

DANIEL EARL POLTER, MD: a conversation with the editor

Dr. Dan Polter (*Figure 1*) was born in Chicago, Illinois, on December 17, 1933. When he was very young, he and his family moved to Norman, Oklahoma, and then to Dallas, Texas. He graduated from the University of Texas in Austin in 1955, having majored in chemistry, and from the University of Texas Southwestern Medical School in 1959. His internship, residency, and chief residency in internal medicine were at Parkland Memorial Hospital in Dallas. From 1963 to 1965, he was in the Medical Corps of the US Army, stationed in Orleans, France. Thereafter, he spent 1 year in fellowship in gastroenterology at the Wadsworth Veterans Administration (VA) Hospital in Los Angeles, returning to Dallas in 1966 as chief of gastroenterology at the VA Hospital. Four years later, he entered private practice and in 1971 became chief of gastroenterology at Baylor University Medical Center (BUMC). He remained in that position until 2003. In 1975, Dr. Polter became clinical professor of internal medicine at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical School. In 1990, he became president of the BUMC staff, and a year later, chairman of its medical board. In 1996 he was awarded the Distinguished Clinician Award of the American Gastroenterological Association. From 1998 until 2000, he was president of the Texas Society for Gastroenterology and Endoscopy; that organization gave him the Robert Nelson–Marcel Patterson Award in 2003. Additionally, Dan Polter is a wonderful human being. He and his lovely wife, Lucy, have 3 offspring. Dr. Polter has been an enormous credit to BUMC and one of its outstanding clinicians for nearly 40 years.

William Clifford Roberts, MD (hereafter, WCR): *Dr. Polter, I appreciate your willingness to talk to me and therefore to the readers of BUMC Proceedings. Could we start by your talking about your early life, your growing-up period, your parents, and your siblings?*

Daniel Earl Polter, MD (hereafter, DEP): I was born in Chicago during the Depression. My father always had a job, but it was barely enough to get by on. My father was born in Vienna, Austria. His parents lived in Odessa, the Ukraine, and left Russia rather than be conscripted into the Russian army. His father was killed in a construction accident in Budapest, so his mother, when he was 4 years old, came to the USA via Ellis Island.



Figure 1. Dr. Dan Polter during the interview.



Figure 2. Maternal grandfather, Earl Hetzel.

WCR: *Did she come to Chicago?*

DEP: She came to Chicago initially because relatives were there, and she later married a businessman in Birmingham, Alabama, who had 2 sons. My dad never felt accepted in that family. He felt like the stepchild, which he was. So at age 16, he left Birmingham and went to live with an uncle in Chicago, where he finished high school. He took some college courses at night while working various jobs, mainly in the hotel business. He worked his way up to being an assistant manager in one of the hotels. He met my mother, who was born in Dayton, Ohio, in Chicago. She was of Pennsylvania Dutch extraction (*Figure 2*). Via the family Bible, we can trace her relatives back to the early 1800s in Montgomery County, Ohio. My father and mother married in 1927, had their first child in 1929, and had their second in 1931. I was born in 1933, an accident. They were in dire straits at that time because of the Depression. His salary barely provided enough to eat on, but we survived.

Early in World War II, my dad managed several war plant cafeterias and later went into the navy as a commissary officer.

From the Division of Gastroenterology, Department of Internal Medicine (Polter) and the Baylor Heart and Vascular Institute (Roberts), Baylor University Medical Center, Dallas, Texas.

Corresponding author: Daniel E. Polter, MD, Digestive Health Associates of Texas, 3500 Gaston Avenue, Dallas, Texas 75246.



Figure 3. At age 12.

He was stationed in Norman, Oklahoma, where we lived from 1944 to 1946 (Figure 3), when we moved to Dallas.

My 2 older siblings are sisters (Figure 4): one taught Spanish in high school for many years in the Houston area. She got a PhD in Spanish. She has 3 children, one of whom died in 2003 in an auto accident. My other sister lives in Seattle. She married shortly after graduating from high school and has 2 daughters. She has been a tour guide for many years, is very gregarious, and has traveled all over the world.

I enjoyed my time in Oklahoma because I had a lot of freedom there. The grade schools in town organized sports for the boys, so I played all kinds of sports under coaches who were usually students at the University of Oklahoma. I've always enjoyed sports but have never been particularly good at them.

After we moved to Dallas, I went to Greiner Junior High School and Sunset High School. Although school was never difficult for me, I never did particularly well because I didn't study much. I did enjoy the more interesting courses, especially English. One of my mentors in high school was Eula Pearl Smith, a demanding English teacher. I enjoyed her courses very much. I also enjoyed math and the sciences. There was a young chemistry teacher, John Martin, the son of Methodist Bishop Martin in the Dallas area. John was very enthusiastic and sparked my interest in chemistry. He subsequently went on to become a college professor in Colorado.

After high school, I attended the University of Texas in Austin, majoring in chemical engineering. After the first year, I changed my major to chemistry, which I enjoyed. One mentor was Dr. Norman Hackerman, chairman of the department of chemistry at the time and subsequently president of Rice University. He taught freshman chemistry and physical chemistry during my junior year. I was a lab assistant in the physical chemistry labs and worked one summer for a graduate student in chemistry. Midway through my senior year, however, while taking a graduate course in physical chemistry as the only undergraduate student in that difficult course, I decided to go to medical school. Students were required to have premed advisors; mine was Dr. Clark Hubbs, a zoology professor, who tried to talk me out of going to medical school. He encouraged me to stay in chemistry, saying I could



Figure 4. With older sisters Margaret and Kay in 1936.

do a lot more good in research than in practice. But I had made up my mind.

I started at Southwestern Medical School in Dallas in 1955. Medical schools at that time were having a hard time attracting competent applicants. Southwestern then had a class capacity of about 100 students. There were about 20 students in our freshman class who didn't make it.

In medical school, the volume of work was considerable, but it wasn't any more difficult for me than college. Medical school was very exciting, particularly the junior and senior years, the clinical years. The department of medicine was young and very energetic. Dr. Donald Seldin was its chief. Drs. Jay Sanford, Marvin Siperstein, Carleton Chapman, Morris Ziff, Burton Combes, and Leonard Madison were other faculty members. There also were a number of residents who later became faculty members, including Dan Foster, Jere Mitchell, Norman Kaplan, Jean Wilson, Floyd Rector, and John Fordtran. The chief residents I trained under were outstanding: Jack Barnett, Charlie Austin, and David Young.

As a junior student, I was on the service of John Fordtran, who was a first-year resident at Parkland Hospital. He was extremely bright and enthusiastic, and that was infectious. It was a wonderful experience. He's been a mentor and close friend ever since. We also had superb town attendings, particularly Al Harris, who was very demanding, and Billy Oliver.

As chief resident my last year at Parkland, I was able to do pretty much what I wanted with my spare time. John Fordtran had come back to the medical school after his gastroenterology training in Boston to head the gastroenterology division. I was his unofficial fellow that year. I spent time in his research lab and went on consults with him. That's when my interest in gastroenterology took form.

I then went into the army as a "Berry Planner." I was stationed 2 years in Orleans, France, at the 34th General Hospital. That

was an immensely enjoyable experience. I had never been out of the USA and was exposed for the first time to history, architecture, and art. My wife and I traveled about Europe as much as we could.

After those 2 years, I was a fellow in gastroenterology at the Wadsworth VA Hospital in Los Angeles for 1 year. I couldn't afford to come back to the USA to interview but was accepted sight unseen. (Dr. Seldin must have written a good letter for me.) The fellowship at Wadsworth was exciting. The faculty included Morton Grossman, one of the deans of gastroenterology at the time, as well as Bill Bachrach, Dave Boyle, and Howard Goldstein.

Following that year, I returned to Dallas. John Fordtran asked me to set up the gastroenterology lab and program at the Dallas VA Hospital. The chief of medicine there at the time was Seymour Eisenberg, who was another of my mentors. I enjoyed patient contact quite a bit, but as chief of the division at the VA Hospital I was 3 or 4 people removed from the patient. I didn't like that. After 2 or 3 years being full-time there, I went into practice with Cecil Patterson at the Medical Arts Building but remained half-time at the VA Hospital. Cecil was an amazing individual. He was a pioneer in endoscopy. He had injected esophageal varices with sclerosing agents back in the 1930s through a straight esophagoscope, technically a very difficult procedure. He had also devised nets for retrieving foreign bodies from the stomach. He was ahead of his time. At one point he was president of the American Gastroscopic Society. One of his partners, Dr. Milford Rouse, became president of the American Medical Association in 1967. (Dr. Rouse subsequently endowed an annual lectureship in gastroenterology and nutrition at BUMC.)

By this time, I had been married for 13 years and had 3 children: Marie, David, and Adam. My wife, Lucy, was born in an oil field in West Texas and raised in Fort Worth. Marie, a registered nurse, also has a bachelor's degree in chemistry and a master's degree in business administration. She lives in Tucson, Arizona, now and is raising her 3 children. David, an attorney for an environmental consulting firm in Austin, Texas, has 2 children. Adam is a network engineer for an aviation parts company in Dallas and is not married.

My wife is an amazing person and certainly the most important influence in my life. She has done a wonderful job raising our 3 children. As soon as the children were all in school, she became very active in community volunteer activities. When she participates in some organization, she really throws herself into it. As a result, she has been president of most organizations she's worked in over the years, including the League of Women Voters, the Women's Council of Dallas County, the Visiting Nurse Association board, and other local organizations. She's the most focused individual I know, a wonderful support for me, and my best friend (Figure 5).

I had been in practice at the Medical Arts Building for a time when Ralph Tompsett, chief of medicine at BUMC, asked me to come to Baylor to set up a gastroenterology lab. I accepted the offer and started in 1971. We began in the Veal Building (subsequently torn down) with a laboratory and 2 procedure rooms. Pat Crumliss came with me from my private practice to be the supervisor, a position she held for 16 years. We started the gastroenterology fellowship immediately and subsequently have trained 34 fellows over the years. The interaction with the fellows



Figure 5. With wife, Lucy, in 1993.

has been a very enjoyable part of my career. I came to BUMC in a full-time, hospital-based position. (Dr. Tompsett at the time was trying to build up the hospital-based, full-time physicians to strengthen the teaching program for internal medicine. These physicians included Charles Jarrett, Zaven Chakmakjian, Jack Hyland, Mike Reese, and Charles Shuey, among others.)

Over the next few years, gastroenterology continued to grow. Drs. Charles Walker, Kent Hamilton, Dan DeMarco, and Harry Sarles subsequently joined the gastroenterology group. A major event was when Dr. John Fordtran succeeded Dr. Tompsett as chief of medicine in 1979. He brought great strength to the gastroenterology division as a result of his research and teaching activities.

In 1985, I was nominated to a position on the National Residency Review Committee for Internal Medicine. (Dr. Al Roberts had been on the committee and nominated me.) Most members of that committee were chiefs of medicine or professors of medicine in various medical schools. I was one of the 3 representatives that the American Medical Association had on the committee, a "man on the street." I was on the committee for 6 years. The committee reviews all internal medicine teaching programs and internal medicine subspecialty fellowships in the USA and Puerto Rico. That was a rewarding experience. I met a lot of exciting, interesting, and nice people. The committee worked very hard—3 full days of meetings 4 times a year—but it met in the nicest places: Hawaii, Virgin Islands, Montreal, and British Columbia, among others. The travel was the reward for lots of hard work.

From 1983 through 1990, I was chairman of the pharmacy and therapeutics committee of BUMC, and that was a very educational experience. Dr. Robert Rosen succeeded me and has done an outstanding job.

In 1990, I was elected president of the BUMC medical staff. This was a very turbulent time for medicine. Managed care companies were becoming powerful. At that time, our medical staff chose Southwest Physicians Association to represent BUMC physicians in managed care negotiations.

In 1995, we formed an areawide gastroenterology organization. That led to the formation of Digestive Health Associates of Texas (DHAT). Dr. Charles Walker, Dr. Charles Richardson, and others had formed an independent practice association to win contracts with managed care companies. We realized that

gastroenterologists were going to have to organize, not only for managed care contracts but also for practical purposes, since reimbursement was dropping and practice expenses were increasing. We started with 40 gastroenterologists, forming in essence a group practice. The group has been very successful. It now consists of 59 gastroenterologists, mainly in Dallas and Tarrant Counties, 4 endoscopy centers, and a large central business office (with directors of managed care, billing and collections, and human resources—all of the things to help gastroenterologists manage their practices). That's been a very important development. Managed care companies pay attention to organizations like DHAT, which was one reason we formed it.

WCR: *How many gastroenterologists are in the USA?*

DEP: Several thousand.

WCR: *What about in Texas?*

DEP: About 650. Our state gastroenterology organization has about 325 members.

WCR: *What about in Dallas?*

DEP: My guess would be 100 in Dallas and Tarrant Counties.

Let me mention my health. I've always been in good health but have had several unusual problems over the years. In 1984 (age 51), I developed exercise-induced heart block. Because there was no electrophysiology expertise in Dallas at that time, I went to Duke, but they couldn't find the cause. After all their studies, they told me to rest for 6 months. Rest did not help. While raking leaves about 5 months later, I could tell my heart was blocking down. Then I had a cardiac catheterization, and a pacemaker was inserted. I've had a pacemaker ever since and have had no problem with exercise since then. If my pacemaker is turned off, I now have complete heart block.

About the same time, I developed some eye problems, including light sensitivity and excessive squinting. Several ophthalmologists could not figure out what was wrong. John Fordtran came back from a trip to Austin one day with a newspaper clipping about blepharospasm and said he thought that was what I had. He was right! A neurologist confirmed the diagnosis, but he didn't know how to treat it. Then I learned that Dr. John Harrington in Dallas was treating blepharospasm with an experimental drug called Botox. At that point when I was driving, I had to hold one eyelid up with my finger to see. I thought I was not going to be able to continue driving or even practicing. He gave me 6 Botox injections around each eye, and about 24 hours later, as if by magic, everything opened up. Since then, I've been getting Botox injections every 5 to 6 months.

About 1993 (age 60), I came back from skiing with really sore knees. They had been sore periodically for years from running, but not to that degree. Radiographs disclosed that each of my patellas was in 2 pieces, one large and one small (bipartite patellas). The patellas were not tracking properly. Dr. Steve Curtis then removed the smaller portions and did some other things, and I've not had any knee problems since.

I do enjoy *running*, *reading* (particularly history), *tennis* (I'm not very good at it, but I play several times a week), *gardening* (we've lived where we are now for 36 years and our trees have all grown to the point where I don't have a place for a garden anymore from lack of sunlight), and *skiing* (but I don't get to ski too often).

Gastroenterology has continued to thrive at BUMC. There are some 20 gastroenterologists now on our staff. Our lab has continued to increase in volume, even in the face of a number of ambulatory endoscopy centers. That's due in part to the influx of screening colonoscopies, which all gastroenterologists are now doing. Dr. Rick Boland became the new chief of gastroenterology in 2003, and Dan DeMarco became the medical director of the lab. Dr. Boland is going to make major contributions in colon cancer research, particularly in genetics. We recently doubled the number of gastroenterology fellow positions from 3 to 6, or 2 a year rather than 1 a year.

WCR: *Who pays the salaries of the fellows?*

DEP: For many years, our group paid most of the fellows' salaries. About 8 years ago, our group decided it couldn't support the fellowship financially any longer. The hospital now pays the salaries of all of the fellows. We have outstanding fellows who contribute to an atmosphere of intellectual stimulation and learning.

New technologies are rapidly emerging, such as endoscopic treatment of gastroesophageal reflux and expansion of the applications of endoscopic ultrasound. We're seeing new treatments for inflammatory bowel disease and viral hepatitis and other gastrointestinal disorders. It's a very exciting time for gastroenterology.

It's been a wonderful ride for me. I enjoy patient care most of all, but I've enjoyed all the interaction over the years with my colleagues and fellows. I have had 3 outstanding chiefs of medicine to work under: Drs. Ralph Tompsett, John Fordtran, and Michael Emmett. The BUMC administration has been very doctor-friendly. I appreciate the support they've provided over the years.

WCR: *Let me go back a little to get to know you as a person a bit better. You left Norman, Oklahoma, to come to Dallas in 1946. Why did your parents choose to come to Dallas?*

DEP: My dad, who had worked at a number of jobs in Chicago, liked the Southwest. He thought it was a better atmosphere than Chicago and that Dallas would be a good city to live and work in.

WCR: *What did he do when you first moved here?*

DEP: He had a number of jobs. He managed a restaurant for a time. He managed the cafeteria for the big Sears store and mail order plant on South Lamar. He sold hospital supplies on the road for a period. Eventually, he returned to Sears and sold furniture, staying with Sears for many years, even after moving to California in 1952.

WCR: *Why did your parents move to California?*

DEP: They had done some traveling and liked Southern California better than Dallas. Within a year of moving there, they built a small home in Whittier.

WCR: *At that time, you were in college at the University of Texas?*

DEP: Yes. I stayed in Texas. I went to California to work summers in aircraft plants, one year in Santa Monica and one year in Pomona. I also worked at an oil company research lab one summer in Brea, California.

WCR: *When you came to Dallas in 1946, you were 13 years old. Were your sisters still at home?*

DEP: Yes, they were 15 and 17.

WCR: *What was home life like at that time?*



Figure 6. Parents with children David and Marie, 1964.

DEP: Because my dad was having trouble making ends meet until he settled down with his job at Sears, my mother worked in a fabric store downtown, a place called “The Yardstick.” She worked most of the time we were in Dallas, and she also worked in Southern California.

WCR: *What was your dad like? Is he still living?*

DEP: He died in 2002. He was born in 1909, so he was 93 when he died.

WCR: *And your mother?*

DEP: She was born in 1906 and died in 1977 (Figure 6).

WCR: *She was a bit older than your father? Did your father remarry after that?*

DEP: Yes. It was never a formal marriage. He met a navy widow and, so that she could keep her pension, they never formally married, but they lived together for years. She had some strokes and moved to a nursing home. He then came to Houston to live with a daughter for about 10 years. He died of Sezary’s syndrome, a cutaneous T-cell lymphoma.

WCR: *What was your dad like?*

DEP: He was not very communicative for much of his life. The burden of a family in the midst of the Depression was not easy for him. Although he took some accounting courses, he was not able to pass the certified public accountant examination and therefore sought and acquired nonaccounting jobs.

WCR: *Neither your mother nor father was able to graduate from college?*

DEP: No. My mother spent a brief time in nursing school.

WCR: *What was your mother like?*

DEP: My mother was a very warm and very strong woman. She was the strength of the family.

WCR: *What was home life like? Was dinner at night a big deal in your house?*

DEP: We always ate dinner together. With both parents working, we kids did chores around the house and helped prepare dinner and clean up afterwards. The time in Oklahoma was really a vacation for me because we had all the facilities at the navy base—swimming, summer camps, that sort of thing. And I enjoyed school quite a bit as well.

WCR: *Did you and your 2 sisters get along well?*

DEP: We got along reasonably well. It was a pleasant household.

WCR: *Was education stressed a lot by your parents?*

DEP: I think so. One sister didn’t go to college because she got married right after high school. But, yes, we were certainly encouraged to continue with our education.

WCR: *Were there a lot of books around the house? Did your parents read much?*

DEP: They didn’t read much. Every Saturday afternoon, my dad would lie down on the couch and listen to the Metropolitan Opera. He enjoyed that. Many years later, I came to enjoy opera.

WCR: *You mentioned that you enjoyed sports all your life. In high school or junior high school, did you play any competitive sports?*

DEP: I played in church leagues. I was small until I was into my junior year, when I grew about 6 inches. I never participated in high school sports.

WCR: *How did you decide to go to the University of Texas for college?*

DEP: I had been accepted at Rice University and was planning to go there. My sister, who was at the University of Texas, talked me into going there instead. I don’t know how she did it. I lived at a co-op there for the first couple of years and then lived at the Tejas Club, which I had joined.

WCR: *You must have done quite well in high school to have gotten into Rice?*

DEP: I was probably in the upper fourth of my class in high school. When I entered college, I was really scared. I didn’t know if I was going to be able to make it or not, but I did well in college.

WCR: *That was the first time you had ever been away from home. Was college a happy experience for you?*

DEP: It was. It was sort of scary. I got on a bus in Dallas with my one suitcase and got off the bus on 19th Street in Austin and walked a couple of blocks to the co-op. I can remember every step of that day. I didn’t know anybody in Austin.

WCR: *That was 1951?*

DEP: Correct.

WCR: *How big was the University of Texas at Austin then?*

DEP: There were about 11,000 students. Now it’s probably close to 50,000. I always had to work when in college. I became self-supporting after the first couple of years and in medical school also. That was a time when you could do that. You can’t do that anymore.

WCR: *What kind of jobs did you have?*

DEP: I worked in one of the libraries. The best job I had was night elevator operator at the Railroad Commission building. I would work from 7:00 to 11:00 PM 5 days a week, and I was able to study during that time. If anybody came in, I would take them up on the elevator. My parents had bought me a 1939 Chevrolet my first year of college so I could drive to California. I worked summers there, as mentioned earlier. One summer, I worked about 90 hours a week: I worked at an aircraft plant 6 days a week, 8 hours a day, from 4:00 PM to midnight, and then went over to a small hospital in Whittier and worked as a night orderly from 12:30 to 7:00 AM 6 days a week. I had no time to get into trouble that summer.

WCR: *Do you require much sleep?*

DEP: More now than I used to. I used to be able to get by on 5 or 6 hours of sleep each night. Now I need a little more.

WCR: *Did you have to work at making good grades?*

DEP: I had to work—not as hard as some people, but I had to work at it.

WCR: *Were there any physicians in your extended family?*

DEP: None.

WCR: *So you had no role models?*

DEP: Correct. I had been to a doctor once that I remember when I was a kid after becoming jaundiced. I saw a doctor in Oak Cliff. He looked at me and said, “You’ve got hepatitis,” and he sent me home. Two weeks later, I was well and that was it. No blood tests!

WCR: *That was your first and only experience with a physician until you became one yourself?*

DEP: That’s right.

WCR: *How did you decide to go to Southwestern Medical School?*

DEP: First, they accepted me. I had not even taken the Medical College Admission Test at that time, or at least they didn’t have the results. Galveston eventually accepted me after they got my test score. Southwestern was looking for students.

WCR: *Did you enjoy your medical school experience?*

DEP: Yes. It was great.

WCR: *Was it easy for you to decide on internal medicine?*

DEP: Yes. I found kindred spirits in that field. The house-officers and faculty in internal medicine at the time were exciting, and I wanted to be part of it.

WCR: *Once you came to Dallas, you pretty much stayed here except for the tour in the army and your fellowship in gastroenterology in Los Angeles.*

DEP: That’s right.

WCR: *Where did you live in medical school?*

DEP: The first couple of years I lived in the Phi Beta Pi fraternity house, which was an experience.

WCR: *Who were some of your classmates in medical school?*

DEP: Weldon Tillery, Ed Harrison, Ken Hempel, Pat Evans, and Joe Hawkins. A number of my classmates are still in town. We are planning a 45th class reunion the spring of 2004.

WCR: *Did you apply to other places for an internship?*

DEP: No. That’s an interesting story. Parkland Hospital at that time took 8 straight medicine interns. I thought more than that were applying from our class, so several of us were anxious because we did not know who would be accepted. Tim Reedy, one of my classmates who has since died, and I got on an elevator with Dr. Donald Seldin one day before the selections were announced. Both Tim and I were applying for the straight medicine internship. Dr. Seldin got on, punched me in the shoulder, and said “Hi.” Then he said “Hi” to Tim. When he got off the elevator, Tim was almost in tears. I said, “What’s the matter?” He said, “He didn’t hit me!” He was worried he was not going to get the internship.

WCR: *Both of you got it?*

DEP: Yes. Everyone who applied got it. Only one was not from Southwestern; he was from North Carolina.

WCR: *What was your class rank at the end of medical school?*

DEP: I don’t know where I ranked. I made Alpha Omega Alpha.

WCR: *What about in college?*

DEP: I don’t remember what it was, but it was respectable.

WCR: *You mentioned earlier that medical school wasn’t more of a challenge for you than was college. What were some surprises to you in medical school when you first entered?*

DEP: Learning how to study anatomy was a challenge. When looking at that huge anatomy book, I thought there was no way I could learn all that information. My roommate my freshman year was Jesse Dickson, now an orthopaedist in Houston. Jesse was organized. He would eat supper, study from 6:30 to 10:00 PM, close the books, and go to bed. He did that every night. I wasn’t quite that organized. I studied a lot the first couple of years. In the clinical years, there was not nearly as much time for studying. The same held true for internship and residency. We had so many excellent teaching conferences that it probably made up for the lack of reading. When I got into the army and discussed medical matters with other doctors, I realized the gap I had in terms of my knowledge of the medical literature. That was a deficiency in my residency training.

WCR: *You made up for that during the 2 years in the army?*

DEP: I don’t know that I made up for it, but I realized the deficiency and knew that I had to do more reading in the future.

WCR: *Did you have any scholarships to medical school?*

DEP: No. Medical school tuition, however, was only \$120 a year at the time.

WCR: *You worked all through medical school, and you paid your own way?*

DEP: Yes. You could do that then. Living in the fraternity house was almost like living in a co-op; it was very inexpensive.

WCR: *You fixed your own meals?*

DEP: I don’t think we had meals at the house.

WCR: *What year did you get married?*

DEP: I got married in 1957, before starting my junior year in medical school.

WCR: *What attracted you to Lucy at that time? How did you meet?*

DEP: We met on a blind date that I had with one of my classmates who knew her in college. It didn’t start out very auspiciously. We went to play miniature golf, and I didn’t have my billfold. (I had left my billfold at a store and later did retrieve it.) I was immediately impressed with her. I called Lucy the next day and said, “This is Jones at the Dallas Police Department. I’m investigating a stolen billfold.” I don’t think that impressed her either. But, we eventually got together.

WCR: *How long did you date before you got married?*

DEP: About 18 months.

WCR: *What’s the age differences of your offspring?*

DEP: Our daughter is 43, one son is 41, and the other son is 36.

WCR: *By the time you had finished your army service and the fellowship, your family was complete?*

DEP: No. Our youngest son was born after we had moved to Dallas. We came back to Dallas in 1966, and he was born in 1967.

WCR: *What was your home like, let’s say after you had been back in Dallas 10 years or so?*

DEP: I was working long hours, but our kids were in all sorts of activities. I tried to participate in their activities as much as

possible. We took vacations. We have lived in the same house for 36 years, so they had a home that they could count on.

WCR: *Where do you live?*

DEP: We live in North Dallas.

WCR: *It was a major decision to go from chief of gastroenterology at the VA Hospital into the private arena. How did you make that decision?*

DEP: In part because research was never a primary interest of mine, and I realized that to be really successful academically, I needed to be invested in research in a major way. Also, I enjoyed patient contact. There was inadequate patient contact for me at the VA.

WCR: *You mentioned that John Fordtran got you interested in gastroenterology. Did you consider other areas in medicine before settling on gastroenterology?*

DEP: Before Dr. Seldin asked me to be chief resident, I had planned to do an endocrine fellowship with Norman Kaplan when I finished my residency. I was undecided at that point.

WCR: *While growing up, did you have many family vacations?*

DEP: Yes. My dad was not very patient. We'd stop at the Grand Canyon, he'd take a look for 5 minutes, then we'd be on, but we did take family vacations.

WCR: *They were automobile vacations.*

DEP: Correct.

WCR: *When you eventually went into practice, how much time would you take off each year?*

DEP: We took a family trip for a couple of weeks during the summer and then we took about a week during the winter to go skiing with the children.

WCR: *What was your day-to-day life like, let's say about 1980? You were in private practice and you were head of gastroenterology at BUMC. What time would you wake up in the morning?*

DEP: I would get to the hospital probably around 7:00 AM and probably leave the hospital around 8:00 PM or later. It was a long day.

WCR: *You worked half day, 12 or 13 hours! What time did you wake up as a rule?*

DEP: Usually around 5:30 AM.

WCR: *And you got home after 8:00. Would your wife wait for dinner?*

DEP: Yes, unless it was really late, say 9:00 or 10:00 PM. The family usually had dinner together.

WCR: *What time did you go to bed?*

DEP: Around 11:00 PM.

WCR: *So if you got 6 or 6½ hours of sleep, you were okay. You mentioned you always liked sports. I understand you have a tennis court at your house?*

DEP: I've had one for about 30 years.

WCR: *You played a good bit?*

DEP: Not very well, but I played a fair amount.

WCR: *Do your kids play?*

DEP: My daughter plays some tennis, but my 2 sons really don't play much, although they can.

WCR: *You mentioned you like to read history. What do you do during your time off now for the most part?*

DEP: We travel some (Figure 7). We enjoy that. I enjoy reading history, both contemporary and otherwise. Right now

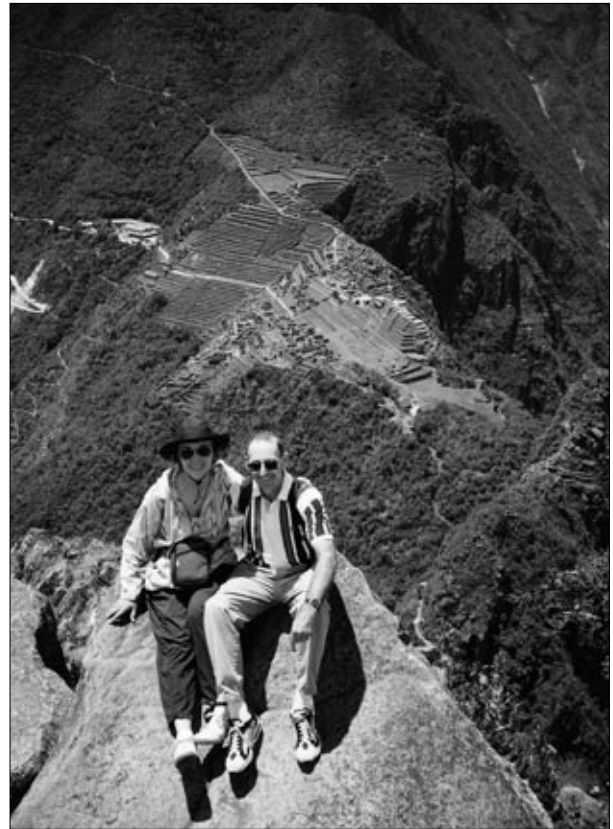


Figure 7. With Lucy at Machu Picchu, 1996.

I'm reading a biography of Ben Franklin. I recently read Robert Caro's latest volume on LBJ.

WCR: *Do you have lots of books around the house?*

DEP: Yes, lots, more books than we have bookcases.

WCR: *Does your wife read a lot?*

DEP: Yes.

WCR: *She went to the University of Texas?*

DEP: She went to the University of North Texas.

WCR: *What's the age difference between you two?*

DEP: I'm 6 months older than she is.

WCR: *You couldn't entice any of your kids to become a physician?*

DEP: We never pushed our kids in any direction.

WCR: *Do you take off more time now than you used to?*

DEP: Yes. We take 1 or 2 big trips a year. Those are generally 3-week trips.

WCR: *When you were chief of gastroenterology for almost 30 years, how much time did the administrative activities take each week?*

DEP: It was variable, maybe 5 or 6 hours a week.

WCR: *You have witnessed enormous changes in gastroenterology during the past 40 years.*

DEP: When I entered, it was basically a cognitive specialty. Then it rapidly became a procedural-type specialty. I enjoy that—I enjoy doing things with my hands—but I enjoy the intellectual side of it as well.

WCR: *You don't send many patients with peptic ulcer to a surgeon anymore, do you?*

DEP: No. That's thanks to the drug companies.

WCR: *Did it shock you when the fellow in Australia came up with the concept that peptic ulcer disease was an infectious problem?*

DEP: Let me tell you a story about that. Like a lot of physicians in Dallas, I was skeptical at first. We've had a gastrointestinal tumor conference for many years, and Ben Harrison, a Baylor surgeon, said 30 years ago that peptic ulcer was due to a bacterial infection and that he treated his peptic ulcer patients with antibiotics. I thought that was silly. I've been wrong about a lot of things in my life, and that was one of them. Ben Harrison was ahead of his time.

WCR: *How has liver transplantation at BUMC affected your practice?*

DEP: When Göran Klintmalm was hired by BUMC, he came to my office and asked for my help. I told him I would help in any way I could. Little did I know what was ahead. The liver transplant program took off at BUMC, and Dr. Klintmalm deserves enormous credit.

WCR: *What year did that program start?*

DEP: 1985. Since then, we have been inundated with very sick patients with all sorts of liver diseases. The program was pretty taxing on the gastroenterologists at that time. My practice suddenly became at least 50% liver disease. I also was chairman of the liver transplant selection committee for about 8 years. Since we now have a group of hepatologists, my practice is probably 30% liver disease, the remainder being inflammatory bowel disease, esophageal disorders, and other intestinal problems.

WCR: *How many pacemaker changes have you had?*

DEP: I had one change in 1992. That's it. I have a Medtronic dual-chamber DDD pacemaker. It's given me no trouble. It is checked now every 4 months because it has been in place for 11 years.

WCR: *Back in 1963, when I was superficially involved with pacemakers, they were large (about 200 g) and they lasted no more than 2 years. Today, they weigh about 25 g and last many years. Are you using that capsule that takes pictures of the bowel?*

DEP: We're using it a lot more than we thought we would. Dan DeMarco is in charge of that program, but I also read a certain number of those studies. Reading them is time consuming. It takes about an hour to read one. The technology must speed up. The software now has sensors that pick up blood. It takes 50,000 frames over the course of nearly 8 hours.

WCR: *You are 70 years of age. Are you going to work forever?*

DEP: That's a good question. I won't work forever, but as long as I enjoy what I'm doing, I don't see any reason not to keep doing it. I may work less than I have in the past.

WCR: *Do you still get to work early?*

DEP: I still generally get to the hospital around 7:00 AM. Some days I get up and run in the morning, and then I may not get there until 8:00 AM or so.

WCR: *How much do you run a week?*

DEP: Since I've had more time, I've been running more. I run about 25 miles a week.

WCR: *And you've been doing that for how long?*



Figure 8. At Heart-6 Ranch in Wyoming, 2002. (a) Dan and Lucy. (b) The entire family. Back row: grandchildren Katie McDermott, Mariel Polter, Megan McDermott, Danny McDermott, and Ezra Polter. Front row: Dan, Lucy, Marie McDermott, Harry McDermott, Adam Polter, Robbin Polter, and David Polter.

DEP: Maybe not that much mileage, but I've been running for 30 years. I'll run 3 or 4 days a week in the mornings. I ran the White Rock half marathon in December 2003.

WCR: *What do you do on the weekends?*

DEP: We do some work in the yard. We do have some flowerbeds and things of that sort. I do things around the house. My wife always has things for me to do. We go to the symphony and opera. We go to some literary things at the museum. We plan future trips.

WCR: *What's your favorite place to go?*

DEP: Our most amazing trip was to Antarctica. In May 2003, we spent 3 weeks on the Amazon and took our 14-year-old granddaughter with us. That was a terrific experience.

WCR: *Did you go up or down the Amazon?*

DEP: We came down. We flew to Lima, took a little plane over the Andes to a town called Iquitos, which is near the headwaters of the Amazon, picked up the boat there, and came down the Amazon.

WCR: *Do you have any regrets? Do you have anything that you wanted to do that you haven't been able to do?*

DEP: There are always things that I would do differently as far as relationships with people and that sort of thing, but overall, I would say "no." I've been incredibly lucky.

WCR: *How many grandchildren do you have?*

DEP: We have 5. We had them all here during Christmas 2003.

WCR: *Do you usually all get together over the holidays?*

DEP: We did this year. A year and a half ago, we took the entire family to Wyoming for a week at the Heart-6 Ranch outside Jackson Hole (Figure 8). It was owned by 6 heart surgeons from Houston. (It's not owned by them anymore, but that's how it got its name.)

WCR: *Dan, is there anything that you would like to talk about that we haven't touched on?*

DEP: I think we've talked about a lot. I've already told you more than I know.

WCR: *I want to thank you for talking to me and therefore to the readers of BUMC Proceedings.*

DEP: It's been my pleasure.