

Gerald K. Stone

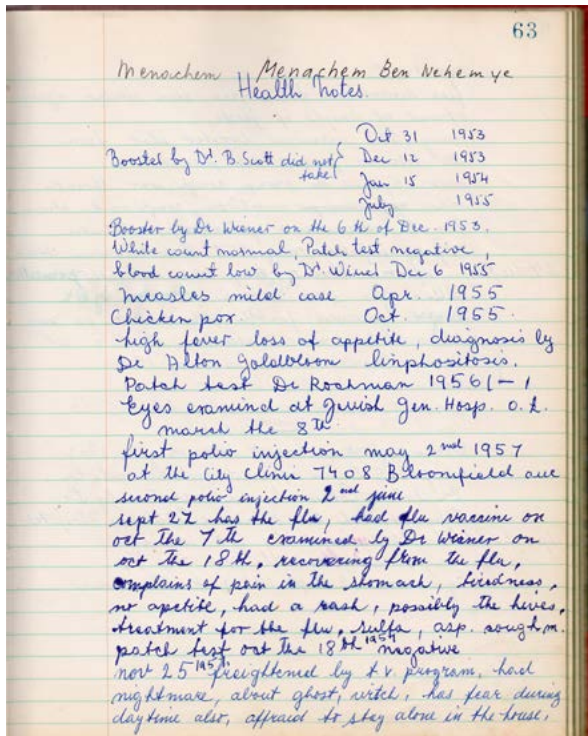
Mother's *Health Notes*, Dr. Alton Goldbloom and Shakespeare

My parents, Miklós Mandel and Veronika Schwartz (aka John and Miriam Stone), were no strangers to deprivation, disease, and death. They were Hungarian-born Holocaust survivors who, in 1947, settled in Montreal after immigrating from a displaced persons camp in Germany to the United States. My mother described her experiences in the Kisvárdá ghetto, Auschwitz-Birkenau and Stutthof concentration camps, and death march, in her memoir, *A Survivor's Memoir*, published by the Montreal Institute for Genocide Studies and excerpted in Ferenc Laczó's *Confronting Devastation: Memoirs of Holocaust Survivors From Hungary*. They crossed the Atlantic Ocean aboard the S.S. *Ernie Pyle* with their few possessions in a plain cardboard suitcase which my father had bartered for a pack of cigarettes. That is all they came to America with, save for the hope and determination to start their imperiled lives anew.



Veronika Schwartz and Miklós Mandel, 1947

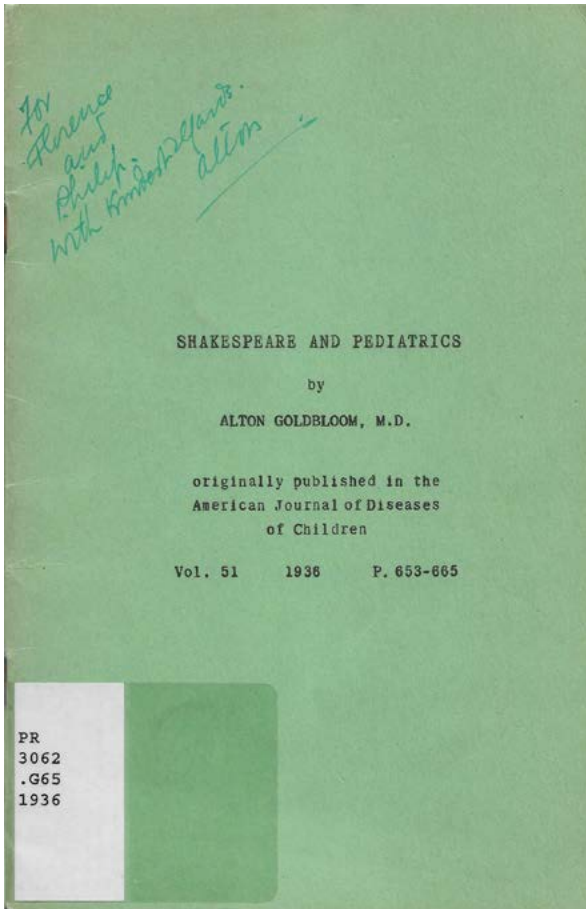
I was born on July 4, 1953, the third of five sons. The date and time of my birth, weight, and the name of the attending physician and hospital were carefully recorded in a black journal by my mother. On three pages of "Health notes" she dutifully kept a record of my height and weight, immunizations, patch tests, childhood diseases like measles and chickenpox, a tonsilectomy, medical and dental examinations, even recurrent nightmares and fears. Also recorded atop the first two pages was my Hebrew name, Menachem. The last entry was for an eye exam in September 1970, by which time I was seventeen years old, had finished high school, and was beginning studies at Vanier College.



One entry my mother recorded was a «diagnosis by Dr. Alton Goldbloom [of] linphosytosis» [i.e. lymphocytosis]. This was in late 1955 or early 1956, when I was 2½ to 3 years old. Our family physician, Dr. Ben Scott, had prescribed an antibiotic for me, but my mother, concerned that my illness, including high fever and loss of appetite, did not seem to improve, brought me to be examined by Dr. Goldbloom, then certainly the Montreal Jewish community's most highly respected pediatrician. He correctly diagnosed my condition as lymphocytosis, an abnormal increase in white blood cells sometimes caused as an immune response to fighting a viral infection. He reassured my worried mother that I would be fine and that the illness would resolve itself without recourse to antibiotics or other drugs, which it did. In an article entitled *My First Fifty Years in Medicine*, published in 1963 in *Macleans*, Dr. Goldbloom wrote: «I have been careful not to lose sight of the fact that many diseases ... are self-limited, run a predicted course uninfluenced by medication and usually have a favorable outcome.»

Some forty-five years after being seen by Dr. Goldbloom, I chanced upon a slim pamphlet of his with green card covers entitled *Shakespeare and Pediatrics*. This was an offprint of a talk Dr. Goldbloom had delivered May 31, 1935 at the thirteenth annual meeting of the Canadian Society for the Study of Diseases of Children, in East Aurora, N.Y. and published the following year in the *American Journal of Diseases of*

Children. An avid reader of Shakespeare, Goldbloom compiled from the Bard's plays a number of references to children and childhood diseases. It was fortuitous that, during a visit to my parents in late October 1998, my mother suggested that we visit the nearby Côte Saint-Luc Public Library for there, upon a book cart of items offered for sale, is where I found this scarce pamphlet, inscribed by Dr. Goldbloom no less! The only reference I found to it was in his autobiography, *Small Patients*, in which he referred to this paper as "a delightful diversion" (p. 223).



Gerald Stone Collection,
University of Ottawa Library

As recounted in his memoir, Alton Goldbloom's first career interest was the theater. Only after his father's impassioned pleading and offer of financial support was the younger Goldbloom persuaded to pursue medical studies. Goldbloom entered McGill University in 1909, graduated in 1916, and, accepting a position in 1944 as chair of McGill's pediatrics department, became the first Jew to hold a chair in any Canadian university. By 1963, Dr. Goldbloom had treated seventy-five thousand children! Yet Goldbloom's love of Shakespeare remained a lifelong affair. Following Dr. Gold-

bloom's death in Montreal in 1968, Drs. Harry Medovy and S. G. Gross both mentioned his knowledge of Shakespeare and love of drama in their letters of appreciation, published with Goldbloom's obituary in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal*.

Besides Dr. Alton Goldbloom (1890–1968), several other Jewish physicians are mentioned in my mother's *Health notes*, among them family practitioner Ben Scott (1917–2012), pediatrician Fred Wiener (d. 2018), and surgeons Arthur Cohen (d. 1986) and Israel Shragovitch. These journal pages exemplify the important role my mother played as our family's primary interlocutor, not only with health, but also school, municipal and other government officials and agencies. Finally, as a book collector, these *Health notes* and Goldbloom's *Shakespeare and Pediatrics* offer an example of personal association that imparts added significance to an acquisition.

Sources

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