

Elvira Gonstead Dies at Age 90

Barbara Migliaccio

Elvira Meister Gonstead, wife of the late Dr. Clarence S. Gonstead, died December 14, 1991 in a fire in her Mt. Horeb, Wisconsin home. The fire's cause was unknown but probably originated in the main living area. By the time firefighters arrived at the scene at 2 a.m., the house was engulfed in flames. Mrs. Gonstead was found by firefighters inside the home. She was not breathing.

Mrs. Gonstead was the indispensable helper at the side of her husband, the famed chiropractic pioneer who originated and taught the ubiquitous Gonstead technique, until Dr. Gonstead's death in 1978.

The two met at a barn dance in Middleton, Wisconsin during the years that Dr. Gonstead was attending Palmer College of Chiropractic. They were married on St. Valentine's Day in 1924 and moved to Mt. Horeb. Dr. Gonstead opened a chiropractic office in a bank building, unusual at that time because most DCs in the 1920's had offices on the second floor of their homes. Mrs. Gonstead helped with scheduling appointments and with whatever was necessary. She drove the car on after-hours rounds, allowing Dr. Gonstead to nap between patients. She even shoveled snow outside of patients' farmhouses during the polio epidemic so her husband could more readily get inside to treat the polio victims.

When the practice became too large for the bank building, the Gonsteads opened the first Gonstead Clinic of Chiropractic in 1939. So many chiropractors had heard about the success of Dr. Gonstead's technique that in 1946 he was persuaded to begin teaching seminars.

By the 1960s, Dr. Gonstead was internationally known and another expansion was necessary to accommodate the huge number of patients. Often Mrs. Gonstead had to make room in the Gonstead home for those patients who had come from out of town or out of the country.

The expanded clinic was completed in 1964. It is of Scandinavian design, covering 19,000 square feet with seating for 106 patients in the reception area. The main floor has an out-patient chiropractic facility with laboratory and x-ray, with the lower level designed for seminars. Mrs. Gonstead was the hostess at the adjacent Karakahl Inn, where she opened and managed her own dress shop. Dr. Gonstead named the inn after a Norwegian bible meaning "Leave your cares."

The Gonsteads expanded their clinic staff in the mid-1960s with the addition of brothers Dr. Alex and Doug Cox, both graduates of Palmer. The Gonsteads and the Cox brothers traveled all around the United States and the world teaching and caring for patients.

The Gonsteads sold the clinic and seminar business to the Cox brothers in 1974, after working with them for over a decade. Dr. Gonstead continued to see patients in the clinic until October 1977. He died on October 2, 1978.

In 1989, Mrs. Gonstead was awarded the first Gonstead service award by the Gonstead Clinical Studies Society. Dr. Ester Mork said this of the reasons behind the Society's award: "We salute you and honor you. We recognize the woman behind the man ... the friend and confidant who was

always there. You helped pioneer the rights of the sick to have chiropractic care."

In Mt. Horeb, Mrs. Gonstead was known for her kindness and generosity. In an article in the Wisconsin State Journal, former neighbor Alverna Robinson said of Mrs. Gonstead, "She was a private person but a wonderful giver."

In *The Master's Touch: A History of Dr. C.S. Gonstead and His Legacy*, by Mary E. Goble, Mrs. Gonstead says of her marriage: "We got along real good. It was hard at first. When you get married, you know, you get food ready and nobody's there to eat it. You have to adapt yourself to that and a lot of women I don't think can do that. You have to remember when you're married to a doctor he's always on call. I was a help at all angles. Whatever I had to be, I had to be. Whatever I had to do, I did."

Barbara Migliaccio
Second Assistant Editor

JANUARY 1992