

## ELLEN TAYLOR SELDIN: a conversation with the editor

**E**llen Taylor (name changed from Moncy) Seldin (*Figure 1*) was born in Peking, China, on July 28, 1939. Her father was a naval officer and therefore they lived in several different countries. After graduation from public high school, she went to nursing school at the Massachusetts General Hospital. She obtained a nursing degree and then enrolled in Boston University, where she received a bachelor of science degree in 1963. Her junior year was spent in Paris supported by a scholarship from Hamilton College, and she became fluent in French. After deciding that she wanted to be a physician, she enrolled in the University of Texas at Austin to complete her pre-medical school requirements and then went to the University of Texas Southwestern Medical School at Dallas, graduating in 1970. Her internship and residency in general surgery were at the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center in Denver. She entered clinical practice in Denver and was an active member of the surgical faculty of the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center, becoming an associate professor in 1987. In 1988, she was awarded the Golden Apple Teaching Award and in 1989, the Outstanding Clinical Preceptor Award from the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center.

In 1989, she moved to Seattle, Washington, and continued her surgical practice there. Because of an illness in the early 1990s, she gave up her practice of surgery and became an emergency room physician, moving to Greenville, Kentucky. After 3 years of practice there, she returned to Dallas, Texas, as the wife of Dr. Donald Seldin. Dr. Ellen Taylor is a charming and talented lady who continues to be an active physician in the specialty of emergency medicine.

**William Clifford Roberts, MD (hereafter, WCR):** *Dr. Taylor, I appreciate your talking with me and therefore with the readers of Baylor University Medical Center Proceedings. It is August 17, 2002, and we are sitting in the cafeteria at Southwestern Medical School. Could we begin by my asking you to talk a bit about yourself? Where were you born? Who were your parents? What did they do? Do you have siblings?*



**Figure 1.** Ellen Taylor, MD, during the interview.



**Figure 2.** At age 3.

**Ellen Taylor Seldin (hereafter, ETS):** I was born on July 28, 1939, in Peking, China (*Figure 2*). My father was an Annapolis Naval Academy graduate. One of the first positions he had in his naval career was as a White House aide, and in that capacity he was in China before the outbreak of World War II. My mother was with him. My older sister was born in Shanghai. Following that period, we lived with my mother's relatives in Macon and Cochran, Georgia, during World War II. My mother, Mildred Watson, was born in Macon. She is from a long line of southerners and was descended through the Daughters of the American Revolution.

**WCR:** *What did your father do during World War II?*

**ETS:** He had several commands. He was awarded the Navy Cross for bravery displayed while in command of a destroyer in the South Pacific.

**WCR:** *Are either of your parents alive?*

**ETS:** No.

---

From the Department of Emergency Medicine, Doctors Hospital, Dallas, Texas (Taylor Seldin); and the Baylor Heart and Vascular Institute, Baylor University Medical Center, Dallas, Texas (Roberts).

**Corresponding author:** Ellen Taylor, MD, Department of Emergency Medicine, Doctors Hospital, 9440 Poppy Drive, Dallas, Texas 75218.

**WCR:** *How many siblings do you have?*

**ETS:** There were a total of 5, 3 girls and 2 boys.

**WCR:** *Where are you in the hierarchy?*

**ETS:** I'm second. My older sister now is a gardener in Massachusetts. My younger sister is a professor of Spanish literature at Temple University in Philadelphia. My brother Charles is a jack-of-all-trades and runs several apartment houses southeast of Boston. My brother David is retired.

**WCR:** *Which parent pushed you all to excel?*

**ETS:** I think it was more my mother. My father was disappointed that I wasn't going to get married and have children right away.

**WCR:** *After World War II, where did the family move? Did you continue to move around a bit?*

**ETS:** We did. The first place we lived for any period of time was Puerto Rico (from 1947 to 1949) (Figure 3). Then we were in Newport, Rhode Island. My father was an instructor at the war college there. After that we lived in Boston, where he was commander of the Boston Naval Shipyard. In the 1970s the shipyard was sold to the city. It's now become beautiful waterfront property. I remember boxcars, working piers, cargo ships, and destroyers being anchored there. We lived there until my father retired from the navy. We then moved to Winchester, a suburb about 15 miles northwest of Boston, where we had been bussed to school. My father then enrolled in the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University for a year. He was appointed to the US Diplomatic Corps. In that capacity all of us were sent to San Jose, Costa Rica. I was 14 at that time. I went to high school there for 2 years and learned Spanish. My younger sister became interested enough in Spanish that she majored in it in college and became a professor of Spanish.

**WCR:** *How did you decide which college to attend?*

**ETS:** In high school in Winchester, I really didn't have any interest in going to college. I was an erratic student: A's sometimes and C's sometimes. One day the high school guidance counselor said, "We don't have any college applications for you. Aren't you going to college?" I told her I didn't really think it was necessary for me because we had traveled so much that I already had a grasp of the world. She asked me what I wanted to do. I told her I might volunteer in a hospital. (I'd already been volunteering in a local hospital.) She asked, "Does medical work interest you?" I told her that it did to some extent. She told me that if I wasn't sure what I wanted to do, I could go to nursing school and therefore always have a job. She said the best nursing school in the country was at the Massachusetts General Hospital.

I went to the 3-year nursing program at Massachusetts General Hospital and was surrounded by many bright minds from Harvard. It was there that I became interesting in learning. My first college course was Philosophy 101, given every Tuesday night at Harvard University night school. I took the subway across the Charles River to Harvard Square. It was thrilling. I made an A. That's when I decided I wanted to go to college.

When I finished nursing school, I went to Boston University for a degree in nursing. I decided to study French for one of my elective courses; I did well. The next year I was in France on a scholarship with the Hamilton College program. Hamilton College is located in Clinton, New York. It had and still has a



**Figure 3.** At age 8 with her family at the naval base in Puerto Rico, 1947.

junior year program abroad. That was my first European experience. I loved it. I came back and planned to pursue a PhD in French. Boston University offered me a scholarship and the position of director of their French House so that I would have room and board paid for. I still worked on weekends as a nurse to support myself while in college. It seemed so easy, so effortless that at the last minute I thought, "Maybe I should study something more worthwhile." Language seemed frivolous, too much fun. "I should become a doctor," I thought.

**WCR:** *What happened?*

**ETS:** My younger sister was in Austin, Texas, for her PhD studies. At that time the University of Texas in Austin was one of the best universities for a PhD in Spanish. She finished with honors at Bryn Mawr College as a Spanish major. She had been in Austin for a couple of years. She was impressed with the quality of the Texas university system. Based on her recommendation (she's very smart), I came to Austin in 1964 to live with her to do premed studies.

**WCR:** *At that time you were 25. How long did it take you to fulfill your premed requirements at the University of Texas?*

**ETS:** It took me 2½ years to get through all the courses. Then I applied to Southwestern, which had the same entrance requirement for nonresidents as it did for women. You had to be in the upper 10% of the entering class based on your Scholastic Aptitude Test and Medical College Admission Test scores and your college grade-point average. I thought, "It doesn't really make any difference whether I'm a woman or a minority, I'm a nonresident. That requirement would apply in any case."

**WCR:** *How did chemistry and biology strike you? Did you feel as much at home with them as you did with French?*

**ETS:** No, I didn't. What amazed me was that I did well in mathematics. I'd never done well in mathematics in high school. In Austin, the math courses were separated into those for math majors and those for engineers. I was not going to be an engineer. I needed math because I had to take the science courses. They told me to take math for math majors. The first day of class the instructor said, "We're going to talk about the number zero. Is there a number zero? Why is there a number zero?" It was a philosophical discussion about numbers. It was a surprise! After algebra and geometry, I decided to take calculus even though it wasn't required. I loved it. The first semester of calculus was differential and the second semester of calculus was integral. The course was set up initially with no textbook because it was based on the theory that you were supposed to be able to work a problem and arrive at an answer. Due to frustration, I went across the street and bought Schaum's College Outline Series. I found problems worked out in the text. It seemed like all my questions were answered. I thought it was fabulous. The next day in class the instructor said, "Does anybody have the homework done?" I said, "I do." He told me to show the class. I must have covered 3 boards writing equations. I sat down and he said, "That's pretty good. Did you consult the textbooks?" I told him, "Yes, I did." He said, "I'm disappointed to hear that. But since you've brought it up—all right, class, here's your textbook." I loved math, and I think if I'd stayed I would have become a math major.

Chemistry was difficult for me. It was very exacting. When you measured things in pipettes, everything had to be just right. We had to analyze how much silver was in a dime. I had much more trouble with chemistry. Nevertheless, I made A's. The more theoretical the course was, the better I did.

**WCR:** *How did Texas strike you when you came to Austin the first time?*

**ETS:** It was beautiful. I loved the climate and what has been described as the "can-do spirit." I had gone on several exploratory interviews in Boston in 1963 regarding the possibility of my going to medical school. I found no encouragement anywhere! They'd ask, "Was your father a doctor? Did you go to Radcliffe?"

**WCR:** *You obviously did well in your classes in Austin and received a great deal of encouragement there.*

**ETS:** Yes, from all sides. It was like night and day, and it was exhilarating.

**WCR:** *You mentioned that a teacher in high school had encouraged you to continue your studies and to consider nursing. Did any other teachers have an impact on you?*

**ETS:** Yes, my English teacher in high school in Winchester, Massachusetts. As seniors we read *Crime and Punishment*. My teacher thought my grasp of the story and characters was excellent. He wanted me to go to college as an English major.

**WCR:** *In high school and college, what were some of your extracurricular activities? I understand that you are a musician.*

**ETS:** That came later. I had a few years of piano lessons when growing up, and my mother played piano very well. I didn't devote myself to it until much later. I started taking piano lessons again in the 1980s. I became very engrossed with it and even took 3 months off in 1985 to go to Boston to study in music school. I



**Figure 4.** Playing the piano at a hospital talent show in 1984.

was at the Berklee College of Music, just around the corner from where the Boston Symphony plays (Figure 4).

**WCR:** *Were you an athlete in high school?*

**ETS:** Not in high school. Because of where we lived and because my father was an officer, tennis courts were usually available. I played a lot of tennis growing up and kept active. I'm playing tennis again now, 1 day a month, with a couple of wonderful women. I'm the youngest member of the group. They are all in their 70s, and they are better players than I am. It's so much fun. During my surgical residency in Denver, Colorado, I started to swim as a way to relieve tension and to stay in shape because of the long hours. This was 1970 through 1975. I worked 36 hours on, 12 hours off. It was grueling. I joined the Jewish Community Center and started to swim laps at night. Somebody asked if I'd like to be on a swim team. I ultimately swam for the Denver Athletic Club for the next 3 years. I went to meets around the country but never to the nationals. I qualified, but I couldn't manage to take off the amount of time required to travel. I really loved it. I also learned how to ski in Colorado.

**WCR:** *What did you swim?*

**ETS:** Although I can do all the strokes, my best stroke is the backstroke. I won most of my medals in the backstroke.

**WCR:** *Was your home growing up an atmosphere of learning? Were there lots of books around? Did your father or mother or both discuss ideas and concepts?*

**ETS:** That fluctuated. My father was gone a lot. He worked for the United Nations for almost 2 years (1949 through 1951). We had moved to Newport, but he was gone for those 2 years to be an advisor for the United Nations. He was stationed in Tel Aviv. When he came back from that, he was in Laos for 2 years.



**Figure 5.** As a medical student at Southwestern.

My mother had friends who were artistic. They would often be dinner guests. Some of my father's friends from the military and the United Nations were very knowledgeable about history and foreign affairs; they were quite stimulating. My father was an avid reader.

**WCR:** *And your mother?*

**ETS:** She painted and played the piano. It was more of an active engagement with the arts as opposed to the world of ideas.

**WCR:** *You could apply to medical school after you had been in Austin about 18 months?*

**ETS:** Yes. The whole time I was there I was a nonresident. At that time you had to be in Texas for a year without being in school to be considered a resident. I didn't want to wait, so I kept my nonresident status.

**WCR:** *Where did you apply to medical school?*

**ETS:** I applied to Galveston, Southwestern, and Washington University. I was accepted at all 3. I was given a \$1000 scholarship at Washington University, but the tuition, room, and board was \$4000. That wasn't going to be enough, so I went to Southwestern.

**WCR:** *You weren't financially dependent on your family after leaving nursing school?*

**ETS:** That's right. My father could have helped me, but he didn't really believe in his heart that that's what I should be doing. He thought I should be married and raising children. I had to manage on my own.

**WCR:** *I gather that you made virtually all A's at the University of Texas in Austin.*

**ETS:** I was fortunate in that. I made a B in either physical or organic chemistry. All the rest were A's.

**WCR:** *You started medical school in 1966 at the age of 27?*

**ETS:** Yes.

**WCR:** *How did medical school strike you?*

**ETS:** I loved it. Everything was so interesting. Everything was conducive to learning, but I also had to work. On the weekends, I worked as a nurse in Parkland Hospital's emergency room

to make enough money to live. During the week I had the luxury of being a student.

**WCR:** *Did the studies come easy for you, or did you really have to work hard?*

**ETS:** The limiting factor for me was that my study time was limited by my work schedule. The salaries were not much then. The third year, the clinical year, I was more interested than ever in medicine (*Figure 5*). Although I had scholarships part of the way through, in the third year I took out a loan so I wouldn't have to work as much and could really study. As a result I did very well that year. I finished second in the internal medicine exam. During the first 2 years I was right in the middle of the class, and then in the third year I became number 6 in the class. People were just astonished. I remember feeling, "Those places aren't reserved."

**WCR:** *How many medical students were in your class?*

**ETS:** There were 110, including 14 women.

**WCR:** *Did you skip a grade or two in grammar school or junior high?*

**ETS:** No, I didn't. I graduated from high school at age 17 and started nursing school at age 18.

**WCR:** *In medical school you were about 5 years older than most students and had had a broadening career. Did you feel a lot more mature than your classmates?*

**ETS:** In some ways. And, of course, I had had clinical experience as a nurse putting myself through college and the first 2 years of medical school.

**WCR:** *You had little time for dating?*

**ETS:** It was minimal. Once I decided I wanted to be a doctor, I wasn't looking for a husband.

**WCR:** *Who had a major impact on you in medical school?*

**ETS:** Dr. Seldin.

**WCR:** *When did you first meet him, and what was your initial impression of him?*

**ETS:** I'll never forget the first time I saw him. I was a second-year medical student in the physical diagnosis course. This was 1967, and I was 28 years old. It was a class given from 1:00 to 2:00 PM, right after lunch. I used to sit fairly close to the front, the third or fourth row back. We were at about the halfway point in the course. Most faculty who gave talks were interesting and good. Many were physicians in the community. We were sometimes given opportunities to see patients at St. Paul Hospital. One day someone by the name of Dr. Seldin was giving the class. The other students knew more about him than I did and told me that he was head of the Department of Medicine. In walks this handsome, well-dressed, energetic man. He didn't miss a thing. I thought, "Oh, my God. He is the handsomest man I've ever seen." I was astonished at his energy, his alertness, and his command of medical information.

He presented a case of a woman who had difficulty breathing. He put up an x-ray. I don't remember exactly what it showed, but there was something in the presentation that made me think of sarcoidosis. After he went through the physical findings and the x-ray, he asked, "What occurs to you?" I was so mesmerized by him and the presentation that I raised my hand. He said, "Well, what do you think, young lady?" I said, "I think it might be sarcoid." "That's very good. Why do you think that?" I went through a list of things and he said, "Very good. That's close but not quite right." It was Wegener's granulomatosis. After the class



Figure 6. Scrubbing for her last operation in Seattle in January 1993.

my fellow students came up to me and said, "How could you do that? You weren't even afraid." And I said, "Well, I guess I wasn't. I don't know why."

I didn't see him again until the third year. I did very well that year, and John Fordtran asked me to work in his laboratory over the summer. He was interested in something called macroamylase, and he wanted me to set up a laboratory testing method to try to prove or disprove its existence. In the context of working for the Department of Medicine that summer, I went to conferences once a week and saw Dr. Seldin in full display. That was where I really appreciated what was going on.

**WCR:** *Did anyone else in medical school have a major impact on you?*

**ETS:** Yes, Dr. McClellan, who ran the educational aspect of the Department of Surgery. Dr. McClellan called me in and said, "We'd like you to apply for general surgery at Parkland." I ultimately decided to go to the University of Colorado, in Denver.

**WCR:** *In medical school as you rotated through the various departments, was it easy or difficult for you to select a specialty?*

**ETS:** I enjoyed all the rotations. The one drawback for internal medicine was that I wasn't sure I would have the patience to deal with chronic illnesses.

**WCR:** *Did Dr. Seldin try to persuade you to be an internist?*

**ETS:** Not exactly. He stopped me in the hall one day about halfway through the fourth year and asked, "So where's your application? I haven't seen it." He asked if I was going to be a surgeon.

I had decided that, yes, I would be a surgeon. I went to the University of Colorado for my internship and residency. I was the third woman in their program. I was a general surgeon for 19 years and loved it. I never thought I would do anything different, but ultimately I am doing something different (Figure 6).

**WCR:** *When you told Dr. Seldin that you were going into surgery, did that destroy the atmosphere? Was he quite annoyed?*

**ETS:** He just said, "What can I do?"

## Moncy Chosen as Outstanding Clinical Preceptor

Ellen Moncy, M.D., a member of the LMC medical staff, has been named this year's "Outstanding Clinical Preceptor" by the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center.

In notifying her of the award, William Pearce, M.D., Associate Professor of Surgery, noted that "numerous students have commented to me about your practical approach to surgical problems, and you have served as an excellent role model for them."

Moncy was presented with the award at the Resident's Banquet, held June 11 at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Denver.



Ellen Moncy, M.D.

Figure 7. Recipient of a teaching award from the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center, 1988.

**WCR:** *How did it work out in Denver? Did you enjoy your internship and residency?*

**ETS:** I did. I got there in 1970. I did well, and when I finished the residency I actually stayed on as part of the clinical faculty. I enjoyed interfacing with the students and housestaff for the next 15 years through conferences and rounds (Figure 7). It was 2 days a month, but over a period of years, that adds up.

**WCR:** *You were in private practice?*

**ETS:** Yes. I had a private practice in 2 hospitals on the west side of Denver—Lutheran Medical Center and the St. Anthony's hospital system—but I had a teaching appointment at the University of Colorado.

**WCR:** *Was there any particular area of surgery you focused on?*

**ETS:** It was brought to me. I didn't really want it, but being a woman, everybody thought that I would somehow be a natural for dealing with breast problems. Every female general surgeon has had this happen to her. Breast surgery has now become a specialty in and of itself. I really didn't want to specialize in breast problems because the best thing a woman can hear is that she needs nothing at all and what a surgeon wants to do is operate. The cases I really wanted were gastrointestinal—necrotizing pancreatitis, gunshot wounds of the liver, etc.

**WCR:** *You like working with your hands?*

**ETS:** Yes.

**WCR:** *You play the piano. Do you do any other things with your hands?*

**ETS:** I love gardening. Yesterday, Donald came home in the middle of the afternoon. We have put in some new cherry laurels for a screen because the neighbors across the creek cut down all their trees. We have had to put in trees on our side. While the growing season is good, these cherry laurels need fertilizer. I was working away trying to get a fish emulsion just right, and I was covered with dirt. He walked out, saw me, and just shook his head, "You are in your element. You love every bit of this. I know it."

When I started living in the same household with Don Seldin, I had to get new gardening tools. I had sold all my own tools. I didn't think I'd get back into it so much, but I realized I missed gardening. When he sees me out in the rain and the cold, he comes outside to stand and watch.

**WCR:** *You were in Denver, Colorado, until when?*

**ETS:** I left there in 1989, but I kept in touch with Donald Seldin every 4 or 5 years. If something I did was of consequence—for example, one year I got the teaching award from the university and there was a little excerpt about it in the hospital newspaper—I would send it to him. It was a nonpersonal method of communication. “Dear Dr. Seldin, I wanted you to know I continue to be active in medicine and I enjoy my teaching appointment at the university. Sincerely yours, Ellen.”

**WCR:** *Would he write you back?*

**ETS:** Oh, yes. Always. Of course, he wrote everyone back. He would write, “So good to hear from you. Delighted to know that things are going well. If you’re ever in Dallas, please let me know. Sincerely yours, Don Seldin.” Every 3 or 4 years something would come up that would be appropriate to send, and I did that. In 1987 a party was held in honor of Dr. Seldin’s retirement from the chairmanship. I was notified about it by the Alumni Association because they wanted to raise money. They wanted as many people to come as possible. I thought, “I’m going to come down for that.” I did, and I stayed with one of my old classmates, a woman who became a pediatric anesthesiologist. We used to study together. I came to the festivities and was amazed at how handsome he still was.

**WCR:** *Did you two have much conversation during that period?*

**ETS:** Just very briefly because he was with his wife. When looking at her I realized something was amiss. I wasn’t sure what. He was very solicitous of her. He almost steered her around the room. She wasn’t left to walk by herself. Although there was no way for me to know at the time, she had already had several cerebral hemorrhages. She ultimately died from a massive cerebral hemorrhage. He did a wonderful job taking care of her. He remembered me and shook hands.

**WCR:** *Was your first husband a surgeon?*

**ETS:** He was a urologist. He was on the staff at the medical school, and that is where I met him. He also did reconstructive pediatric urology. He was a very good surgeon and urologist.

**WCR:** *You had no children?*

**ETS:** Correct.

**WCR:** *How did you decide to leave Denver after all those years there?*

**ETS:** It was probably a mistake. After our marriage ended in 1985, I was unsettled. A job offer came from Seattle where my former husband had moved. We had become friends at that point. The real estate market was crashing in Denver in 1988/1989. I hadn’t really defined what I wanted to do, and it looked like a fantastic job offer. I decided to take it. I moved to Seattle (Figure 8), but shortly after moving there, the hospital that recruited me went bankrupt, and I got sick. That was the start of an asthmalike illness that almost did me in. Ultimately, a very busy surgical group there realized that I was in town and they asked me to join them. I did. I started having 70- and 80-hour workweeks again. I was hospitalized a couple of times with what was believed to be sinus blockages requiring sinus operations. I also was hospitalized once for respiratory insufficiency and had to be on a prednisone drip. At that time, an eosinophilia was diagnosed. It was controlled only by huge doses of steroids. Ultimately, my partners and I jointly decided that I couldn’t keep up the schedule.



**Figure 8.** In Seattle with her 2 springer spaniels, 1990.

Living in Seattle was expensive, and I wasn’t sure if I was going to go on disability or just quit or go to the country. I decided I would go someplace where living was inexpensive and do emergency medicine part-time and try to get my health back. I took a job in Greenville, Kentucky. I had a wonderful boss. I did emergency medicine and had my health care at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, about 40 miles away. Slowly I began to get better.

I joined the Unitarian Church. The regular pianist they had went on vacation and somebody asked if I would fill in. I did. One drawback for many people in the Unitarian services is the lack of emotion. The church is trying to change that by highlighting the musical component of the service. They’ve invested a lot in their musicians. They started having national music conferences in 1990. I went to one in 1994 in Chicago at Northwestern University. It was uplifting. I met people from all over the country.

Two weeks after leaving that conference, information started coming out about the next year’s conference. I made plans to attend the conference, which was scheduled for Houston, Texas, in August 1996. Several months later the medical school newspaper, the *Center Times*, came in, and I learned that Muriel Seldin had died in September 1994. I decided to send Don Seldin a Christmas card. I wrote, “It’s wonderful to see that you are still working at the school and active. I will be in Texas next summer for a music conference. Yours truly, Ellen, class of 1970.” To my surprise, he sent a letter back, “If you’re coming to Texas, why not stop off in Dallas? Let me show you how the medical school has evolved and take you to dinner. So that you shouldn’t be embarrassed, you should know that my wife died last year. Sincerely yours, Don.”

**WCR:** *Did you correspond at all in those 6 months?*

**ETS:** Yes. I wanted to have some sort of dialogue but I didn’t want it to be personal. While in music school (University of Colorado at Denver—part-time), I became interested in the life of Johann Sebastian Bach. I wrote a term paper on Bach. The woman who taught the course, a Juilliard graduate, was interested in my approach. She thought that it might be the basis of a PhD project. What I looked at was not the genius of Bach but several questions: Why didn’t he write symphonies? Why didn’t he create the form? Why did a much lesser musician 50 years later create the symphonic form? My thesis was that he didn’t want, for

some reason, to invent new forms. He pushed whatever there was to the limit, but he stayed within the form. He never left Germany. The furthest he went was to hear Dietrich Buxtehude play the organ; he walked 113 miles for that. My professor thought my question was promising. I wanted to have a dialogue with Dr. Seldin so I sent him the Bach paper. I asked him if he could read it and let me know what he thought about it.

**WCR:** *This was when?*

**ETS:** January 1996. I sent him the manuscript with great trepidation. I thought, "What am I doing?" Six weeks went by and I heard nothing. It turned out that at a meeting in Canada in January 1996 he became terribly ill and was hospitalized. He went into septic shock for 3 hours with a blood pressure of 60/40 mm Hg. He had pneumococcal pneumonia. When he returned to Dallas he didn't come back to work for several weeks. He had totally forgotten about my manuscript. I finally wrote him a letter. "You are probably very busy, and if you don't have time to read the paper I understand. But if you could return it, it would make me feel better." I was afraid of losing the paper because to me it was very valuable. I had sent him the original copy. I kept my own copy. He got that letter.

**WCR:** *You shamed him?*

**ETS:** He felt guilty that 1) he hadn't read it and 2) he didn't even know where it was. He and Ann Welch, his assistant, searched his office and found it. He read the paper. I couldn't believe the critique he wrote. He saw every flaw in the manuscript that my teacher hadn't seen. I appreciated his comments tremendously.

**WCR:** *Did he write all over the paper or on a separate document?*

**ETS:** He wrote a letter. It was a very scholarly analysis of the paper. I was impressed. He didn't think my paper was wonderful at all. His letter gave me the chance to write back, "Thank you very much. I'll arrive in Dallas on such and such day." He sent back another letter saying, "Is it true that you are driving to Dallas? Why don't you fly and we can have somebody meet you?" I wrote back that I didn't fly because I had such a problem with headaches brought on by air travel. I did ultimately come to Dallas, and I stayed with some Unitarian friends. He came to pick me up for dinner. He was still so handsome. He took me to the Riviera restaurant. About halfway through dinner—there I was in my \$50 dress—he leaned over and said, "You rekindle something in me that I haven't felt in years." He kissed me right in the middle of dinner.

I went on to Houston. The church temperature was set at about 60°, and I didn't have enough clothing to be able to handle the air-conditioning. I had not brought any prednisone tablets with me. In the middle of the night after the first day in the church (I was staying with my niece and her husband), I woke up wheezing and coughing. It was bad. On the second day of the conference, despite having borrowed a sweater from my niece, I still got very cold and had to leave a choral practice because of coughing and wheezing (bronchospasms). I finally found one warm place in the whole complex—the children's room. I got back that night and opened all the windows. Of course my niece and her husband wanted it cool. I had another bad night and thought, "I've got to do something. I've got to get some prednisone." My inhalers weren't enough. I had a Texas license but no address in Texas. The next morning I called and found Dr. Seldin in his office and

asked him, "Would you possibly consider phoning in a prescription for some prednisone for me. I'm in trouble." He could hear that I was in trouble on the telephone. He asked what was going on. I explained that the air-conditioning was so bad that I couldn't function in the conference. He said, "If it's that bad, why don't you just come back to Dallas?"

I did, and I stayed for 4 days. Maybe because it was unscheduled, those 4 days gave us a wonderful beginning. We worked out that I would see him twice a month. When I went back to Greenville, I told Dr. Willard Keith: "Dr. Keith, I've got to talk with you about my schedule." He looked at me and said, "Well, is he willing to come to Greenville? Do you think he'll like Greenville, Kentucky?" "That's just it, Dr. Keith, I'm going to be needing some letters of recommendation from you for a job in Texas."

**WCR:** *The relationship moved quickly.*

**ETS:** Yes. We spent time together twice a month for the next year. Either I came to Dallas and was able to get 4 or 5 days off at a time or maybe there was a European trip that he had planned and I would meet him in New York and we'd go from there. I applied and got jobs in Dallas. (I ultimately completed the boards in emergency medicine.)

**WCR:** *What was Dr. Seldin's home like? What impressed you when you first went into his home?*

**ETS:** Artwork, beautiful furniture, and how meticulous he was with regard to everything being so nicely kept. Also, the state of disrepair of some of the plumbing, cracks around windows so that drafts and insects could get in, a leak in the garage that had gone on for 30 years.

**WCR:** *What do you love most about Donald Seldin? What is it like living with Donald Seldin day in, day out?*

**ETS:** What I love most is his vibrancy, his ongoing thirst for knowledge, his optimism about life. What's it like living with him on a daily basis? He is exacting about everything. It is easier, for example, if I present the outfit I am thinking of wearing ahead of time. "Do you agree that this goes with this and this goes with that?" He may say, "That's ridiculous. Why would you want to take that purse with this outfit? You've got much better purses. I'll find one." And he does.

**WCR:** *Virtually nothing misses his eye. Is that what you are saying?*

**ETS:** Yes.

**WCR:** *He told me he eats nothing he doesn't like and only half of what he likes.*

**ETS:** That's about right.

**WCR:** *You are a gourmet chef?*

**ETS:** I'm becoming a better cook all the time. It took me 3 years to get a hamburger just right. The most helpful thing to me was actually the *Dallas Morning News*. In April 2002, with the start of warm weather, they had a section on barbecuing. That helped me more than anything. I finally have the hamburger just right.

**WCR:** *Dr. Taylor, what are your professional working hours like?*

**ETS:** For me to be able to have blocks of time off, the arrangement I've made with my various employers and medical directors is that I'm willing to work nights, weekends, and holidays when I'm here. I would say about 50% of the time I work the night shift, which means I have to sleep in the daytime.

**WCR:** *How many hours are you working a week now?*

**ETS:** It comes to about 30 hours a week if you apportion it over a month's period of time. But, for example, if we are leaving for 2 weeks, I'll try to get a full month's work in the first 2 weeks of the month. That doesn't leave a whole lot of free time for me at home.

**WCR:** *You've never shunned hard work.*

**ETS:** Right. Apparently it agrees with me.

**WCR:** *Do you ever get home from work by 5:00 PM?*

**ETS:** No, because the shifts I work are 7:00 AM to 7:00 PM or 7:00 PM to 7:00 AM. We are so busy at work that I end up staying late. I usually don't get home until 8:00 or 8:30 PM. When working the night shift, what we like to do is meet for dinner ahead of time. At 6:00 PM we'll meet at Mi Cocina, for example, which is a good neighborhood restaurant close to the route I have to take to get to work. Or I'll fix something simple at home. I like for us to spend that evening hour together from 6:00 to 7:00 PM so that we can interface on what's happened during the day. Then at 7:00 I'll leave and go to work.

**WCR:** *Let's say you are home for an entire evening. It sounds to me like Dr. Seldin does not sleep but 4 or 5 hours a night.*

**ETS:** He has a reading program. He's one of Borders' best customers! There's no question about it. He has a book going at all times. Of course, he reads the *New York Times* and the *Dallas Morning News* every day. He brings back articles from the *Times* that he wants to be sure I've read. They tend to be Paul Krugman or Thomas Friedman. I'm back at the piano again. I take a lesson once a month, but to prepare for that, if we have a free evening at home, I usually practice the piano and he reads. We do have a television, which goes on for the professional football games.

**WCR:** *And that's about it.*

**ETS:** That's about it.

**WCR:** *Does he discuss with you a great deal of what he reads?*

**ETS:** Occasionally. Usually he doesn't. If it's really been a good book, he'll give it to me to read or at least glance through. If it's something in the *Economist*, let's say, he'll just give it to me and say, "I want you to read this."

**WCR:** *What do you tend to talk about at the dinner table at home when you don't have anybody else over?*

**ETS:** We have 2 sets of conversations. One is the conversation at the dinner table and the other is the conversation that we usually have later at night outside on the terrace. At dinner I usually ask him what he thinks about something that has been in the news that day. We may talk about political events. Later, on the terrace, we talk about more personal things—things he's worried about at the school, things he's concerned about with regard to his children or his grandchildren. Or I'll bring up issues in my family that are of concern. That tends to come out later at night for some reason, not at the dinner table. Also, there is more of a focus at the dinner table on the food preparation, why it was good, why it wasn't good, what to keep in mind, what to avoid next time, etc.

He was never very interested in the outside of his house until I arrived. Now he's almost more interested than I am. We had Lambert's Landscape Company help us. There are a lot of trees around our home, especially in the backyard. The Lentz Company has put in lighting. We've just expanded our terrace. It's



**Figure 9.** Dancing with Donald Seldin at the internal medicine housestaff party in June 1997.

lovely on these warm balmy evenings to sit and enjoy the surroundings. In Dallas you can do that maybe 8 out of 12 months of the year. Usually at 10:00 or 10:30 PM in the summertime (when it's cooled down) we'll sit outside, look at the garden, now beautifully lit at night, and have a conversation. Sometimes we'll have a little brandy; sometimes, hot tea. I'm trying various green teas. We may have a tea ceremony out there.

**WCR:** *What would you say that you have brought to Donald Seldin in this marriage? Somebody mentioned to me that Donald Seldin looked a little down until you came along, and then all of a sudden he was light on his feet again.*

**ETS:** Thank you. I'd say a couple of things. One is that I love to dance and he loves to dance. A lot of times if we are out at a party and are in high spirits when we get home, we put on Frank Sinatra and dance at home.

**WCR:** *What kind of dancing?*

**ETS:** Ballroom dancing (Figure 9). The fox-trot.

**WCR:** *That must have been a joyous surprise for you. You had no idea that Donald Seldin was a good dancer?*

**ETS:** Exactly. He didn't know I was a dancer. That has been a wonderful discovery.

**WCR:** *Is there anything that he's not interested in that you are interested in?*

**ETS:** He won't go biking with me. I like to bike (Figure 10).

**WCR:** *Do you do a lot of it?*



Figure 10. On a 4-day bicycle trip in the 1980s.

**ETS:** Not a lot. Maybe every 3 to 4 months. I got a second bike so that when we have a houseguest who likes to bike we can do bike rides on the White Rock trail. Also, he won't go hiking with me, but he will walk city streets.

**WCR:** *You mean when you travel?*

**ETS:** Right. I would say I sort of brought the outdoors to him. I have many similarities to his first wife in that she became an apparently wonderful cook and I am interested in that. She played the piano; I play the piano. She was fluent in French and did a thesis on Marcel Proust. I speak French.

**WCR:** *Is he fluent in French?*

**ETS:** No, in German. He was in Germany for 3 years after World War II and studied German in high school. He's given medical lectures in German.

**WCR:** *You met Dr. Seldin in medical school when you were 28 and saw him again in 1988 when you were 48. Did you have some images of him that didn't stand up after you got to know him better?*

**ETS:** I had to ask myself, "Am I falling in love with a legend or with a real man?" Anybody who gets hooked up with a star probably needs to ask that question. I carry around a photograph of what he looked like when I first saw him.

**WCR:** *It sounds to me, Dr. Taylor, that you really have a joyous marriage.*

**ETS:** It is. It's terrific.

**WCR:** *Does he expend as much energy in being a good husband as he did in becoming a great physician?*

**ETS:** I think so.

**WCR:** *Is there anything else you would like to talk about that we haven't touched on?*

**ETS:** The only thing we haven't touched on is his family and my family and how we interface. It has all worked out quite well. It's very pleasant to do things together.

**WCR:** *It sounds like he was a wonderful husband in his first marriage.*

**ETS:** I believe he was. I think sometimes he feels that he cut the children and Muriel short because he was so invested in building the medical school.

**WCR:** *This has been wonderful. You're great.*

**ETS:** Thank you so much.