

a new young mother afraid and her baby impatient for the light? Or a great-grandfather wanting to ask the doctor if it was time to call the priest?

We knew not.

But often we learned at 7:30 in the morning, at breakfast time as the family gathered for porridge and toast and honey and jam.

For it happened frequently that the latch on the office would again click, the air whoosh again with the door's closing. A powerful smell of ether would often rush ahead of the doctor into the kitchen. There it mingled easily with the smell and the sound of spoons rattling against the sides of porridge dishes. Mother, privileged to invade the boundaries of privacy by a few feet whenever she thought it absolutely urgent, took her cue from the ether.

"Well?" she asked.

An equally laconic response, "A boy," or, "A girl."

Factual as it was, that kind of response did not satisfy mother. It left her wanting to ask one more supplementary. "Everything all right?"

"Just fine."

Round the table there was consensus that the day had started. Of course someone else might pick up the telephone come night, and that someone too would hear The Operator ask, "Number please?" Again the sounds would come into the night: the latch on the office door would lift and click back into place again, and the doctor would be out to another home in town, to the hospital, or indeed miles distant to some place in the country.

"Number please?"

"Operator, can you get me the doctor, please?"

"One moment, I'll ring."

Night calls. House calls. Mysterious links in the chains of life.

— Excerpt from the memoir, *Tales from the Doctor's House*, 1995, John Patrick Dunn

One thousand words



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Listening with the heart

These "little doctors" are actually street children who are living at a shelter run by a humanitarian organization. Even with their broken past, these children were the most inspiring and uplifting people I have ever met. The hardest part of working with them was having to say goodbye when our project was finished. — Melissa Chan, medical student, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ont.

This photograph was among the winning entries in a contest that was held during the 2006 International Women and Children's Health Conference at McMaster University. Students in health sciences programs submitted photographs taken during their work in developing countries and in rural Ontario.