Falls. Al invited him to dinner - along with an entourage of KGB and RCMP agents - and then took him to the Falls the next day!!

I believe that every one of us who lived in that very busy house, six children and very busy parents, thoroughly enjoyed our time together. For me, it was one of the best times of my life.



# 20 McKee Avenue

By: Steve Pengelly



**Bette, Allan and their children**

Growing up in an old house with five siblings and two parents who practiced medicine, with offices in the basement, was a bit chaotic, but very comfortable. It was chaotic because with six active children doing different things at the same time, and frequently coming into conflict with one another, the house was always “busy”. At the same time, the situation was comfortable, because both parents were always available – between seeing and dealing with patients – whenever we needed them.

The house we lived in was originally built by Jacob Cummer, one of the pioneering farmers who settled north of Toronto, and just north of the community of Lansing. His far-

mhouse was eventually purchased by Bette’s parents, Carl and Mildred, who built a new house next door. When our parents got married, they moved into the old farmhouse.

The House had five bedrooms upstairs, two bathrooms – thank goodness – and two sets of stairs leading to the main floor. The main floor had a large country kitchen, a living-dining room, a formal living room and a library. The lower level, which had a walk-out to McKee Avenue, was re-designed in the 1950’s by an architect friend of Bette and Al’s, and was the base of their respective practices until the mid-1980s.

My memories of life at 20 McKee are all good, and I suspect my

# Resources Utilized and Acknowledgements

“A short history of a long life – A Memoir”, by Dr. Bette Stephenson, 2016 self published

Eulogy by family friend Alan Cole, delivered at the funeral service for Dr. Bette Stephenson, August 24, 2019

Canadian Medical Association: Debbie Ayotte, Librarian, Associate Director, Policy Research and Support

Ontario Medical Association: Aleks Dhefto, Senior Media and Communications Advisor

Aleks Defto, an O.M.A. researcher and Debbie Ayotte, a C.M.A. researcher were both most helpful in finding historical material as well as photos.

Ontario Medical Association, Corporate Records and Archives, Toronto, interview with the Hon. Bette Stephenson, M.D. August 25, 1976

The interview recorded by the Ontario Medical Association in 1976, less than a year after Bette's first election, provided excellent background information.

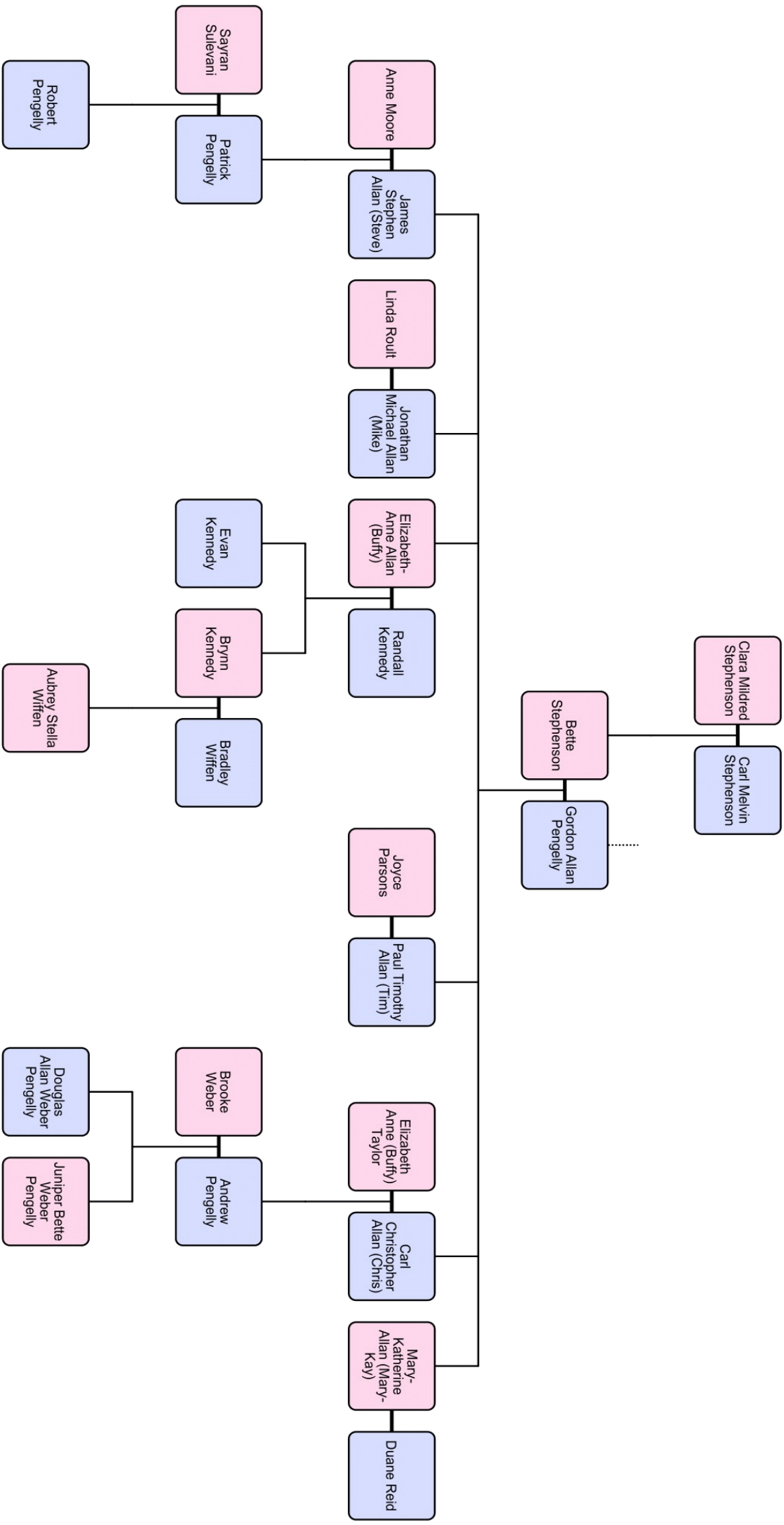
Steve Paikin, TVO The Agenda

Steve Paikin's interesting interview on TVO's The Agenda was a superb accompaniment to Bette's candid autobiography.

I caught a glimpse of Bette the doctor through one of her patients, Ruth Briden. Interviews with those with whom Bette worked revealed a lot about Bette the person. The observations of former parliamentary colleagues underscored Bette's impressive leadership skills. Bette Stephenson's family were most helpful, with Stephen and Elizabeth culling the family albums for some lovely photos.

This publication is the result of a marvellous team effort. Two talented Interns, Cassandra Earle and David Cassels conducted interviews and did the layout, complete with graphics and photos. Once again, superb editing and proofreading were supplied by Helen Breslauer. Ashok Jain of Print City applied his expertise to the project from start to finish, once again providing high quality printing. My heartfelt thanks go out to everyone on the team.







**W**hile it is obvious that leaders must be grounded in reality and learn from the past, what really sets them apart is when they can inspire us, waken us to our collective responsibility, and take us to a higher place.'

**-Lieutenant Governor Hon. Elizabeth Dowdswell**