



## Marketing the Physician Assistant Concept to the American Public: The Bold Ones TV Episode and Gasoline Alley Comic Strip

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The first physician assistant (PA) program began in 1965. Five years later, there were still many fundamental issues that needed to be resolved. Educational standards did not exist, no process was in place to evaluate or compare graduates' competencies, and only a few states had enacted legislation enabling doctors to hire and use PAs in their practices. The function and role of the PA was still open for debate. Although physicians were warming to the concept, other health professions were leery of the idea and concerned about potential role conflicts and liability issues. Early studies of patient acceptance of PA services were promising, but long-term acceptance was not assured.<sup>1</sup>

Into the fray steps two unlikely sources of support – a television show promoter and novice scriptwriter, Jerome (Jerry) Bredouw, and a syndicated newspaper cartoonist, Dick Moores. Both were intrigued by the plight of former military corpsmen whose clinical training and skills could not be readily used in the civilian health sector. Their stories are intertwined and reveal how serendipity helped market the PA concept to the American Public in 1970.

Born in Kansas City, Missouri in 1919, Jerome (Jerry) Bredouw was a dance band trumpet player during the 1930s. He enlisted in the army in 1940, played trumpet, attended Warrant Officer Band Master School, and became a band leader in the Air Force before being discharged in 1945. While in service, he conducted for Bing Crosby at the Hollywood Canteen. After service, Bredouw remained in California working for the Fresno Bee Newspaper for ten years and then for an advertising agency in San Francisco. The agency sent him to Los Angeles in 1959 to promote the Hong Kong television series, produced by pioneer television writer and producer, Roy Huggins at 20th Century Fox. Huggins created and produced the *Fugitive* in the early 1960s. Bredouw and Huggins became friends and Bredouw came to work for Fox. Two years later, he took a job with ABC, transferred to New York to head their on-air promotions department until 1967 when he returned to Hollywood. He left ABC in 1968 to work as a free-lancer, promoting television ideas and trying his hand at script writing. By this time, Huggins had moved from Fox to Universal Studios and was producing episodes of the dramatic series “*The Bold Ones*.”<sup>2</sup>

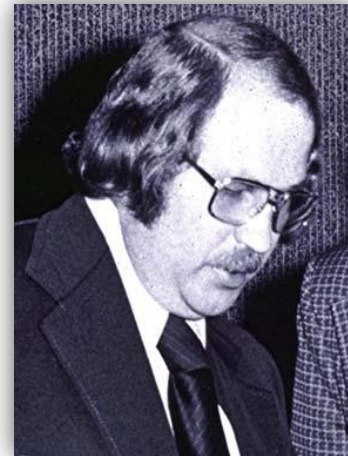


Jerry Bredouw

A combination of events attracted Bredouw to the plight of medical corpsmen and their use as paramedics by doctors needing help to meet the growing demand for medical services in the 1960s. He had dreamed of becoming a surgeon as a boy, but a trip to the Kansas City slaughter house one summer changed his mind. He remained interested in medicine and enjoyed discussing the latest advances with his physician friends. Many of these physicians expressed their frustration with medicine, their inability to meet growing demands, and the lack of funds and personnel to care for the poor. Bredouw was an avid reader of ***Gasoline Alley***, and followed Chipper Wallet's adventures as a corpsman in Vietnam. One series depicted Chipper, who was providing care to a remote village, saving the life of a Vietnamese woman who needed emergency surgery. Bredouw recalls wondering why corpsmen could not be used in similar roles to extend medical services to urban and rural poor in the United States. At some

point, he became aware of the trail involving Dr. George Stevenson, a neurosurgeon in Redding, CA, who used a military trained surgeon assistant, Mr. Roger Whittaker, to help with brain surgery.<sup>2</sup> The ***Shasta County v. Whittaker*** (1966) trial underscored the need to develop legislation to protect physicians who wanted to delegate task to assistants under direct supervision.<sup>3</sup> Dr. Eugene A. Stead, Jr., founder of the physician assistant program at Duke University, testified on behalf of Stevenson and his assistant at the trial. In a letter to Stead written in August 1967, Stevenson thanked him for traveling to Redding for the “purpose of aiding the paramedical technician endeavor.” He also noted that “Mr. Roger Whittaker had continued to exhibit only the highest qualities of professional and moral interest and attitude toward the care of patients.”<sup>4</sup>

Bredouw went to Redding, talked to Stevenson and became convinced that doctors should be able to employ and use paramedics to extend medical services, especially to remote communities. He began researching the paramedic - physician assistant concept, wrote to Dr. Robert Howard at Duke to obtain more information about the Duke University Physician Assistant Program, visited Dr. Richard Smith, founder of the MEDEX program at the University of Washington in Seattle, and visited and spoke with leaders of the American Medical Association (AMA) in Chicago, IL. He took his idea for a script to his friend and mentor, Huggins at Universal Studios. Huggins liked the plot and helped Bredouw write the script for an upcoming episode of *The Bold Ones*. Not everyone was excited about going “public” with the idea of using paramedics to assist doctors. Smith at the University of Washington and several AMA leaders were concerned about moving too fast.



Roger Whittaker

They felt more time was needed to produce Medex and PAs, place them into practice, and evaluate their capabilities and acceptance by patients. They were afraid that premature publicity might polarize people before the concept could be fully evaluated and defended. Howard at Duke University however was supportive and felt that public pressure was needed to convince the AMA and other health policy makers to actively support the PA concept.<sup>2</sup>

While putting the final touches on the script, Bredouw informed Howard in June 1970 that he had corresponded with cartoonist Richard (Dick) Moores to interest him in having Chipper Wallet, a character in the *Gasoline Alley* comic strip, become a PA. Bredouw felt Chipper's military corpsman experience in Vietnam made him a perfect candidate to become a PA. In his letter to Moores, Bredouw elaborates on the plight of returning medical corpsmen, their legal problems and their potential for training as PAs at programs like the ones at Duke University and the University of Washington. He wrote "My TV scripts will, I hope, do more to advance the public image of a sensible solution to the medical crisis than another five years of meetings. Additionally, the impact of a highly successful comic strip's endorsement of the concept could be of enormous benefit where this problem really lives -- in public opinion."<sup>5</sup>

***The People against Dr. Chapman*** aired on December 6, 1970 as part of "The Lawyers," one of the four series under the umbrella title *THE BOLD ONES*. The episode was directed by Jeannot Szwarc. A November 1970 NBC press release describes the episode as follows:

"Brian Darrell (Joseph Campanella) faces one of his toughest cases when he defends a former Army medic charged with murder. Nick Chapman (guest-star Monte Markham), the former medic, administered to ailing citizens of a small U.S. community so effectively

that townspeople referred to him as 'Doc Chapman, angel of mercy.' Due to lack of modern equipment, Chapman employed unorthodox methods in an emergency to save the life of a car accident victim. The man dies and his partner accuses Chapman of murder. Brian then learns that Chapman is practicing without a license. The case looks hopeless until Walter Nichols (Burl Ives) comes up with an 11th-hour key witness for the defense.”<sup>6</sup>



**Left to Right: Jerry Bredouw, Joe Campanella, Unknown AMA Representative and Monte Markham, Photograph by Delmar Watson**

Howard responded immediately, sending a letter to Bredouw on December 17, 1970 congratulating him on the episode. He said, “[the episode] gave the physician’s assistant concept some much-needed publicity. I enjoyed the program very much and all the comments I have heard from other people concerning this episode were very favorable.” Howard also acknowledged that he had been in touch with Moores, who had visited the program twice from his home in Fairview located near Ashville, NC, and was “seriously contemplating making Chipper a physician’s assistant.”<sup>7</sup> Bredouw responded to Howard on December 22, 1970 saying that “there has been a rather startling amount of response from various quarters since the show aired.” Universal was referring most local calls to him and others to Joe Donovan, up at the Santa Clara Medical Society.”

Donovan had been active in getting California Law 2109 passed to clear the way for “legitimate PAs [to work] in our over-crowded state.” Bredouw confessed to Howard that Smith at the University of Washington was not pleased with the show. “[I] asked if his darkest fears about the show had been realized and he sighed heavily, and reported that they were.” Bredouw quoted Smith as saying that “I [Bredouw] may have torpedoed his whole program up there, but I think he may be dramatizing a bit himself.”<sup>8</sup>

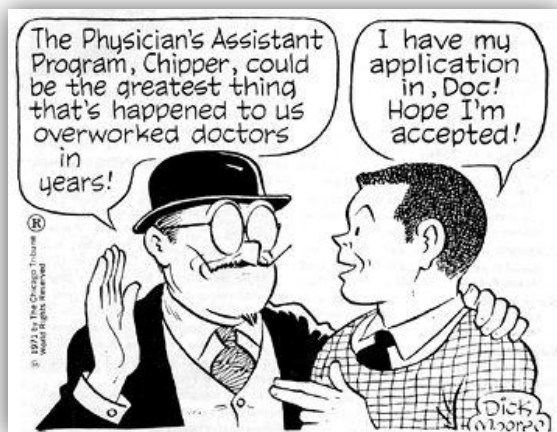
A graduate of the Chicago Art Academy, Dick Moores began his cartooning career as an assistant to Chester Gould on **Dick Tracy** during the early 1930s. After several successful ventures of his own, he joined the Disney Studios in 1942 working on several comic series and animations. In 1956, Frank King recruited him to assist with **Gasoline Alley**, a comic strip that King introduced to the public in 1918. This comic focused on the country's fascination with automobiles. The characters of the strip aged in "real time" - growing up, marrying, parenting, and dying as the years went by. By the time King retired from doing the Sunday strip in 1951, Dick Moores was groomed to take over. Like all Americans, the Vietnam conflict affected the lives of the characters in Gasoline Alley. Chipper, the Wallet's son, enlisted and became a military corpsman. Upon his



**Cartoonist Dick Moores**

return to civilian life, Chipper was unsettled about what to do. Moores was considering Chipper’s options, one being medical school, when Bredouw’s correspondence arrived in 1970. After several exchanges of letters, Bredouw wrote to Moores that he had “took the liberty of

calling Dr. Robert Howard the head of the program at Duke this morning and telling him of our correspondence. I don't know how close you are to Durham, but it would appear that there is an area of mutual interest here, so perhaps you and Dr. Howard will be talking soon.”<sup>5</sup>



**Doc talks to Chipper about  
Attending a PA School**

An article appeared in the March 12, 1971 issue of the *Intercom*, the Duke University Medical Center's newsletter, indicating that the Duke Physician's Assistant Program had made the comic strip that week in about 180 newspapers across the country. The article stated that the strip was printed on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday and showed Chipper discussing the PA program with some of his friends. "His decision on whether to enroll will be made in a later strip." Moores had visited the program in the fall, spent time with Howard, observed students in classes and graduates at work. According to the article, Moores had ties to Duke. A daughter had earned a MA degree in teaching in 1969 and a son had received a BS degree in 1962, later becoming a heart surgeon.<sup>9</sup>

Howard and Moores continued to correspond between September 1971 and April 1972. Joe Sigler in the Medical Center's office of Information became involved in the process, forwarding Howard comic strips sent to him by Moores. The local Durham newspaper did not carry the strip although attempts were made to persuade them to do so. Howard told Moores in a September 22, 1971 letter that he had no suggestion for the content of the strip and that "Chipper is just going to have to spend a lot of time and hard work the next couple of years learning how to be a PA." Howard was curious about Chipper's female classmates consisting of "two brunettes, one blond and one redhead" since this truly represented the case. Moores responded that he had no "informant" in the program and had drawn the strips prior to the class entering that fall – a lucky guess.<sup>10</sup>

Because of their efforts to inform the public about the PA concept, Howard invited both Bredouw and Moores to attend the Fourth Annual Conference on Physician's Assistants held in Durham on April 22 & 23, 1972. Bredouw could not attend but Moores did with his son, Bill, the heart surgeon. Moores sent Howard a letter on April 24, 1972 saying that he enjoyed the two days in Durham and that he had "picked up a much broader view of what PAs are about" and that he would "now be able to give a little something extra to subsequent episodes on Chipper."<sup>10</sup> He promised to send Howard original drawings from the next episodes that he drew. These originals were sent and mounted as an exhibit that has been displayed many time by the Duke PA Program at anniversary and PA day events for the past thirty years.

## **Epilogue**

Jerry Bredouw retired from Universal Studios and moved to Edmonds, WA. He was 83 years old when interviewed for this article. Bredouw's friend and mentor, Roy Huggins, who produced THE BOD ONES, died in Santa Monica, CA in April 2002. He was 87 years old. George Stevenson retired from his neurosurgical practice in California, travels and drops by occasionally to visit friends in Durham, NC. His surgical technician, Roger Whittaker, was invited by Eugene Stead, Jr. to apply to the Duke PA Program. He was accepted and



graduated as a PA in 1969, was president of the American Academy of Physician Assistants (AAPA) in 1976-1977, worked as a surgical PA in Oklahoma City, and died prematurely at the age of 50 from cancer in July 1990. Dick Moores won the National Cartoonist Society's "Rueben Award" in 1975 as "The Most Outstanding Cartoonist of the Year." He also won "Best Category" 3 additional times, including 1986, a week before he died. Robert Howard left Duke University in 1972 to develop a Family Medicine Residency Program in Florida. He was a leader and advocate for Family Medicine until his death from cancer in January 2003. He was 66 years old.

Gasoline Alley lives on today, continued by Jim Scancarelli who inherited the strip following Moores' death in 1986. He currently resides in Charlotte, NC and sent a cartoon of Chipper congratulating the audience attending the Duke PA Program's twenty-fifth anniversary ceremony held October 6, 1990. According to the Scancarelli's family tree of Gasoline Alley characters, Thomas Walter 'Chipper' WALLEY was born on April 1, 1945. He was a Vietnam Draftee who served in the US Coast Guard as a Medical Corpsman. He attended PA school in the early 1970s and now works as a physician assistant with Dr. Smartley. He married Amy Sloan, a physical therapist on March 28, 1992 (they eloped). Chipper and Amy are the parents of twins, Gus Alley "Li'l Skeezix" and Kathleen Elly born in 1992. Chipper still occasionally shows up at national conferences.



**Chipper at AAPA Conference  
Nashville, TN 1992**

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#### Acknowledgements:

Jerome (Jerry) Bredouw donated the photographs of himself to the PA History Society. The photograph of Dick Moores and the cartoon of Doc and Chipper are courtesy of the Duke University Medical Center Archives. The photographs of Roger Whittaker and Chipper at convention are from the PA History Society's still image collection: AAPA Photographs.

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