

**Anthony Owen Stickings, OLS# 1071  
December 3, 1923 – February 20, 2005**



**Figure 1: Friends Ambulance Unit "China Convoy". The photo was taken at Chungking South Bank Garage. Anthony Stickings is in the front row, far left.**

Anthony Owen Stickings, or “Tony” was my father. He was and continues to be one of the greatest influences on my life.

Tony was born in 1923 in England in Mitcham, Surrey, now Southwest London, and moved when he was a young boy to Brentwood in Essex County, just Northeast of London. He was the youngest of the boys in a family that also included a younger sister. A family that valued education, his father was a chemical engineer, mother was a qualified teacher and accomplished musician, and eldest brother Brian had plans to be an architect, but died at age 22, a Commando in the Royal Marines in World War II. Brother Ewart was a biochemist, and Margaret, the youngest, was a multilingual journalist who in later years attended Medical School in France.

The Stickings family also stressed moral and ethical values. Married in the United Methodist church in Mitcham, Dad’s parents, Ralph and Dora, later joined the Congregational church in Brentwood where Ralph was a deacon and lay preacher. The dinner table in the family home was a place to gather for conversation on topics of importance, both sacred and secular. It was where they would discuss their differences in response to the call to join the British war effort in the Second World War. The family of six were split three and three as they tried to apply the church’s teachings to the news from Europe.

Ralph and Brian both enlisted – Ralph seconded to the medical corps where he had served twenty five years earlier, and Brian into the Royal Marines. Ewart was in university, Margaret was too young, Dora too old, but Tony was just the right age to be eligible for conscription. He registered as a conscientious objector and went to court to defend his convictions. He joined the FAU – Friends’ Ambulance Unit

– China Division, which decision and experience determined much of the future direction of his life.

Dad's work in the FAU involved procuring, storing and distributing medical supplies, in an area where the invading forces had cut off normal supply routes and continued to be a threat to safe travel. In addition, Tony was trained as an emergency 'midwife' and was called upon to deliver a baby (successfully!) in one of the villages.

When he could, he travelled through the hills of China to see as much of the country as possible. On one trip he contracted malaria, but in spite of this he fell in love with the land and its people, as did many of his fellow workers. As the war ended and he looked at the possibilities for the future, he seriously considered ordained ministry, but, maybe because of the different landscapes he had seen in his time abroad, he finally opted for studying geography back in England at Cambridge University, where he received his MA.

Dad rekindled his friendship with my mother through their connection in "Young Peoples" at the church in Cambridge. In March of 1949 they were married and settled briefly in a very old cottage with wavy stone floors, until Dad found a new adventure.

This one took them to British North Borneo with the Colonial Service, and it would be his first foray into surveying. In Borneo, Mum, who had some nursing training, was given a first aid kit to tend to the villagers, while Dad headed a team of surveyors made up of local Dayak people. They travelled inland by river and mapped out areas of the jungle as they hacked and hewed paths to travel by foot. This meant being away for months at a time. Dad loved the work and the people, but Mum, who faced the birth and raising of her first child with no one around who spoke her language, was less impressed.

The tropical rainforest with variation of only one degree when the rains fell every day at four in the afternoon, the army ants that marched relentlessly through anything in their path, the lizards that fell off the ceiling onto the table...as I say, not impressed. But Dad would have stayed on if he could have persuaded Mum to stay with him, along with their daughter – me – who complicated things.

We went back to England when the three year tour was over, and Tony and Jean had a house built according to Jean's own design. Dad worked as a cartographer and we lived in Ashted in Surrey. Mum planted an English cottage garden and with the addition of an adopted son, James, followed quickly by the birth of another son, Tim, life began to be settled...until Dad found another new adventure.

This one brought us finally to Canada – to North Bay in 1957.

Dad had gone ahead on a reconnaissance mission to find work and a home before he wrote to Mum to join him. It was the AOLS that beckoned to him and he found employment with the Ontario Department of Highways, working between Sudbury and Sault Ste Marie. He was not away for months, but for two weeks at a time, coming home on a Friday evening and returning on the Sunday. The neighbours

did speak English, but not quite the same vocabulary or accent that we were used to. It was a learning curve for them and us.

North Bay at that time was still quite wild around the edges, and we lived on the edge of town. I, at the age of almost seven, thought it was wonderful. Mum, now with three children, away from home and family, felt isolated. Dad, despite having almost lost a toe (or more) to an axe that bounced off an Ironwood tree, loved the outdoor life in a Canadian winter just as much as he had loved the jungles of Borneo, and the hill country of China.

But the die was cast, and in 1959, Tony took an office position in Kingston, still with Highways. This time, when he felt adventurous, he looked for something new that would keep him closer to home. He went into teaching and because of his university education, secured a position as a high school geography teacher. We lived in Kingston for six years, the longest I was ever in one place while I was growing up.

But Dad did stay with teaching, moving next to Amherstburg to be Head of Department of Geography there. It was while there that Dad and Mum adopted my sisters, Marlene, eight years old and Valerie, six, from Rainy River Reservation. An adventure of a different kind, and one which Mum also embraced.

The advantage to teaching, though the pay when Tony first started was a pittance, was that you had two months off in the summer. Dad, who planned field trips for his students during the school year, also planned incredible trips for the family in the summer. On a shoestring budget which meant nothing could go wrong, we went from one side of Canada to the other. Of course, things did go wrong – especially when you didn't have the best car to begin with. One thing Tony did not excel in was auto mechanics.

The last move as a teacher was to Port Elgin in 1970, and this time I stayed behind, and not long after, started a family of my own. There were several more moves for Tony and Jean – who, after Dad took an early retirement from teaching, decide to become church organists and choir directors. They moved to Paisley and then to Kincardine, and finally went to BC to Victoria, and on to Sidney, BC when it was time to go to an assisted living facility. Dad died not long after that move, on February 20<sup>th</sup>, 2005.

I began by saying that my father was a great influence on my life. I inherited, whether by nature or by nurture, the same ability to see a grand adventure in new places and people. My Dad taught me a love of landscapes. I remember him studying the sample collection of fifty rocks and minerals that would be part of his exam for OALS. I still look for the beautiful granite rock-cuts along highways as we go north in Ontario, and the unusual one near Gananoque where the limestone changes to granite abruptly, as though someone had drawn a line through the rock. Dad taught me never to go to and from a place on the same route if I could travel a different one to see something new.

He taught his children respect for all people and an absolute regard for life in all its forms. Dad taught us to question, and to learn by questioning. From him, I learned

the importance of standing up for my convictions, especially when it would not be easy. He was a strong ethical influence, contributing to me eventually becoming a congregational minister.

Thank you for this opportunity to spend time with my memories, and to share my father's life with you.

Submitted by Rev. Catharine House