

Gordon F. Murray, MD, January 8, 1939 to May 21, 2018



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Dr Gordon F. Murray was the 44th president of The Society of Thoracic Surgeons and a distinguished member of this profession. He had a major influence on surgery as both Chief of Division of Cardiothoracic Surgery and Chairman of the Department of Surgery at West Virginia University. An advocate of resident education, he served on the American Board of Thoracic Surgery and

the Residency Review Committee, and was President of the Thoracic Surgery Directors Association. He was a tireless worker and leader in our specialty.

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On May 21, 2018, Dr Gordon F. Murray (Fig 1) died in Wilmington, North Carolina, at the age of 79. He was a leader and advocate for the specialty of thoracic surgery. He was born on January 8, 1939, in Muskegon, Michigan. Both of his parents were high school teachers, his mother also a school counselor, and his father, a journalist. The family had Scottish roots on his father's side, and Gordon took pride in the heritage of the Murray clan. Dr Murray had one brother, Douglas (Doug), who was 4.5 years older. By his senior year of high school, Doug had not yet decided on a career pathway and was considering journalism, following in his father's footsteps. He had a discussion with Gordon, who was then in 7th grade, and asked if Gordon had thought at all about a career. Gordon responded quite emphatically, "I'm going to be a surgeon." There had been no prior family members who were physicians, and the exact impetus for Gordon's decision will remain unknown. However, that discussion with his younger brother changed Doug Murray's career trajectory, and he entered the University of Michigan in the accelerated 3-year pre-professional program, saving a year of tuition before medical school for a family with a very limited income. Gordon followed his brother to the University of Michigan, also matriculating in the 3-year pre-professional program prior to medical school. At the University of Michigan, Doug played quarterback for the Wolverines during his freshman and sophomore years under Coach Benny Oosterbahn. Over the years, this was a tremendous source of pride for Gordon. Both brothers remained loyal Michigan Wolverine football fans throughout their lives and periodically returned to Ann Arbor on football weekends, usually tied to medical school class reunions. Doug graduated from the University of Michigan Medical School, and after a surgical oncology fellowship at Sloan Kettering Memorial Hospital in New York, joined the



Fig 1. Gordon F. Murray, MD.

faculty at Emory where he remained for his professional life as a highly accomplished surgical oncologist. He still resides in Atlanta today.

Gordon Murray began medical school at the University of Michigan in 1959. In his senior year, 1962–63, he completed a 6-month research fellowship at the Johns Hopkins Hospital as an assistant in the laboratory of Dr David Sabiston and Vivien Thomas, the renowned surgical laboratory assistant to Dr Alfred Blalock and a key figure in the development of the Blalock-Taussig

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operation for the treatment of cyanotic congenital heart disease. Dr Murray was elected into the Alpha Omega Alpha Honor Medical Society at the University of Michigan. While he was in medical school, he met Sharon Lynn Marsden of Grand Rapids, Michigan, on a blind date. Sharon had attended Albion College but had transferred to the University of Michigan to complete her major in Education. Their relationship grew, and on June 15, 1963, just after his medical school graduation, Gordon and Sharon were married. As a University of Michigan graduate, Sharon had just secured a position as a teacher in the Ann Arbor Public School System. When Dr Murray learned that he had been accepted into the Johns Hopkins Surgery Residency Program, Sharon had the uncomfortable job of informing the principal who had just hired her as a teacher that she would be leaving for Baltimore with her new husband!

Dr Murray began his surgical training at the Johns Hopkins Hospital in 1963 where Dr Blalock was the Surgery Department Chair. Dr Blalock died in 1964, and Dr George Zuidema became the new Chief of Surgery. With the inevitable programmatic upheaval that accompanies departmental leadership change, Dr Murray completed his fourth year of surgical training at the Massachusetts General Hospital (1966-1967) but then returned to the Johns Hopkins program where he served as Senior Assistant Resident from 1967 to 1969 and as Chief Resident from 1969 to 1970.

During the Vietnam War era, the Berry Plan was initiated in the United States. This program allowed physicians to defer obligatory military service until completion of medical school and residency training, thereby ensuring that there would be a sufficient number from each of the medical specialties for military service. The Plan was enacted in 1964. Dr Murray was "Berry Plan deferred", and after completion of his residency at Johns Hopkins, he served as a Thoracic Staff-Surgeon at the US Naval Hospital in Great Lakes, Illinois, from 1970 to 1972. The Murrays had 3 children—Bren born in 1965, Bill in 1967, and Bruce in 1971.

After completion of his military service in 1972, Dr Murray was recruited by Benson Wilcox, MD, Chief of the Division of Cardiothoracic Surgery, to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill as an Assistant Professor of Surgery. He remained on the surgery faculty at UNC for the next 14 years, becoming an Associate Professor in 1975, Professor in 1980, and Associate Chief of the Division of Cardiothoracic Surgery in 1981. Ben Wilcox, Society of Thoracic Surgeons President (1994-1995), was a friend and mentor to Gordon Murray and served to reinforce his commitment to resident education, which had already been influenced by his parents who were teachers. Gordon Murray was a dedicated physician and surgeon, but his priority was his family. He was a "hands-on Dad". During their time in Chapel Hill, Gordon frequently camped with his 2 boys and instilled in them his love of the outdoors. They often fished in the Outer Banks of North Carolina and took backpack and bike trips, riding 25 to 35 miles a day and camping out on Ocracoke Island, one of the barrier islands of the Outer

Banks. Gordon and Sharon enjoyed playing tennis, and Gordon was a marathon runner. Their favorite family vacation spot was Sunset Beach, NC, where they would spend 2 weeks together in the summer at Wooten Cottage. Years later they would return together to Sunset Beach, their "special place", for important family events. Gordon guided his daughter, Bren, into a career as a pediatric intensive care unit nurse, which he told her would provide more nursing autonomy and an exciting professional life. Bren recently left nursing after 15 years to pursue her other passion, watercolor painting. Bill was working in hospital administration when he tragically died of abdominal adenocarcinoma at the age of 39 in 2007. Bruce is Executive Director of the Poole YMCA in Garner, NC.

In 1985, Dr Murray was recruited to the University of West Virginia in Morgantown as Professor of Surgery and Chief of the Division of Cardiothoracic Surgery. For the next 18 years, Dr Murray would serve the University of West Virginia as Chief of the Division of Cardiothoracic Surgery (1985-2003) and Chairman of the Department of Surgery (1987-1998). An advocate for resident education, Dr Murray served as Program Director for both the University of West Virginia Thoracic Surgery and General Surgery residencies. During his long tenures at both the University of North Carolina and then West Virginia University (WVU), he served on multiple medical school and departmental committees. He was respected for his calm demeanor, integrity, and ability to gain consensus as he participated in meetings of search committees, curriculum planning, the Professional Fees Committee, Pension and Benefits Committee, Medical Executive Board, and various strategic planning committees for a new professional office center. He played a major role in the strategic direction of the WVU Health Sciences Center. While in Morgantown, the Murrays' new family getaway was at the Wisp Resort in Deep Creek Lake, Maryland, less than an hour away.

Gordon Murray was a member of multiple professional societies including The Society of Thoracic Surgeons, the American Association for Thoracic Surgery, the Southern Thoracic Surgical Association, the American Surgical Association, the Association for Academic Surgery, the Association of Surgical Education, The American College of Cardiology, the American College of Chest Physicians, the American Heart Association, the Southeastern Surgical Association, the Halsted Society, the Thoracic Surgery Program Directors Association, and others. He had a wide breadth of knowledge of our specialty, his scientific publications spanning the field and dealing with such diverse topics as lung cancer, tracheal stenosis, acquired tracheoesophageal fistula, benign and malignant tumors of the esophagus, management of congenital lobar emphysema, management of wounds of the subclavian, innominate and axillary arteries, use of a temporary heparin-coated (Gott) shunt bypass for innominate artery reconstruction, outflow patch infections in tetralogy of Fallot, congenital cardiac disease, and cardiac valve replacement in active endocarditis.

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