



## Mel Ochs, MD

### IN MEMORIAM

**1911–2004**



MEL OCHS, AGE 93, died with an alert mind, watching TV with son Rod Millard at home.

His was a life rich with personal and family history. Mel was a feisty person with deep convictions of right and wrong and responsibility, and deep caring for his patients who adored him.

He was a healer with compassion. In 1949 he was one of only three doctors south of Broadway in Sacramento. Office calls then were \$4, and deliveries were \$75 — and that included newborn care. Buck Springer remembers doing drip ether anesthesia for a tonsillectomy Mel performed in his office.

The Ochs family came from Schoenfeldt, Russia, an enclave of German culture along the Volga River. When they came across the Great Plains of America, the family lost an uncle to illness, and a grandaunt in an Indian uprising. The Kansas earth failed them, and after the grasshopper plagues of the 1870s, they moved farther west, ending up near Walla Walla, Washington, in a settlement called Colfax.

There Mel was born. He grew up in pastoral farm country with horses, pets and cousins. His dad farmed wheat, like his father before him. There were no tractors, and horses tilled the soil. Mel had in his mind to be a doctor since age 6. When he was 12, the family was hit by the Depression. They moved to San Jose where his father was a ditch digger for the San Jose Water District, and remained so until he died.

Mel had a keen competitive spirit. He excelled in high school sports, taking the state 100-yard dash record, and was on the 110-pound league championship basketball team. He graduated from San Jose High School in 1929, and worked in a spinach cannery for two years to have money to start college at San Jose State. He attended three years, ran out of money and went to work again, this time in a casket factory making coffins.

A year later, an uncle made Mel an offer: The family had strong ties with the Seventh Day Adventist Church, and Mel was offered help in getting into Loma Linda Medical School if he would help care for his paternal grandmother in Walla Walla, where he could also finish his undergraduate education. He accepted. In 1934, he graduated from Walla Walla and the following year entered Loma Linda Medical School, graduating in the top 10 percent of his class. He received his MD in 1940, awarded at the end of an internship at Los Angeles County Hospital.

World War II broke out before he could go into private practice and he initially went to a four-doctor clinic in Yavapai, Arizona. Besides hospital work and clinics, he delivered babies at home for the Indians and ran a clinic doing health certification of employees of a Bordello.

When Mel finally made it to Sacramento, he worked at the downtown jail clinic. One day a builder offered him space at the Fruitridge Shopping Center. He practiced there 25 years, and after that he practiced in an office on Freeport and Florin roads. He closed this office in 1988. He continued part time work in clinics, including the office of Dr. Henry

Go in 1991.

When he was 90, the DMV gave him a five-year driver's license and he continued to do medical outreach, giving flu shots and checking blood pressures at Jose Rizal Senior Center near Florin Road. He shot pool, played bingo and went dancing and had several girl friends.

Earlier, in the time of family building, he was a devoted family man and father, raising sons: Kevin Ochs and Kenneth Ochs and a stepson, Rodney Millard. Preceding Mel in death were his first wife, Violet, and second wife, Patricia. Kenneth died of cancer in 2000.

Mel practiced medicine for 48 years, 38 of them in Sacramento. He was the embodiment of what makes this a noble profession: skill, compassion, knowledge of the human condition. He came from a generation of Americans whose spirit was forged in overcoming hardship with strong beliefs and hard work.

He had a fire in the belly for medicine and warmth for humanity in his soul.

— *Rod Millard and Henry Go, MD*

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