



IN MEMORIAM

David Krankheit, MD, 1919-1996

Every couple of years, we here at SSVMS conduct a readership survey to determine what you, our readers, are interested in reading. That's why we call it a readership survey, and that's why you are called readers. In any case, we found, somewhat to our surprise, that the most popular articles are obituaries. We therefore will try to run more obituaries, whether any of us die or not. And any similarity to the lives and careers of actual deceased SSVMS members is purely coincidental.

This obit was written by Dr. Henry Plantagenet, who was a fairly good (and possibly the only) friend of the deceased. It was found recently in a file labeled "Hold - Not fit for Publication."

As Dave used to say, he was not born on a mountain-top in Tennessee, but not too far away, in Blimpsburg, North Carolina on a cold December morning in 1915.

His father was a farrier and his mother helped pay the bills by selling horoscopes to the locals. All five of his siblings died in childhood due to overwhelming hookworm infestations, and at the age of 10 Dave was determined to get the heck out of Blimpsburg and so he joined an itinerant circus disguised as a bearded midget. He made his way to Nashville where, by dint of hard work, he gained entry to Vanderbilt University, and then Vanderbilt Medical School from which he graduated in 2-1/2 years, some say because he married the Dean's youngest and least attractive daughter, Tallulah.

Soon thereafter, Dave had his surname legally changed to Crockett in order to make it appear that he was related to one of Tennessee's favorite sons. By the late 1930s, Dr Davy Crockett (that's what it said on his business card) had the biggest and busiest practice in Nashville. He wore a coonskin cap whenever he was in public. In 1940, He and Tallulah were divorced, and she moved to California with their son Lester, who was nicknamed "Rocket."

Dave was drafted in 1942 and entered the Army Medical Corps where he managed to procure a R.E.M.F. (e-mail me if you need to know what that stands for) appointment as a medical consultant to SHAEF headquarters in London. he was always proud of his wartime service, most of which was spent lobbying the top brass to stop the loathsome and embarrassing practice of short-arm inspections among the enlisted men.

While in London, he wooed and married Lady Elspeth Braxton-Hicks, thrice-divorced heiress to the Sweet-We-Bee chocolate candy fortune. They produced a child, Gwyneth, and returned to Nashville after the war. Elspeth hated Nashville and divorced Dave in 1947 and returned to London with Gwyneth.

Dave was despondent after Elspeth left him and he longed to rekindle his relationship with Tallulah who, he discovered, was living in Sacramento. He sold his lucrative practice in Nashville and moved to Sacramento. He had his surname legally re-changed to Krankheit because he knew that no one in California cared about anyone named Davy Crockett.

Tallulah spurned him when he finally found her in 1951. She was happily remarried to a mortician and had six more children. Dave decided to stay in Sacramento in any event and soon, with his naturally pleasant personality, medical savvy and boyish good looks, had a successful general practice up and going.

He was the first doctor in California to start a practice exclusively focused on obesity treatment and eventually opened over 30 franchised offices, called "Fat-B-Gone" clinics, up and down the state. Dave married for the third time in 1956, this time to one of his previously obese former patients, Marlene LaGrasse, who turned out to be pretty cute after she shed 80 pounds.

But he ran into trouble with the Board of Medical Quality Assurance in 1960 when he was discovered prescribing Dexedrine to the once again pudgy Marlene and most of the members of her bridge club. He had his license suspended and served six months in Leavenworth on federal drug charges. Marlene divorced him while he was in prison, and died a few months later in Pickwickian crisis.

He did quite well after he got out of prison, having somehow landed a job as a clinical researcher for the giant Swiss pharmaceutical firm Scheiss-Schnitzel-Umlaut. Moving to Switzerland in 1965, he never returned to the USA.

I know he died in 1996 because of a call from the coroner in Flugelhorn, Switzerland who told me his body had been discovered in a dumpster behind a fast food joint, and a handwritten note in his pocket identified me as his next of kin.

Accompanying this obituary is a police photo of Dave taken in 1975 and published in the local paper after he was arrested following a bar fight in Flugelhorn. The caption reads (translated from the German) "American doctor, Davy Crockett, was arrested last night for hooliganism."

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