

Dr. Clara Christie Might: My Beacon of Hope

By Avni Ganeshalingam

I collapsed in a narrow hallway on the Covid Unit, with my head in my hands, feeling dejected. My trembling hands concealed my tears. My body ached as I yearned to curl up into the fetal position to find some tranquility. Being in the frontlines of this pandemic has tested me to the core. I was in my concluding year of medical school; however, due to the excessive amounts of stress, I began questioning my stamina for withstanding the physical and emotional pressures of being a doctor. Just then, I heard a creaky sound reverberating through the lengthy hallway. Two nurses pushed a stretcher, carrying an older woman into a room across from me. Her short grey curls landed on her wrinkled skin, as her bespectacled eyes shone with optimism. The elderly woman wore a ravishing white dress with metallic bangles. Surprisingly, I caught a glimpse of the woman gazing at me with an empathetic smile. “Child, why do you look unhappy?” she asked with a wavering voice. “Come. Keep me company.”

In such an arduous time, I suddenly felt an overwhelming calmness come over me. “Thank you. I’m Kate,” I said solemnly.

“I am Dr. Clara Christie Might. I used to be just like you, and I know medical school is challenging. When I was your age, I went to medical school at McGill University, and was the only woman to graduate in my class,” explained Dr. Might.

Wow, she’s a doctor! I thought. “I’m sorry you are battling Covid,” I whispered sadly.

“Don’t you worry about me. I am tough,” Dr. Might reassured me. I was born in Winchester, Ontario in 1895. Being the youngest of ten was hard, but I managed. Our family moved to Calgary in 1903 and, eventually, I attended Calgary Normal School. Finally, I worked as a teacher from 1915-1919.”

“Then you proceeded into medical school?” I guessed politely.

“Yes! I graduated from medical school in 1925, and then went to Yale to specialize in obstetrics and gynecology,” Dr. Might answered. “I returned to Calgary in 1927 to establish my medical practice, and surprisingly, I was the only female obstetrician in Alberta! I worked fervently for the next twenty seven years.”

“I bet your family admires you immensely,” I added.

“Unfortunately, I never managed to have any children. I did marry a handsome gentleman named Orrin. We accomplished extraordinary things together. In 1965, we donated our first home to provide shelter for the Calgary Indian Friendship Centre. Additionally, in 1981, we founded the Nat Christie Foundation, which was created to improve the welfare of Calgarians. The foundation was named after my beloved brother, who passed in 1954. There is also a library named after Orrin and I, here in Calgary,” Dr. Might said excitedly.

“I actually received the Nat Christie scholarship for medical students last year! Your foundation is incredible!” I exclaimed.

Dr. Might agreed, “I am pleased we could help so many people in need. Over time, the foundation donated over \$6,000,000 to projects and charities in the area. I am particularly proud of our support for human reproduction research at the Christie Unit at the University of Calgary.”

“That is very compelling. You are incredibly generous and compassionate. I cannot believe how much of your life you dedicated to aiding others,” I declared.

Dr. Might girlishly giggled. “I had a fun side too! I joined the Calgary Golf and Country Club, the Soroptimist Club, the Victorian Order of Nurses, and even the Calgary Ranchmen’s Club!

“That must have been undoubtedly enjoyable!” I responded enthusiastically. “You know Dr. Might, before I met you, I was having second thoughts about the path I have chosen. This pandemic has been emotionally draining, and I had considerable anxiety thinking about how I could cope with this stress in the future. After meeting you, I want to persevere and become a strong female role model. Your passion is your driving force. You overcame so much to become an Ob-Gyn. You are a courageous role model who paved a path for women who wanted to become doctors. Furthermore, your philanthropy towards the community through the Nat Christie Foundation forever changed lives. You are the epitome of leadership. The kindness and empathy you showed me today is something I will always remember. You have immensely inspired me.”

“I am delighted you feel that way!” Dr. Might replied, as a tear emerged from her eye.

This conversation transformed my outlook on life. Firstly, Dr. Might was willing to help anyone who asked for it. She devoted her life to help others achieve their goals and dreams. I, too, can volunteer at the Sick Kids Hospital or the Ronald McDonald House to make a direct impact on lives. I would strive to really understand the pediatric patients, cheer them up, and help them believe they have a bright future, despite their condition. Secondly, Dr. Might was a fearless champion for tackling the impossible. She was the only female Ob-Gyn in her time. This concept of fearlessness has motivated me--in the future, I want to become an oncologist, so I can help treat cancer, a seemingly incurable ailment. I can job shadow my uncle, who is a radiation oncologist, to learn more about where cancer research needs the most support. Currently, however, I could encourage children to participate in fundraisers to raise awareness for cancers prevalent in kids, such as leukemia. Finally, Dr. Might was a strong advocate for females to break barriers and do things they are “traditionally viewed” as weak at. She was an influencer for women who had leadership skills, but were not always given the opportunity to lead. I would love to encourage my female classmates to learn more about leadership. I could start a club and invite prominent female leaders in my community to share their journey with the young girls at my school. Additionally, I could promote female participation in STEM education, and clubs which historically have more male participation, like coding club and chess club.

I admire Dr. Might because she was a humanitarian and a heroic trailblazer, especially for women. This bold champion has motivated me to not only be a doctor, but to give back to the community in a meaningful way. As I endure the hardships of life, I will draw strength from her memory to guide me to reach my full potential.

Bibliography:

1. “Dr. Clara Christie Might (1895-1987)”, Alberta Champions, 2004-2021, <http://albertachampions.org/Champions/dr-clara-christie-might-1895-1987/>.
2. Betty & Dan, “Dr Clara Christie Might (1895-1987)”, Find a Grave, February 25, 2013, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/105820939/clara-might>.
3. Rancourt, Dr. Derrick, “Clara Christie Centre for Mouse Genomics”, University of Calgary, 2021, <https://www.ucalgary.ca/research/research-groups/clara-christie-centre-mouse-genomics>.
4. “Orrin & Clara Christie Might Hall”, Calgary Chinese Cultural Center, 2019, <https://www.culturalcentre.ca/library>.
5. “Clara Christie”, Eyres, 2008, <http://eyres.home.texas.net/bios/ClaraChristie.htm>.