



Dr. James R. Urbaniak

Birthdate: May 15, 1936, Fairmont, West Virginia

University of Kentucky 1954-1958, B.S. Degree, *Magna Cum Laude*, PBK

Duke University School of Medicine, 1958-1962

Alpha Omega Alpha Medical Honorary

Duke University Medical Center, June 1962 - July 1963

DUMC Orthopedic Residency November 1965-June 1969

Virginia Flowers Baker Professor of Orthopaedic Surgery, July 1991

Chief of the Division of Orthopaedic Surgery, January 1985-2002

Director Hand Surgery Program 1975-2005

Vice Chairman, Department of Surgery, July 1994-2006

Duke University Medical Center

Honors and Awards:

ABC Travel Fellow, American Orthopaedic Association 1973 Distinguished Alumni Award, University of Kentucky 1985

President of many orthopaedic and hand surgery organizations

North Carolina Physician of the Year 1986

Ann Doner Vaughn Kappa Delta Award for 1994 "Blood *No-Reflow* in Skeletal Muscle after Replantation"

1996 Distinguished Southern Orthopaedist Award, Southern Orthopaedic Association

Thomas Sheen Award, American College of Surgeons 1999

Bristol-Myers Squibb/Zimmer for Distinguished Achievement in Orthopaedics, 2001

Chairman, Board of Trustees, OREF, 2001

Chairman, Board of Trustees, Journal of Bone and Joint Surgery 2004, 2005

2002 Distinguished Faculty Award, Duke University School of Medicine

Honorary Doctorate Degree, University of Athens, November 2003

Member of 22 national and international societies.

Contributed over 300 articles to the medical literature and author or co-author of 12 textbooks mostly in hand and microsurgery.

He has been a leader in basic research and clinical microsurgical reconstruction of the musculoskeletal system.

Reflections as a Hand Surgeon

James R. Urbaniak, M.D.

At the Triennial Congress of the IFSSH-IFSHT in New Delhi, India in March of 2013, Raja Sabapathy, the Programme Chairman, requested that I present a vignette on the reflections of my career as a hand surgeon. I was truly honoured to be invited to deliver this presentation to this audience of international friends. However it was a difficult assignment, for I was instructed to reflect on my life accomplishments and regrets, so to speak. We all know that one of the major principles of speaking is to make minimal use of the words “I” and “me” so this was an arduous task when asked to address reflections on my life, but I gave it a try, and will record some of these efforts in this writing.

First I have been blessed with grandparents and parents who taught me the meaningful values of life – mainly one of service. The title ‘doctor’ is derived from the Latin verb ‘docere’ which means to teach. Personally I believe that I could only serve as a teacher, coach, or a doctor. My greatest professional satisfaction has been the opportunity to teach residents and fellows, which I will later address.

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However my greatest accomplishment in life has been to marry my wife, Muff, a Duke Nurse – no question about it.

That being established, the three most gratifying rewards in my profession have come from microsurgery, teaching, and leadership positions.

1. My passion for microsurgery has been most rewarding. I want to make it clear that few, if any, of my ideas, techniques, procedures, publications, or lectures have been totally original. Although I was a self-taught microsurgeon, I was greatly influenced by giants in microsurgery – Buncke, O’Brien, Morrison, Zjong Wei Chen, Kleinert, and Kutz to name a few. The joy of our first successful thumb replant which was retrieved from the bottom of a lake more than four decades ago remains very fresh in my mind as if it occurred yesterday – so exhilarating. The successful reattachment of the hand of a 25 year old electrician more than three decades ago that enabled him to return to fine and skillful manipulation in his vocation with a normal appearing hand and essentially normal

intrinsic and extrinsic function was also so rewarding. It doesn't get any better.

The exhilaration that is experienced from a free tissue transfer such as a toe-to-thumb, "wrap-around", and a free vascularised fibular graft for avascular necrosis of the femoral head (of which we performed over 3500) is always really gratifying. The thrill of seeing the flow of blood through an anastomosed vessel transcends to life by engaging the flow of many other activities of work and play – this engaging flow causes forgetting oneself and thinking of other's needs and not worry; and therefore be more productive as well as being happy - to paraphrase the Hungarian psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihaly.¹

2. Without a doubt the greatest reward for being in academic surgery is the opportunity to train residents and fellows. I have been fortunate to have been involved in the training of 328 residents, 124 hand fellows, and 81 international research fellows from more than 20 countries. Honestly, I have learned way more from them than they have from me. Many of these relationships have been long lasting as



I've proudly followed their contributions worldwide over five decades.

3. I have been fortunate to serve as President or Chairman of several national and international organisations – including the IFSSH. The titles, positions, or recognition are important, but what is more rewarding is the development and maintenance of lasting relationships from these positions of service. These offices have involved a lot of work and commitment – but as an old Turkish proverb states "No road is long with good company" and I

certainly have been surrounded by great international company. We have cultivated many lasting friends around the globe through a bond of trust – the major bond of a lasting friendship. This bond of trust plays a dominant role in our international alliances in medicine – too bad it is not more genuine in the international political world. We in medicine have an international creed – service.

What Have I Missed?

Certainly some family time – but we accepted the demands of medical



service as part of our family life. As far as play time, I have never distinguished between work and play. "Having fun is doing hard work well" as an old coach once said.² I've really enjoyed being a doctor, surgeon, especially one who performs microsurgery, and by the way I get paid for it. Studies show "Happy People Live Longer." Through my practice, I have learned people first want to know how much you care before they care how much you know. I've tried not to offend others – you only lose – it's a waste of time, especially if they can help you in the future. The best way to get rid of your enemies is to make them your friends.

Finally, in response to the question if I had it to do over what would I change? Well, I believe you have to play with the cards you were dealt. You can't in all fairness change them.

Yes, I've had some failures along the way but I hope that I have learned from them. You are not really a failure until you begin to blame others or situations. When things went wrong in our clinical work, or research we pointed the finger to ourselves and became better from the experience. Medicine, surgery has been good to me – a real joy. As Jonas Salk stated, "one of the best rewards for achieving some success is it puts you in a position to do more."³ Therefore, I hope my greatest accomplishment is yet to come. I realise this presentation has been personal, and for this I apologise, but it is my way of saying thanks to so many international friends, especially those involved in hand and microsurgery.

References

1. Csikszentmihaly, M: Finding Flow: The Psychology of Engagement with Everyday Life. Basic Books, New York, NY, April 6, 1998.
2. Bilas, J: Toughness. New American Library, New York, NY, March 13, 2013.
3. Salk, J, Anshen, RN: Anatomy of Reality. Columbia University Press, New York, NY, March 1, 1983.