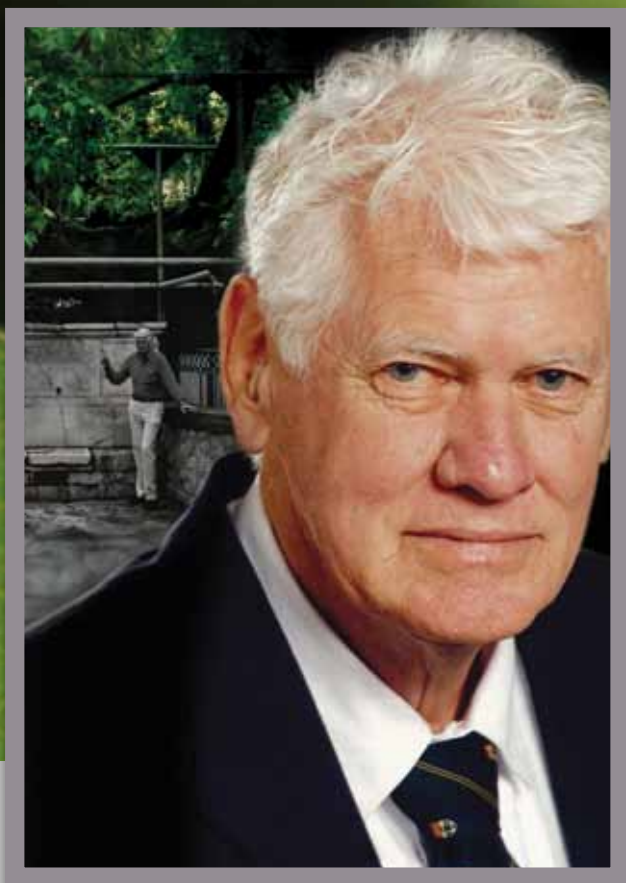




from Kurmond Kid to
**CANCER
CRUSADER**

Pioneering Integrated Cancer Treatment



Professor Fred Stephens

Wakefield Press

From Kurmond Kid to Cancer Crusader

Frederick Oscar Stephens AM, MD, MS, FRCS (Ed), FACS, FRACS
Emeritus Professor of Surgery, The University of Sydney
Emeritus Professor of Surgical Oncology, Sydney Hospital and
The Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, Sydney.

By the same author

Cancer Explained

All About Prostate Cancer

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The Cancer Prevention Manual

Basics of Oncology

Induction Chemotherapy (in press)

From Kurmond Kid to Cancer Crusader

Fred Stephens

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*Dedicated
to my parents,
without whose unqualified love and support the work
reported in this book would not have been achieved*

*Royalties from this book will go towards
the establishment of a
Dorys and Hedley Stephens Chair of Surgical Oncology*

Foreword

Karl S. Kruszelnicki

The years 1927 to 2000 were years of great change in Australia. Frederick Stephens grew up in a house without electricity, telephone, running water or sewerage. From this, he grew up to be Professor of Surgery at the University of Sydney – a remarkable achievement.

This book is his story, and provides an insight into his life, and the society in which he lived. It tracks his progress through high school and university, his travels across the globe, his personal life and, yes, his surgical career. Along the way, he helped improve dramatically the treatment of surgical patients with cancer. It is always difficult to bring in change, and Professor Stephens had to work hard to improve his patients' treatments.

Having reached mandatory retirement age, Fred Stephens is now retired. Unfortunately, due to lack of university funding, no successor has been appointed. The university's aiming, and should be in a position, to develop a leading comprehensive cancer centre. Via its teaching hospitals, the University now has excellent medical oncology, radiation oncology, investigation and pathology services headed by eminent Professors. However, without the skills, know-how and knowledge of an experienced and dedicated surgical oncologist, a Cancer Centre would be incomplete and unbalanced.

In writing this book Professor Stephens hopes to draw attention to the need to re-establish an internationally regarded unit in Surgical Oncology headed by a Professor. In the former unit, headed by Fred, Sydney University was a world leader. Re-establishment of such a unit should make it a realistic possibility for Sydney University to establish a universally recognised, truly comprehensive, Cancer Treatment and Research Centre

I first met Professor Stephens when I was a mature-age medical student in one of his classes. I always found him to be most knowledgeable and accessible, even to the most junior students. This is his very personal recount.

Karl S. Kruszelnicki

Julius Sumner Miller Fellow, University of Sydney

Foreword

Professor Earl Owen

Professor Stephens's dedicated career pioneering the scientific, multifaceted treatment of people with locally advanced cancers is now part of medical history. The trials and tribulations that befall pioneers of radical sensible ideas, such as jealousy, pig-headedness and hidden political motives, and how they have been overcome by this courageous and talented surgeon, are now part of this open, very readable story.

In any American or English teaching university surgical department, Professor Stephens's successful clinical advances would have been encouraged and lauded, giving a much earlier improvement for cancer sufferers using his united surgical/medical/scientific and social positive approach.

From tough boyhood years with a struggling big family in a tiny country village, Fred quietly and determinately made it to medical school, and eventually became its talented and beloved cancer treatment pioneering Professor of Surgery. Even then he had to battle on with his desire to help those doomed by their dreaded cancers as his research work and clinically proven results were not accepted, believed or even acknowledged for a long time.

For those willing to look at the illustrations in the 'Clinical Case Supplement', which is appended to the text, the before and after pictures dramatically show how even the most frightening cancer can be tamed and even cured by Fred's logical, multi-skilled approach.

When such a Surgical Oncology Unit is eventually and belatedly formed in Sydney it will owe its existence to a remarkable and humble pioneer, Professor Fred Stephens.

Professor Earl Owen, AO, Leg d'Honneur
Past President, International College of Surgeons

In the beginning God created Kurmond.

Kurmond is a delightful, peaceful village in New South Wales, along the Bell's Line of Road, between Kurrajong and Richmond; it is located northwest of Sydney between the Blue Mountains and the Hawkesbury River.

The name KURMOND was derived from the KUR of Kurrajong and the MOND of Richmond.

Chapter One

From Kurmond Kid to Medical Student

Mum and Dad

My Mum, Dorys Reed, was the daughter of Frederick Reed, an immigrant from Yorkshire, England, who lived in Croydon, New South Wales, with his wife, Sarah Mosman, and their seven surviving children (their first-born had died in infancy). My grandmother, Sarah Mosman, was a member of the Mosman family after which the suburb of Mosman was named. It was in Mosman that I came to live and raise my family in my later life. Frederick Reed was originally a shopkeeper who bought a small bakery, which he developed and later became a highly regarded Master Baker. He was a devout Christian and a Methodist lay preacher. Mum was their third of eight children. She had a wonderful sense of humour. She frowned on vulgarity or hurtful humour but otherwise she could see a funny side to almost anything. I feel sure that this is what kept her well-balanced and able to continue in good spirits in spite of what might have been an impossibly burdensome life. Her motto was 'If you can't say anything good about someone then better not to say anything at all'. She often quoted the Christian ethic: 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.'

She trained as a secretary and was working with her own father in the bakery business when she became engaged to my father. Their two families had been friends for years and both families attended the same Sunday school and church in the western Sydney suburb, Croydon. They were also in the same tennis club.

Mum always had a medicine chest at the ready, full of bandages, a sling, ointments, 'tonics', and mixtures of various kinds for health problems. She always had something to give us if we had a cough,

cold, tummy-ache, an injury or any other health problem. Particular remedies since passed into history were 'Bate's salve' a dirty brown ointment that was heated and dropped hot onto an infected wound; 'Bidomack' a tonic for anyone who was off his or her food or otherwise not looking well; castor oil for anyone constipated or with a tummy-ache; and 'Ung-Vita' ointment, which came in a round tin that would heal any wound or sore. I never understood how it worked but when Mum rubbed butter onto a head that had been hurt in a fall, it would soon feel better. Of course there was also 'Bonnington's Irish Moss' containing 'petrol-oxymal of carogene from a seaweed found on the coast of Ireland', which was given as a cure for any cough, cold or sore throat. She would also make the inevitable 'bread-poultice' which, if applied hot, would draw pus from and cure a boil or any other infected wound. It all seemed very effective at the time, but I now believe the cures lay in her love and attention as well as the realisation that a second dose of treatment would be inevitable if we did not feel better.

My parents had been sweethearts for years when Dad, aged twenty-one, formally asked my mother's father for her hand in marriage. He was the son of William Stephens, government printer, who lived in Burwood, New South Wales, with his wife, Matilda Stark. He was the sixth and youngest son of a family of eight (six boys and two girls). Shortly after his engagement to my mother, war broke out and he enlisted in the army and in December, 1915, was sent overseas with the Australian Infantry Forces (AIF).

After leaving Australia Dad had further training in Egypt where he met up with his cousin and best friend, Stanley Stark, who was to be best man at his wedding. Although they were in different battalions they both held the rank of corporal. Sadly that was the last time they were to see each other. In 1916 both battalions were transferred to Northern France where they served on the battlefields of Flanders and the Somme.

In a battle at Fleurbaix, near Armentières, Dad was severely injured trying to save his superior officer who was lying dying in no-man's-land between the two battlefields. His superior officer had been drinking heavily and had gone out into no-man's-land 'to inspect the trenches'. He was lying unconscious and badly injured by shellfire when Dad went out to try to bring him back. The officer

died on the battlefield and Dad, severely injured and lying unconscious, was taken prisoner.

This episode was recorded in Charles Bean's official history of the war series. Incidentally, horrible as it was to be a prisoner of war, Dad always gave credit to the German doctors who saved his life. He said that he was treated in a hospital ward with injured German soldiers and was given equally good treatment. In fact an injured German officer was in the next bed and a German corporal, who could write English, wrote a letter on Dad's behalf home to his fiancée and family. He was held prisoner of war in Gefangenenlager, Dulmen 1, Westfalen, Germany for two years.

Medical records indicated that Dad had multiple shrapnel injuries to his head, one eye, jaw, chest, a shoulder, hand, hip, leg and one foot – a total of 16 shrapnel wounds – the most severe being to his head with shrapnel embedded in his brain.

His two best mates, his cousin Stanley Stark, and my mother's cousin, Oscar Clark were both killed in one battle. Thereafter Dad had hatred not for the Germans but for alcohol (he would not allow any alcohol into our house). He always expressed gratitude and admiration for the German medical team that brought him in and cared for him as well as they could under the circumstances after he had been given up for dead. It was through similar such experiences of other soldiers that the propaganda stories of the 'savagery and cruelty of those inhuman German Huns' were seen to be just that: propaganda. The Germans, like the allied soldiers, were just young men under orders who were fighting for a cause.

Dad rarely spoke of his years in a prisoner of war camp but we did discover something of his rehabilitation and hobby activities when we found a scarf and some socks that he had knitted from threads of worn-out clothing using sticks as knitting needles.

He always set a wonderful example in good manners. He would never allow us to start eating a meal before Mum was ready to start and he always held out a chair for her, or any other woman, before being seated himself. Grace was always said either by Dad or Mum before meals. Dad always raised his hat to a lady and would always walk on the outside (the roadside) of the footpath when walking with Mum. Such manners were originally developed to protect women and their clothing from mud or dust being splashed on

them from passing horse-drawn carts or motorcars on the roads. He would also always offer his seat to a lady or an elderly man standing in a crowded bus or train. He would never go through a door before a woman; he would hold the door open for her and I never heard a swearword in our home.

To say that Dad liked a 'cuppa tea' would be a masterly understatement. He liked a cup as soon as he got up in the morning, at breakfast time, at morning and afternoon tea time, with lunch and with dinner, before going anywhere, as soon as he got back from anywhere, whenever friends arrived, whenever friends stayed for more than an hour, whenever friends left, and whenever he had nothing else to do. Other than those times he never had one unless he was thirsty!

When he returned from the war he and Mum were married in the Malvern Hill Methodist church, Croydon, in October 1919. Although he had been trained as an electrician pre-war, he joined his father-in-law in a new bakery business, 'Reed and Stephens'. However, his war injuries – especially the head injuries that caused him to have epileptic fits (starting two or three years later) – made it unsafe for him to work as a baker or to drive the new car he bought with his service discharge money. He was retired to a small soldier settlement farm in Kurmond. The car was also retired to rest and rust in the backyard of a garage workshop in North Richmond. Years later when we passed that garage on the old Kurrajong to Richmond train, 'Pansy', Dad would point out the remains of his old 'Talbot' motorcar amongst the junk in the garage. Until recently I had always believed the car was a 'Talbot', which was a prestigious English car, but photographs of the car clearly show that it was a 'T' model Ford.

Both Mum and Dad lived for their children. They were so very proud of everything we did, sometimes, especially in Dad's case, it was almost embarrassing.

After World War I

When we first lived in Kurmond, Dad had an orange orchard (most of the district was orange orchards), but soon the Great Depression was upon us. I have memories of the farmers trying to sell boxes of oranges along the Bell's Line of Road, and others earning their

subsistence money by building roads and dams using horse-drawn scoops and drays. This subsistence payment was equivalent to present-day 'work for the dole' and it did result in good roads, railways and other public utilities being established.

It soon became obvious, though, that Dad was not well enough to farm so the orange trees were removed and Dad was fully retired as a 'totally and permanently incapacitated soldier' living solely on a war-service TPI pension. We kept a couple of cows in the paddock for milk, and some chooks in the chook-yard but that was all. Dad's health was always a worry; he often fell into a fit (about once a week) and suffered injuries, and we all learned what to do when he was having one. I once had to help pull him off a railway line. Dad was a kind man but the day after he had had a fit he was like a bear with a sore head for about 24 hours – we knew to keep away from him. In a way, I benefited from this experience: I was so impressed by the attention that Dr Steel of Richmond always gave to Dad. Dr Steel would always come so readily from Richmond if he was needed, and Mum knew that if ever he was not available (which I don't think was ever the case) Dr Arnold of Windsor would come to help.

Looking back now from the vantage of my own old age I realise with sadness and regret how little I knew about my father's World War I experiences – experiences that so profoundly shaped the story of his adult life and in turn shaped mine. He accepted his disabilities without bitterness or complaint and spoke very little about his wartime and POW experiences.

It was not until later in life that I began to understand his bravery in the battlefields and his uncomplaining acceptance of his severe injuries, especially the head injuries that resulted in life-long epilepsy that he also accepted as limiting his way of life thereafter.

I remember visiting him in hospital on about three occasions. One particular occasion when I must have been about 3 or 4 years old was after he had fallen in a fit and suffered several injuries including a broken jaw. His face was swollen and heavily bandaged. On another occasion when I was 6 or 7 years old I remember helping my Mum pull him off a railway line after he had fallen in a fit onto a railway track. Luckily there was no train coming at the time. He accepted all these consequences of battle without complaint.

These experiences made me more and more certain that I wanted to be a doctor one day. To be able to make sick people better and to help comfort their families would be the best job in the world. This belief became even stronger when my little sister Dolly became ill with scarlet fever. She was hospitalised in isolation and not allowed to touch or be touched by any of her family or friends. A few months later, at only four years of age, she died leaving my Mum and Dad terribly broken-hearted. Many years later I met Sir Howard, later Lord Florey, the great Australian doctor/scientist responsible for preventing scarlet fever ever causing such tragedies again by his discovery of the clinical use of penicillin. I felt very honoured but at the same time it was sad to realise that if only this had been discovered about thirty-five years earlier Dolly could have been saved.

When I was about five years old my parents bought me a little 'doctor's bag' with a little red cross on it in which I kept bandages, dressings and various lotions and ointments. The bag and contents were inevitably used when any one of my brothers or sisters, but especially one of our pet animals, had a cut or other injury. From that time on the thought of being anything else but a doctor never occurred to me.

Our home, in Longleat Lane, Kurmond, had three small bedrooms, a kitchen with fuel stove and oven, a dining/lounge/music room, a bathroom, and verandas; across the yard there was a shed which housed a toolshed, woodheap, laundry, stables and 'dunny'. The shed was made of vertically erected split ironbark logs. Longleat Lane has since been upgraded from dirt to a bitumen surface road with many more houses, so its name has been upgraded to the more sophisticated Longleat Road.

In 1927 when our family moved to Kurmond I was three weeks old. Joyce was six, Heather five, Stan three and Evelyn one. Dolly, Bruce and Elaine were still to come; but when they arrived they were the only real 'Kurmonders'.

We loved our home and our devoted parents. How Mum and Dad managed with all the children, Dad's war injuries, and the Great Depression, we will never know. I am sure their deep religious faith and deep love for each other had a lot to do with it.

When first we lived in Kurmond there was no electricity, no

telephone and no laid-on water or sewerage. We lived and studied by candlelight and kerosene lamps, and communicated by seeing and talking to people in person or writing letters and putting them in the post. Letters took several days to or from Sydney; we collected them from the little post office up the hill. Dad would walk up the hill every day (except Sunday) to collect any letters, and buy the *Sydney Morning Herald* and groceries from Mr Merriman's shop (the village's only shop). Mum cooked on our wood-fuelled stove or in the oven. If we just wanted to boil water for the regular cups of tea or boil eggs, we did it on a kerosene primus stove. We made toast on a toasting fork in front of the wood fire. The toast made this way really tasted like toast should taste, thick with butter or dripping if we hadn't any butter or jam, and real cream.

We loved the rain: hearing it on the tin roof was great and a few days later we would always find and pick the inevitable mushrooms that followed the rain. The memory of eating those wild field mushrooms on toast still makes my mouth water.

In our little old home some things were immutable. Mum did the washing on Mondays after scrubbing the most soiled clothes on a wooden washing-board, then boiling the washing in water with Siren or Sunlight soap in the copper set over a wood fire, and stirring the clothes in the boiling water with a wooden clothes-stick before hanging it out on wire clothes lines supported by clothes-forks. She rinsed the whites in water with a 'blue bag', apparently to make them more sparkling white! She did the ironing on Tuesdays, using a flat iron heated on the stove. Wednesdays were Mum's 'mending and sewing days' when she replaced any missing buttons, patched or mended any worn or damaged clothes, and darned socks using a mushroom-shaped sock holder that kept the sock in place with its hole exposed. She thoroughly cleaned the house on Thursdays (using a broom, a mop, a carpet sweeper and, when necessary, a can of floor stain with a brush). Fridays were kept for writing up the minutes of the church Sunday school and Kurmond School parents and citizens meetings of which she always seemed to be the secretary. Saturdays she spent with us kids, and Dad, sometimes playing tennis, having a picnic or going for bush walks. She spent Sundays teaching and playing the piano at Sunday school, going to church, where she played the organ, and preparing our big Sunday

roast dinner that was usually shared with the church minister. All this with our disabled father and seven children to care for! She and Dad were never interested in accumulating wealth, fame or power, only in doing the best they could for their family, their community and their country.

Our home was heated by an open wood-fire in the dining/lounge/music room and we opened the windows if we wanted 'air-conditioning'. In summer this always let blowflies into the house and these were partly controlled by liberal use of a fly swatter. Dad was the expert in this. Flies were also caught on 'sticky tapes' hung from a kerosene lamp attached to the ceiling (in the kitchen), or directly from the ceiling in other rooms. There was a saying in Kurmond that the best time to go to 'the dunny' was when cabbage was being cooked in the kitchen; all the blowflies would be in the kitchen.

Radio was in its infancy and I remember my big brother, Stan, making a crystal-set radio. He and I would sit by the fire under the copper in the laundry on cold winters' nights trying to listen to the test cricket 'being broadcast from England'. Like everyone else we later learned that it was regularly faked by broadcasters in a Sydney studio. As it was played in England cricket information was constantly cabled to Sydney where the commentators pretended it was actually happening in front of them. The sound of a bat hitting a ball was made by the broadcaster's pencil being jabbed on a paper pad.

Some years later a new era of entertainment was introduced into our world when Dad bought a real radio. What fun it was in those early days, not only did we listen to sport (I can remember hearing Don Bradman make his world-record-breaking triple century) we were also introduced to a wonderful era of fun radio serials including 'Dad and Dave', 'Ada and Elsie', 'Mrs 'Arris and Mrs Iggs' and later 'Mrs 'Obbs' and 'Yes Wot' with Greenbottle. Our other family favourites on Sunday nights were the radio serial 'Doctor Mac' and 'World Famous Tenors'.

In those days it seemed that everybody sang; it wasn't restricted to the professional few. Singing was a means of family entertainment. It was cost-free, unwired, unplugged and completely joyous. We always had a piano that we would sing around while Mum, or later my sister Evelyn, played. One day Dad bought a wind-up

gramophone that played '78' records. My favourite records were 'The Teddy Bears' Picnic', which I was given as a special birthday present, 'Laughing Ginger Brown' and 'I was a gay Caballero, returning from Rio de Janeiro'. I confess that I do find it hard to adjust to the amplified soundtracks of today, especially when the sound of instruments drowns the lyrics of the vocalist.

For other family entertainment we played cards, especially in front of the kitchen or dining-room fire on cold winter's nights – and winters were cold in Kurmond. On Saturdays and on school holidays, but never on the Sabbath Day, Dad and whoever was around often played cricket on the dirt road. Our wicket was a fruit box or a kerosene tin, and our ball was made of stone-hard composite material (seemingly like iron coated concrete), not the more expensive and relatively softer 'six sticher' leather balls used today. Every time one of the locals, Mr Cook, came speeding past we had to stop play and take our wicket off the road in a hurry. Mr Cook, who was clearly wealthy, owned the only car in Kurmond, although our neighbour, Mr Downs, eventually bought a utility truck for his farm.

When we were a little older and had saved enough Saturday pennies (we were given a penny pocket money every Saturday), we sometimes caught Mr Franks's lorry (a covered truck) to the Saturday 'flicks' in Richmond. We especially loved films starring Buck Rogers, Hopalong Cassidy, Tom Mix or Abbott and Costello, and of course the next episode of the Saturday night serial that had finished the previous week at an exciting, critical or threatening juncture.

As would be expected from their family backgrounds, Mum and Dad were both devout Christians. They believed there was something seriously missing from their lives and our lives without a church or Sunday school in the village, so they started church services and a Sunday school in our home and made plans to have a church built on their property.

Our first Sunday school superintendent was a Seventh Day Adventist pastor, Reverend Maunder. It was a true ecumenical act to have a Seventh Day Adventist pastor as superintendent of a Methodist Sunday School. I remember Mr Maunder giving me a special prize for reciting the 23rd Psalm when I was five years old.

Up until a little wooden church was built on a corner of our land, Sunday school classes were held on our verandah, and church services held in our dining-room. The church minister from Windsor, or a student minister or a lay preacher from the Hawkesbury Agricultural College, Dr Harrison, usually stayed for dinner.

In those days, the term 'sex discrimination' had not been invented. The boys had most of the outdoor jobs and the girls were mostly indoors helping Mum with the housework. Dad, Stan, Bruce (once he was big enough) and I pumped the water from the well. The water was rainwater collected from the house roof and the shed roof. The well water had to be hand-pumped to the elevated tank on four thick, tree-trunk stilts. Mum became the luckiest mum in Kurmond because she had the luxury of having water piped from the tank above sink-level into the kitchen, laundry and bathroom. To pump the water from the well up to the elevated tank was a regular job. Our 1000-gallon water tank became a distinctive landmark that could be seen for miles around and it gave us a warm glow of pride when it first came into sight after we had been away for any length of time. Sadly, after standing for more than 70 years, the tank and the well have been removed. Our large round concrete well with its concrete top approximately a metre above ground level was also a distinctive feature. On very hot days we would drop a kerosene tin bucket attached to a rope down the well, and draw up water that was always refreshingly cool; but we inevitably shared our bathwater and often our drinking water with mosquito wrigglers. 'Never mind the wrigglers in the drinking water,' Dad would say. 'They are only a bit of extra meat.'

We also had to feed the chooks. The female chickens were kept for laying eggs and, in a clear case of sex discrimination, only one lucky male rooster was kept to help the hens make more chickens. The other roosters were dispassionately fattened up for Christmas or a special Sunday meal.

One boy's job, for which I don't think the girls ever demanded equal opportunity, was 'burying the dunny cans'. Our dunny (toilet) furniture consisted of a kerosene tin under a wooden-plank bench with a bottom-sized hole in it. Whenever the can was full, one of the male members of the family had to dig a hole somewhere in the garden or in the paddock, tip the contents in it and cover the