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City: Rockford, IL

Date of Graduation from Medical School: 1957

Medical School Graduated From: Creighton School of Medicine

Residency Location: St. Mary's, Rochester, NY; Christ Hospital, Cincinnati, OH

Specialty: Family Medicine

What factors influenced your decision to become a physician? There were probably many factors, but probably the most influential when I was very little was my Dad. He was a physician, and when I was very little he took me to the office with him. He had had a residency in surgery but he was practicing in Petersburg, Nebraska, population 400 and there was no close hospital so he did what he could in the office. When I was about six, I would hold the heads when he took out tonsils. He would put the patient asleep and then while they were operating they would have ether blow into the mouth and I would hold the head while he took out the tonsils. They had beds in the room back of his examine room and he would keep the people in there and watch them all day long. At night he would check them and send them home. We moved from there and he renewed his surgical skills here at Cook County Hospital. When we moved, he did the tonsils at the hospital, so I wasn't needed but my interest never dulled and by nine I thought that it would be nice to be a physician.

Did you have any mentors or influential people in the course of your medical training or career who made an impact on you? There were several, but the ones who influenced me the most were Dr. Schwinlein in Cincinnati and of course my father and some of the doctors around him.

Did you experience a defining moment that made you feel you had become a physician? No, I do not know just when that happened. I think it was gradual. When I started my Internship, I was very concerned when they called me and I would think "Oh my goodness, now what?" When I ended my Internship my thoughts when they called me were just "Now what?" The tension of not being able to cope or know what I should do were not there. I think that at that point, I thought that I was a physician.

As you were training to be a physician, what one piece of advice could you not have done without? I really do not know much that I could have done without, but one fact I remember so well. Our teacher was telling us that they did not recommend treating blood pressure until the diastolic pressure was 105. In the next breathe he tells us that the insurance company loses money if the blood pressure is over 140/90. So of course we say, shouldn't we treat at 140/90 and he said it was not recommended. This conversation went on for another 5 to 10 minutes and the answer was always the same--it is not recommended. I doubt that anyone in the class waited until there was 105 diastolic to treat, but I know for a fact that the medical profession did not get on board or even study this much for years. I heard these statements in 1956 and I know for a fact that we had a young detail man come to Rockford and try to exhort us to treat at 140/90. I went to Rockford in 1961 and I had been there for a few years when he came with this advice. I was bold enough at this point to just watch this poor young man in action. He had been in my office and asked if I were going to treat at a lower point, and of course I told him no for I had been treating at that level for all the years I was in practice. All these doctors at the hospital would just say humph or something like that and leave. This poor young man was so frustrated. Finally I said to him "Why don't you ask at what level they start treating blood pressure?" Then I told him I had always treated at 140/90. His expression changed and he smiled and said "Thank you." I am sure he was trained like that for the recommendation was probably still 105 diastolic.

What advice would you give to medical students graduating in the class of 2007? Follow your heart, keep your mind open, for truth may not be what we think is true today. Keep learning. If your practice medicine 40 years, you will see something you have never seen before in the next year.

What is the most significant medical innovation you experienced in your years of practice? It is hard to think of one innovation, there are so many. We have CT, MRI, so many new drugs to treat hypertension that were not there when I finished school. We have more antibiotics. We know so much more about the body chemistry and have drugs to treat because of this knowledge. Genetics is now coming into its own with its new medicines. Perhaps the hypertensive treatment and the treatment of heart disease and its causes had done the most to extend the life expectancy the ten years it has been extended.

What regrets, if any, do you have about your medical career? My biggest regret is that I did not have time for more fun. Many people have had time for family and friends that it seemed hard to find.

Is there one patient, situation or incident that stands out above all others in your career? There are several that stand out, most are about the one I did not have the answer to heal and there are other times I think that God was kind, that the patient did not die when I was stumbling around trying to find out what is wrong with them. I did find out, and the patient lived, but it would have been nice if it didn't take so long.