

A Doctor's Thanksgiving Wisdom (1953)

*John Q. Barrett**

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Robert H. Jackson lived actively, vigorously, despite knowing of his family's history of heart disease. His father, Will Jackson, died in 1915 at age 52, apparently of heart trouble. Other members of the Jackson clan had heart problems too. One of Robert's sisters, having "had three quite bad spells with [her] heart" when she was only 34, referred with some fatalism to the possibility of having "a Jackson heart." Robert Jackson might have had his first heart attack as early as January 1941, when he was 48 years old. His medical care attended to his heart from at least then until the end of his life (1954).

In 1934, when Robert Jackson was forty-one years old, he was appointed to national office for the first time and moved to Washington, D.C. But his extended family and many of his closest friends remained in and around his adult hometown, Jamestown, New York. They were the people who, and western New York State was the land and region that, Jackson loved—if you'll excuse a line, he left his heart... So he returned there regularly to visit, at least a few times every year.

And Jackson kept his Jamestown doctor. Dr. Samuel Hurwitz, M.D., was a general practitioner with skills in cardiology. Jackson liked and trusted Dr. Hurwitz and saw him every year. He was attentive to Jackson, prescribing various medicines (bellergal; aminophylline; nitroglycerin) that Jackson took as needed. They corresponded during periods between Jackson's Jamestown visits.

In November 1953, Jackson sent word to Dr. Hurwitz, probably by letter, that he needed prescription refills. Hurwitz wrote back, enclosing signed prescriptions, noting "I have omitted the [patient] name and date, which you can put in when ready to fill the Rx's."

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A DOCTOR'S THANKSGIVING WISDOM (1953)

Dr. Hurwitz also noted his awareness of Jackson's extrajudicial endeavors, which then included his well-publicized November 2, 1953, keynote speech at the dedication of the American Bar Center at the University of Chicago. "The Jamestown papers follow and report your travels," Dr. Hurwitz wrote. "All of us applaud your philosophy."

Dr. Hurwitz closed his November 1953 note to Justice Jackson, written on Thanksgiving Day, with a modest, I think admirable, nod to the role of fortune, and perhaps the role of higher power, in every life:

On this day anyone should be thankful for all the good he has, which are none of his doing.

SAMUEL HURWITZ, M. D.
HOTEL JAMESTOWN BUILDING
JAMESTOWN, N. Y.

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My dear Mr. Jackson -

Enclosed are the prescriptions you requested. I have omitted the name and date, which you can put in when ready to fill the Rx's.

The Jamestown papers follow and report your travels. All of us applaud your philosophy.

On this day anyone should be thankful for all the good he has, which are none of his doing.

kindest regards
Sam Hurwitz