

Bob Lytle, a man of many "lifetimes"

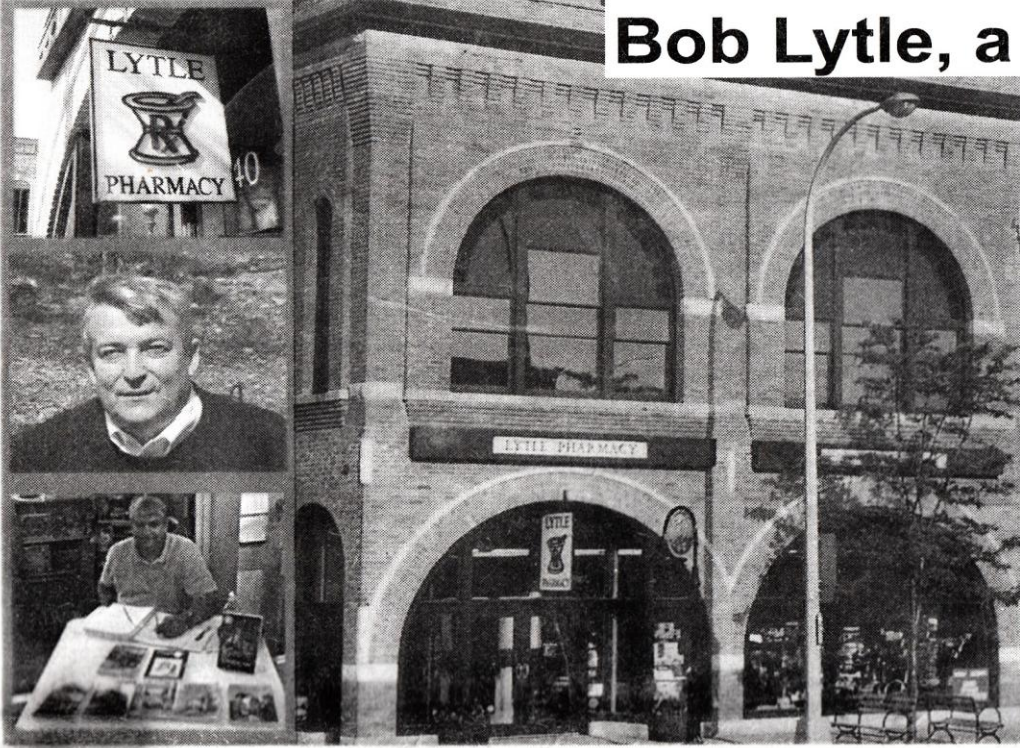
By Orville Hoksch

Bob Lytle: husband, father, poet, college basketball player, author of young people's books, member of various civic organizations, Rochester City Council member (mayor pro-tem for a period of time), international traveler, folk singer, vintage baseball player, newspaper writer and, by the way, the city druggist.

Bob had an early interest in being a drugstore owner. When he was about eight, he would go to the local pharmacy to get his mother's medications. The druggist, Bert Brennan, played an active role in the Saginaw community as well as running his pharmacy. He served as a role model for Bob as Bob planned his lifetime goal while still in junior high.

Bob's experiences in his earliest years (ages five to seventeen) served as source material for his five *Mackinac Passage* books. When his mother was a teen she worked for two elderly women, staying with them where they summered near Mackinac Island. Years later, the women willed the cottage to her. From then on, Bob and his family spent their summers at the old cottage, surrounded by wealthy people and their children. Bob might have felt like the odd-man-out. His family's 12-foot aluminum fishing boat was embarrassingly small compared to the other kids who zipped around in speedboats or competed in their weekly yacht regattas. Bob was neither dismayed nor jealous. He plunged ahead with the recognition of his opportunity to meet new people. The resulting friendships and events also provided the basis for his true-to-life fictional adventures.

Continued on page 2



Bob Lytle's Pharmacy at the northeast corner of Main and Fourth housed in the original Opera House Building, built in 1890.

Bob at a book signing of his Mackinac Passage books.

Lytle: *Continued from page 1*

Bob attended Ferris State, determined to become a pharmacist. His goal was to be like Mr. Brennan, a pharmacist in a small community, but he couldn't tear himself away from his northern Michigan summers. The four summers he was in college, Bob worked both on the Mackinac Island yacht dock and as a folksinger at the Lakeview Hotel. During the third year of pharmacy school, he requested an overseas academic assignment—to take his fourth year at Queen's University in Belfast, Northern Ireland. There he played basketball for the school team and gathered dozens of songs for his minstrel efforts. Bob returned to Michigan for his final year on Mackinac where he met his wife Candy. Her parents were members of the Detroit Yacht Club, based on Belle Isle—the year was 1967. The Detroit riots were in full flower, forcing many of the boaters, such as Candy's parents, to spend their whole summer on Mackinac. The situation gave Bob and Candy sufficient time to become fast friends.

Bob and Candy were married in 1968. After graduation Bob started working as assistant manager at Perry Drugs in Rochester. He was soon made manager of a Perry store in Pontiac—all the while looking to start his own store. Over the next several years Bob and Candy had three sons, Geoff, Ian and Jamie. When he learned that the owner of Morley Drugs, Rochester's long-established downtown pharmacy, had died, Bob went there to see if they needed some relief help. He worked there part-time while keeping his job in Pontiac. Two years later he bought the business and signed a ten-year lease on the store of his dreams. As the new kid in town, Bob had to work all the harder to establish himself as a contributing member of Rochester's close-knit community. Bo, their last son, was born in 1977, the year Bob permanently changed the "Morley Drugs" sign to "Lytle Pharmacy."

It was also the year that Michigan's economy tanked. People were leaving in droves. To make matters worse several drugstore chains had recently

chosen Rochester for their new locations. Also General Motors decided, in a money-saving effort, to restrict their employees to purchase their prescription medications either from a mail-order facility or a selected chain store. To complete the perfect storm, the Hills Theatre—a half block away—chose this time to begin \$1-a-ticket shows—which effectively took up every parking space in the entire downtown. A normal person might have thrown in the towel. Bob and Candy just dug in. They became further involved in a variety of community activities, not only because they wanted to but also to help grow their business.

...prompted Bob to start a service in which he visited OPC members at their homes to investigate medical mysteries.

An incident at the store prompted Bob to start a service in which he visited OPC members at their homes to investigate medical mysteries. From those cases, Bob wrote a medical advice column for the *Era* entitled, "Ask Bob." It caught the eye of a retired benefits manager who suggested Bob

turn it into a book. The man assured Bob that he could sell it to major employers. The book would help them cut their company's health care costs. Bob worked on that idea, putting \$5k into the self-published book called, *Med-Chek*. It was 1991. The book was published and Bob's promoter took that moment to pass away. It left Bob with a basement full of books and no one to promote them.

At this point Bob recognized two things: (1) he loved to write and (2) he would never self-publish again. He felt that if a traditional publishing company didn't think it was good enough to put their own money into its production, then it probably wouldn't sell anyway. Bob chose to continue his writing with a book featuring his northern Michigan experiences. Four years and 26 drafts paid off when *Mackinac Passage: A Summer Adventure* was published in 1995.

As though he didn't have enough on his plate, Bob started researching the family ancestry. His sister was eager to join the DAR and

As though he didn't have enough on his plate, Bob started researching the family ancestry. His sister was eager to join the DAR and believed there was a link to their family locally. Bob discovered a connection through his father's mother that he was a descendant of Lemuel Taylor, the founder of Stony Creek in 1823. As happy as this made his sister, it made Bob even happier—he was no longer the new kid on the block. His roots in the community were deeper than anybody's.

In 2000 Bob started playing vintage baseball—no gloves, all wooden bats, no umpires (you made the calls as you saw them—honestly, as gentlemen.) He was intrigued by the game's early style and from that came the award-winning, time-travel story, *A Pitch In Time*.

Bob has always been interested in the history of the places he lived. He was renting his current building when, in 1984, a March storm blew in one of its beautiful upper windows. The building's absentee owner decided to simply brick it in. Bob was devastated. He suggested that the owner spend the money and restore it. Bob had no say in the matter so he went to the newly formed DDA and asked for help. They said that nothing could be done unless he bought the building—and they would help. After two years and hundreds of meetings with government and bank officials, Bob and Candy bought the building and restored its iconic 1890 façade. During that restoration period Bob never missed a day serving Rochester's community, even though there were times he had to pass out umbrellas to keep the construction dust out of his customers' hair. The research needed for the national historic trust grant provided the incentive for another of Bob's time-travel books, *Three Rivers Crossing*.

Bob achieved his goal of owning and operating a pharmacy in a small town. While he was at it he mastered about two or three lifetimes of other skills and trades as well.

If you aren't already one of Bob's customers you should stop in anyway to say "Hi!" and maybe learn something about the city. If you are a customer, you might realize that within the first few visits he knew your name and greeted you accordingly—just like his mentor, Mr. Brennan. ▼