

A BROTHERHOOD OF HIPPOCRATES: THE CLASS OF 1960



In his work, *The Decorum*, Hippocrates wrote “Between medicine and the love of wisdom there are no great differences; in fact medicine has all the things that lead toward wisdom—dislike of money, reverence, modesty, reserve, sound opinion, judgment, calm steadfastness, purity, knowing speech, knowledge of things useful and necessary for life, and the dispensing of that which cleanses.” Hippocrates did speak of the Class of 1960.

By all accounts the class that entered Upstate Medical University in 1956—six years after the transfer of the Syracuse University College of Medicine to the State University of New York system—was a highly qualified, high-achieving group that went on to enjoy unusual success.

In part, we were beneficiaries of good timing. In 1955, Upstate Medical University had doubled the size of its admitting class and built the new Basic Science facilities for students. A lot of thought went into the curriculum, which stressed clinical ability. The faculty was fresh and enthusiastic.

While it was a Golden Age in medicine,

Leading up to his 45th Reunion in 2005, Leonard Friedman, MD '60, interviewed more than 50 of his medical school classmates. Their recollections about their medical education, their careers, and each other, provide an interesting time capsule of Upstate Medical University.

BY LEONARD FRIEDMAN, MD '60

admitting decisions on the part of the institution also played a big part. Ellen “Cookie” Jacobsen, MD '50, recalls that her husband, Dean Carlyle Jacobsen, PhD, refused to take calls in 1955-56 of those who would entreat him to admit a student. Dean Jacobsen stressed student merit and the independence of the admissions committee. Students were actively recruited from nearby colleges, with the largest numbers coming from Cornell, Columbia, and Syracuse universities.

Long before diversity was an objective, the class included a diversity of students for its time, including a nucleus of early admission Ford Foundation Scholars from Wisconsin and Chicago. These were students less than 22 years old who would probably have been admitted to other medical schools a year or two later. This admissions policy was very productive in moving younger individuals more rapidly into both clinical and research work.

At the opposite end of the spectrum were the older members of the class, many military veterans of Korea. These students provided a link to the faculty and short circuited

any difficulties between students and faculty. One student was actually tapped by Dr. Jacobsen to serve as an informal liaison between faculty and students. Another served with distinction on the student-faculty council and was president of the student council. One more was representative to the school honor committee.

Another prong of the admitting policy was to try to produce generalists for the area. As a result, many who were chosen from Utica to Niagara Falls did return to practice near or in their hometowns, including many a solo practitioner, today considered dinosaurs.

Most students spent a summer or two doing medical research with a professor, including cancer research centers in Buffalo and New York City. Some relationships between students and their summer research professors lasted many decades. This experience, working directly with a clinical professor on a research project, was integral to our experience but something that may no longer be available to students. Post-Sputnik science and research money has led to sophisticated grant programs in research, with less direct student-professor relationships.



In the laboratory.

There were also a large number of students who did histories and physicals at the nearby hospitals to help pay for schooling. Early on, the curriculum and externships reinforced the habit of taking an adequate history and physical and reading extensively to make an adequate differential diagnosis. In particular, the school's relationship to the nearby VA Hospital provided fine clinical externships. Many faculty members held positions at the VA as well as the medical school.

The Class of 1960 enjoyed an unusual class spirit and an exceptional leader in Jim Owens, lay preacher and class president for four years. For most of us, our classmates were the “greatest guys and girls we ever knew.” No one questioned that the class was filled with very intuitive, bright students. The bright-

est students raised the bar for the class, a challenge many of the students attempted to reach and some did. Much of that had to do with the collegiality and sense of helpfulness embodied by the class. No one was ever turned away from a study group, which routinely expanded beyond the standard four members. It was not surprising to later learn the class had done exceptionally well on the National Boards.

What is the legacy of the Class of 1960? When asked what the most important lesson the class could pass on to future doctors, it was simply to listen to the patient. Listening to the patient was such a universal and simple answer that I was overwhelmed by its spontaneous repetition. It suggested that by putting a human face on the patient, something more would happen in the doctor-patient relationship. And not infrequently, the patient's tale would offer the diagnosis as if the patient was diagnosing himself.

Here's what they didn't say: The practice of medicine was never talked about as a business or a 9-to-5 job. Money was never mentioned in relationship to one's medical career. No one identified themselves as a proceduralist who specialized in an expensive procedure



Lederle Trip, December 28-30, 1959

as a daily routine. No member of the class noted his or her participation in the American Medical Association, or participation in peer review committees. The conclusion here is up to the reader.

There is no question that medical practice has undergone profound changes, many of which have been troublesome for the class, as well as those who have followed. Despite those obstacles, the Hippocratic path requires doctors to maintain medicine's social contract with society. As one classmate put it, "bemoaning the present status of medicine is a folly."

If the past is any indicator, our experiences may serve as lessons for future medical students and doctors. And perhaps by our 50th reunion, we'll have a prescription for some remedies.



Students listen to a heart beat using an "Educational Cardioscope."

SNAPSHOTS OF THE CLASS OF 1960:



Julian Aroesty, MD, a Cornell University graduate and a Korean War veteran was not premed so he took a year to study biology and won a New York Medical School Scholarship. After a Strong

Memorial cardiology residency, Aroesty settled at Beth Israel in Boston, where he directed the Cardiac Catheterization Laboratory. He is a clinical associate professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School and now splits his time between patients, research, and residents in the lab and private practice. Julian has had multiple listings in *Boston Magazine* as one of the best heart doctors in the Boston area.



Mary Giambattista Ampola, MD, recalls hearing that the Syracuse College of Medicine had a quota of two women per year before the state took over the school. Even then, she felt that the

women were somewhat isolated, and in the early part of her career, discovered her chairman placing virtually all the women candidates at the bottom of the intern match list. Mary interned at George Washington, followed by three years of pediatric residency at Children's National Medical Center, then a two-year fellowship at Children's Hospital Boston and a metabolic fellowship at Mass General Hospital in Boston. Widely published, Mary was chief of the Division of Metabolism at the Floating Hospital for Children and professor of pediatrics at Tufts University until 2004. After relocating to Atlanta, Mary continues to practice as a pediatric geneticist at the Scottish Rite and Northside hospitals.



Roger Moore, MD, opened a general practice office in Clinton, NY, an hour away from Syracuse. There were 40 patients the first day and he never looked back. He worked around the clock and

was available for house calls, scrubbing in as an assistant on surgeries on his patients. He retired at age 70, though still teaches twice a week at the medical school and maintains his reading. He is an avid painter and provides community service as a school physician.



Donald L. Nathanson, MD, (a New York State Professional Scholarship winner at 19) took a summer externship in London, by day studying hepatic metabolism with Dame Sheila Sherlock and at

night entertaining in local pubs. A Philadelphian since graduation, he became endocrinologist for the 4th Naval District, professor of psychiatry at Jefferson Medical College, and founding executive director of the Silvan S. Tomkins Institute. Known internationally for his work on the biology and psychology of human emotion, he has published and lectured extensively. Don's demonstration that explosive violence is usually triggered by perceived humiliation caught the attention of President Clinton, who appointed him to the Academic Advisory Council of the National Campaign Against Youth Violence. His DVD "Managing Shame, Preventing Violence" is central to the field of restorative justice.



Jim Owens, MD, class president for four years, is often referred to by classmates as "the best person they ever met." A Cornell graduate, he did his internship and residency in pediatrics

at Cornell Medical in New York City. In 1963, he entered the Public Health Service and enjoyed his stay, extending it for a third year. A lay Methodist minister from his college days, Jim practiced pediatrics before realizing a stronger interest in school-aged and older children. He earned a master's in public health degree at Berkeley, then spent the remainder of his career working in youth clinics, adolescent units, and with delinquent children correction units in Seattle. Retired for two years, he continues working at the local correctional facility and remains active in the National Commission on Correctional Health Care.



Felicitas Ritrosky, MD, was one of the oldest members of the class. Her family, from East Prussia, fled in 1945 as the Russian Army advanced on the Eastern Front, and ultimately immigrated to the

United States in 1952. Ritrosky then enrolled at Utica College of Syracuse University, and after being told that women, particularly foreigners, don't get accepted at medical schools, studied accounting. She finished her pre-med courses

anyway and applied to medical schools. After being accepted by five, she chose Upstate, where she stayed for her internship and residency. She married a fellow pediatric resident who joined a pediatric practice in Fort Myers, Florida. Felicitas went to work for the Lee County Health Department, introducing Well Baby clinics and later regular pediatric patient care, serving the economically disadvantaged. She cared for many of the first AIDS babies, as they showed up in her patient population earlier than the private sector. The County Health Department gave up patient care in 1998 and she retired to see the world. The most exciting experiences were three trips to Nepal and Tibet, especially trekking up to Everest Base Camp (17,600 feet) in October of 2000.



Ara Sheperdigian, MD, was a Cornell graduate who came to medical school after working at Parke Davis on the polio vaccine. He was the first married student to have a child born during medical

school and held three jobs: as an extern at Crouse-Irving Hospital, at the blood bank, and at the city laboratory. He continued summer research at Parke Davis while a student, working on an embolism project. Ara recalls being on the student honor committee and never hearing a case from the Class of 1960. After his internship, he returned to clinical investigation for four years, before completing an internal medicine residency and then private practice in Mount Pleasant, Michigan. He retired in 1995 after his group practice was bought out. While he encouraged his five children to enter medicine, none followed, as they were discouraged by his night coverage schedule.



Frank Suarez, MD, was the scion of a long line of distinguished physicians in both the Dominican Republic and the United States. These were his role models as he became a thoracic and vascular

surgeon. He began his internship at St. Vincent's in New York. As an older, married resident with children, he had to move to a salaried residency at the VA. As a surgeon, he perceived himself as a healer who took patients from the consultation room through surgery and their later discharge. He was chief of surgery and president of the medical board at Lincoln Hospital in the Bronx and retired from practice after developing a hand tremor.



The 1960 student council.



Sam Thier, MD, perhaps the most well-known member of the Class of 1960, is an authority on internal medicine and kidney disease and is also known for his expertise in national health policy,

medical education, and biomedical research. Sam entered Upstate at 19, and after graduation did his internship and a year of residency at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston before two years with the Public Health Service at the NIH. He returned to Mass General as a chief resident and specialized in nephrology. He left Boston in 1969 to go to the University of Pennsylvania, where he spent six years in research in medicine, and then served as chief of medicine at Yale. He spent the next six years as president of the Institute of Medicine, National Academy of Science, before becoming president of Brandeis University. After three years, he became president of Massachusetts General Hospital and later chief executive officer of the Partners HealthCare System. Currently, he is professor of medicine and health care at Harvard Medical School, and chairman of The Commonwealth Fund and the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston.



Phil Wolf, MD, has been the principal investigator for the renowned Framingham Heart Study for more than 25 years. Phil was just 20 when he entered medical school and was impressed with

how bright his classmates were and how well they did as a whole on the national boards. He trained at Massachusetts General Hospital and is currently professor of neurology, research professor of medicine (epidemiology and preventive medicine) at Boston University School

of Medicine, and professor of public health at Boston University School of Public Health. In addition, Phil is principal investigator of the MRI, Genetics and Cognitive Precursors of AD and Dementia project, Epidemiology of Dementia Study, and the Precursors of Stroke Incidence and Prognosis Study, all NIH-funded research programs. Among his proudest achievements, however, is the completion of nine marathons (including Boston five times).



Leonard Friedman, MD, the author of this article, was a Ford Foundation Scholar who entered Upstate at age 19. He noted in the class yearbook that his only interest

was the history of medicine club, an interest that has not faded over time. Lenny completed his internship at Beth-El Hospital in Brooklyn and his residency in community psychiatry at the New York School of Psychiatry, then volunteered for Special Forces in the Army where he was an honor officer of his parachute training class. After his military service, he graduated from Harvard Law School. As a clinician, he ran a Med/Psych unit for five years, specializing in minimal head trauma and continues practice as a psychiatrist. He is the author of *The American Fall*, *the Russian Winter*, and *the Chinese Spring and Summer*. ■