WEATHERING THE STORM TOGETHER
The Creation of Medicare & Community Clinics in Saskatchewan

Birch Hills byelection, 1959

Arriving at Saskatoon Community Clinic, 1962

Celebrating Saskatoon Agreement, July 23, 1962
I was born on an extremely dusty night in June of 1934, in Wakaw, Saskatchewan.

Unable to see through the dust, my father had to feel his way to the neighbours' using a rope that my family and the Boyers had run between our houses to help us find our way in blizzards and dust storms. Many people had ropes like this to help each other in those hard times.

From the very start, I found it hard to breathe. Mrs. Boyer had to remove the umbilical cord from around my neck. But I survived.
I suffer from severe asthma and had to see the doctor frequently as a young boy.

As I grew, so did my parents’ medical bills.

When my father died in the war, things became even harder for me and mom. The neighbours did what they could to help, but the bills kept coming.

WWII and the end of the Depression ushered in new social programs around the world. People wanted to take better care of each other.

1939: Great Depression ends; World War II starts
1944: Tommy Douglas’ Co-operative Commonwealth Federation elected to government in SK, promising public health care and strong social programs.
1945: WWII ends
1946: For the first time in North America, comprehensive Medical Care Insurance is introduced in the Swift Current Health Region as a prototype for the province. It would be many years before the province could afford to expand it throughout the province.

1947: The CCF government introduces a Hospital Insurance program to cover costs of hospitalization.
In 1959, there was a by-election to elect a new Member of the Legislature (MLA) after our MLA passed away. By then I had been farming for nearly ten years. We took a rare break from seeding to see one of our heroes, Tommy Douglas, in Birch Hills.

A few weeks later, I had an accident on the farm.
As the possibility of Medicare became more real, people started organizing. Those opposed to Medicare formed the Keep Our Doctors Committee. Those in favour, including my mom, formed Citizens in Defense of Medicare.

**IF THE DOCTORS STRIKE AFTER MEDICARE STARTS IN JULY, WE WILL HAVE TO BE PREPARED! HEARD SOME DOCTORS MAY FORM A COMMUNITY CLINIC IN SASKATOON.**

**MAYBE WE CAN START ONE HERE IN WAKAW TOO?**

**THEY KEEP RUNNING EDITORIALS THAT ARE SCARING PEOPLE INTO BELIEVING THEY WILL loose THEIR DOCTOR.**

**WE WILL NEED TO WRITE LETTERS TO THE PAPERS STATING OUR SUPPORT**

**COUGH**

**VICTOR, YOUR ASTHMA IS MUCH WORSE THIS SPRING. Here IS A PRESCRIPTION FOR A NEW INHALER THAT MIGHT HELP. COME BACK AND SEE ME IN A MONTH. SOONER IF IT GETS WORSE.**

**IF MEDICARE GOES AHEAD, I WILL BE GOING ON STRIKE WITH THE OTHER DOCTORS. I AM WORRIED ABOUT MY PATIENTS BUT MUST FIGHT FOR WHAT I THINK IS RIGHT.**

**ONLY THE MAJOR CENTRES WILL HAVE EMERGENCY SERVICES. OUR HOSPITAL WILL BE CLOSED. IF THINGS GET BAD, BE READY TO GO TO SASKATOON.**

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**June 30th - Night Before the Strike**

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**June 1960: CCF wins election on Medicare platform**

**September 1961: Advisory Planning Committee releases report recommending comprehensive medical insurance for all**

**October 1961: Douglas introduces Medical Care Act in Legislature**

**November 7: Douglas steps down to lead federal NDP and Woodrow Lloyd succeeds him as leader of the Saskatchewan CCF-NDP**

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**November 17: Act Passes**

**May 1962: Doctors announce they will strike if the Medical Care Act is carried out.**
In July, while the doctors continued to strike, my asthma acted up again and my mother & I paid our first visit to the brand new Saskatoon Community Clinic.

I hear they expect more than 20,000 at the K.O.S. rally. Too bad. Premier Lloyd doesn't want us to counter-protest. I bet we'd have 40,000, but he's afraid it would escalate things.

I hear he clinic was open until midnight the last 3 nights because of all the demand. So many people need care.

I hope we can keep up.

There are more doctors coming from Toronto and Britain next week.

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July 1, 1962:
Medical Insurance Act comes into effect. Doctor's strike begins.

July 3, 1962:
Saskatoon Community Clinic opens.
The debate over medicare has rarely been as dramatic as it was during the doctors' strike, but there continues to be debate over public medicare and the values of co-operative healthcare provision. Those who believe in Medicare and Community Clinics must continue to fight to protect and improve them.

July 11, 1962:
Keep Our Doctors rally at the Legislature much smaller than expected.

July 16, 1962:
Lord Stephen Taylor arrives to assume the role of sole mediator between the government and the College of Physicians and Surgeons.

July 23, 1962:
Strike ends when doctors and provincial government sign the Saskatoon Agreement.

September 1962:
Just weeks after the strike, over 12,000 families and approximately 40,000 individuals have become members of 57 Community Clinics in Saskatchewan.
"Community Clinics were on the very front line in the Medicare battle in 1962. They made Medicare possible."

- Allan Blakeney, former Minister of Health and Premier of Saskatchewan

**WHAT ARE THE COMMUNITY CLINICS?**

Groups of citizens throughout the province believed so strongly in the concept of Medicare that they set up their own co-operative health clinics in the summer of 1962.

They were passionate and brave in their efforts to start Clinics on their own with few resources and little support in the medical community. The spirit and hopes of those pioneers continue at our Downtown and Westside Clinics in Saskatoon as well as at Community Clinics in Prince Albert, Regina, and Wynyard.

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**Oct. 2012 - Me at the new Westside Clinic bldg. on 20th St!**

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**May 1969 - sod-turning for new Community Clinic bldg. on 2nd Ave!**

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**July 2012 - Celebrating the 50th Anniversary of Medicare and Community Clinics**

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This publication was produced in 2012 to commemorate the 50th anniversary of medicare and Community Clinics in Saskatchewan.

Thank you to the members, volunteers, staff and partners who have contributed to the vitality of the Saskatoon Community Clinic over its entire history, including those who made this publication possible.

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While this story is based on the authors' understanding and interpretation of real events, the Boyer and Belenko families are fictitious. Any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.