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Dedicated (Nitro) physician honored as 'Quiet Hero'



Chris Dorst

Dr. George Hogshead was honored recently by the Thomas Memorial Foundation for his decades of work as a family practitioner.

By [Sara Busse](#)



Chris Dorst

Hogshead holds his great-granddaughter, Mackenzie Valleau, while seated with his daughter, Susan Valleau, at his Nitro home.

NITRO, W.Va. -- Dr. George Hogshead walked into the waiting room at Thomas Memorial Hospital recently, and a woman approached him with a question.

"She said, 'You don't recognize me?'" the retired doctor said. He apologized to the woman for not remembering her, and then she told him where they had met.

"You delivered me 60 years ago!" the silver-haired woman exclaimed.

"I told her, 'I hope you don't hold that against me,'" Hogshead said with a chuckle. "She said her mother did for about her first 16 years."

The woman is one of the thousands of babies Hogshead delivered in his medical career as a family physician.

"I never did keep an accurate count, but I always say I delivered about 2,500," said Hogshead, 89. In his self-effacing way, he went on to tell of other physicians who delivered more babies than he did.

As a general practitioner, Hogshead did it all.

"I found it all interesting," he said. "I enjoyed more of the relationships with the people than the procedures. I must have liked it all or I wouldn't have stayed in it so long."

The Thomas Memorial Foundation recently honored Hogshead for his dedication to his patients and to the hospital with the 2010 Quiet Hero award.

"I couldn't have done what I did had it not been for my understanding wife," Hogshead said of his late spouse, Bobbie. "I met her during my internship at Philadelphia General -- she was an RN. She was the best thing that came out of that internship."

He was married to Bobbie for 58 years. They had four children, George Jr., Susan, Deb and John. There are three grandsons, one granddaughter, two step-grandsons, one great granddaughter with one on the way, and two step-great-grandchildren. They are spread across Georgia, North Carolina, Ohio and West Virginia, but they all were in attendance when the family patriarch received his award.

Hogshead worked long hours, but this wife worked hard to keep the family together.

"They never sat down for dinner until I got home from work, and it might be 9 o'clock. Those kids would get pretty hungry," Hogshead said. "My son would say, 'Why can't we eat? Everybody down the street is eating!'"

"A doctor once told me that the woman you marry is your wife but the practice of medicine is your mistress," Hogshead said. "I think that was true. My wife really kept the family together."

In grade school, Hogshead's eldest son, George, was unimpressed with his father's calling.

He was hanging out with a bunch of friends one time," Hogshead said. "One said, 'My dad works for Monsanto.' One said, 'My dad works for Carbide.' One said, 'My dad works for the city.' Another said, 'My dad works for the fire department.' It came George's turn, and he said, 'My dad doesn't work. He just goes to the office.'"

Hogshead jokes that he was a child prodigy who burned out early. He grew up in Carbondale, Fayette County, and he started school when he was 4.

"My brother was two years older," Hogshead said. "I pestered and pestered my mom to let me go to school. She asked the teacher, who said if I could do the work, just send me."

This early start allowed him to be the youngest graduate of Temple University medical school -- at the age of 23. He started medical school at West Virginia University, then only a two-year program, and transferred to Temple, along with seven classmates, for his last two years.

He was the son of a coal camp physician. His uncle, who died in World War II, was a doctor. His older brother and sister became doctors, as well.

"It was interesting, to say the least," he said. "It was general practice, so I did OB, peds -- everything."

Before moving to Nitro in 1947, Hogshead practiced at Iowa State University. "I got tired of treating mono and hay fever, so I came back to West Virginia." He said Nitro was booming, thanks to the war, and he joined the staff at McMillan Hospital. A friend of the family, J.W. Skaggs, was instrumental in getting Hogshead to locate in the Nitro area.

A proud father, the retired physician details the accomplishments of his children and grandchildren, including his daughter, Susan, a retired schoolteacher, who lives near him.

Hogshead retired in 1987, and he was a founding member of the Thomas Memorial Hospital Foundation in 1989. He served on the foundation board for a number of years, including as its president in the late 1990s. He remains active as an honorary board member.

Hogshead has donated generously to the Thomas Memorial Foundation over the years, but it was the extra mile he went for his patients that will be remembered.

"I got called out on an OB call out on Hizer Creek off Poca River," Hogshead said. "It had rained hard. I forded three or four little creeks with the car, but I couldn't get through the last one I had to cross to get to the house.

"I called two young boys over and said, 'You boys want to make some money? This woman is in labor and I can't get across.' One of those boys put me on his back, and one of them carried my two bags. I told them, 'If you don't have anything else to do, wait here for me,'" Hogshead recalled.

"It was a short delivery -- she had been in labor a while before I got there -- and when I was finished, those boys were waiting," he said, laughing. "I gave them \$5 apiece. They got more than I did! The going wage for home deliveries was about \$40 for prenatal, delivery, postpartum care, and circumcision of the baby, if they wanted it."

Hogshead's adventure wasn't over. One of the creeks he had forded on the way to the delivery was now swollen with water.

"I knew the lay of the land -- I was out that way a lot -- so I took my shoes and socks off and waded across to see if I could pass it in my car. Then I took my socks and tied them around the distributor so the car wouldn't flood out," he said. "That was common practice back then."

Not what most people think of as a doctor's practice. The humble Hogshead disagreed.

"I just did whatever I had to do."

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