

W Dean Warren, MD: Iron Hand and Principles of Steel

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In his life, W Dean Warren inspired young surgeons to make a difference and to be something more than they might have been on their own motivations. The authors of this paper are enormously indebted to Dr Warren for a differing, profoundly direct, personal influence, and career example. This tribute to his life describes, in moderate chronological order, remarkable insights and contributions that Dr Warren made to surgery, nationally and internationally, in his all-too-brief career during the second half of the 20th century.

THE EARLY YEARS

Dr Warren was born at Jackson Memorial Hospital in Miami, FL, on October 28, 1924. This, ironically, would be the hospital at which he would assume his first major leadership position, appointed as chief of surgery at Jackson and chair of the department of surgery at the University of Miami School of Medicine (1963). He was 1 of 3 children born to Hosea and Norma Hawes Warren. Both parents were educators. Signs of Dr Warren's talents surfaced early in his life. In his Florida high-school days at Lakeland High, his athletic talent was first demonstrated as a member of his baseball and basketball teams. He was valedictorian of his high school class. Later he was a first-rate college baseball player during his time at Dartmouth, where he received an AB degree in 1947 and was a member of Phi Beta Kappa.

He served in the Marines from 1943 to 1946, where he played on the basketball team. After his stint in the Marines—and because of his recognized talent—he was returned to Dartmouth by the armed forces. Some of us were lucky to have heard him talk with William Altemier

about what it was really like to play baseball. Dr Altemier was a major-league-class catcher who passed on an offer to play for the St Louis Cardinals to pursue a career in surgery. A member of the Southern, he went on to become professor and chairman of the department of surgery at the University of Cincinnati (1952).

Dr Warren's career led to medical school at Johns Hopkins (1950), where he was elected to membership in Alpha Omega Alpha. He was at Hopkins for only 1 year as a surgical resident, not being granted a second-year position. A contrasting story is that Dr Warren declined reappointment because he could not afford to stay at the penurious wages then paid in Baltimore. This only served as a backdrop for his well-known wit. He enjoyed telling and retelling the story for the rest of his life about how he and 1 other person were determined to see who could be the best person ever dropped from the infamous Hopkins' pyramid. The other person, of course, in the same era, was Tom Starzl. There is no question that Dr Warren or Dr Starzl were probably the most accomplished surgeons to have been triaged from the Johns Hopkins surgical residency program, no matter who totaled up the score.

His time at Johns Hopkins was not a loss. He met and married a beautiful nurse named Eileen Dukeshire. At a later time, Eileen would become the perfect chair's wife (Fig. 1). She was a warm, gracious person. She was a massively positive influence throughout his life, and there was nothing in terms of entertainment, comfort, or solace that she could not provide to the people who worked with him. The prolific union produced 4 daughters (Becky, Amy, Patty, Penny) and 1 son, Dean Junior.

Dr Warren's first stop after the Hopkins' internship in Baltimore was at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. None of us knew the real story, but that lasted only a year. He completed his residency at Barnes Hospital in St Louis under the then-new Professor Carl Moyer, with Dr Evarts Graham having just retired after a long and most distinguished career. As a newcomer, late in his residency at Barnes, one can never quite tell where one is or should be, but at one later point, Dr Warren proclaimed loudly at a social meeting, "I am not a Moyer man!" As it turns out, Dr Moyer was standing right behind him, turned, and said to him, "Hi Dean, I haven't seen you in a long time." This was one of the few times in

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Figure 1. W Dean Warren and his wife Eileen in 1977. (Reprinted courtesy of Duane G Hutson and the family of W Dean Warren.)

Dr Warren's life that he was ever one-upped conversationally, but that was one! He quickly straightened out his Dupuytren's contracture and shook Dr Moyer's hand warmly.

THE CHARLOTTESVILLE YEARS AND REMARKABLE COINCIDENCES

William Harry Muller

When Dr Warren finished his residency, he aligned himself with Dr Harry Muller, who then had just returned to Charlottesville after completing the Hopkins' residency and was working with Dr William P Longmire as the founding faculty for the University of California Los Angeles School of Medicine on the Westwood campus. Dr Muller was one of the very early school cardiac surgeons, and Dr Warren joined him, along with a cadre of fairly well established, broad-based general surgeons who made up an excellent surgical faculty at the University of Virginia. He joined the staff at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville (1955).

William P Longmire

Very few people know that Dr Longmire's father was an early graduate of a predecessor of the University of Louisville School of Medicine and had practiced medicine in Sapulpa, OK, for his entire career. Just as Dr Longmire had been selected to advance in the Hopkins' program, his father became ill and he returned to Sapulpa to maintain the family practice for some time while his father moved through the various stages of congestive heart failure. Notably, in that same town, Dr Longmire Sr had delivered a young man who became one of the significant contributors to surgery with 2 completely different contributions. The man was Myron (Bill) Wheat, who

described the unappreciated presence of cancer in large villous adenomas and separately, conceptually saved the turkey produce business by showing the value of antihypertensives to lower pulse pressure and prevent aortic dissection, the most common cause of death in industrially raised Thanksgiving turkeys. Dr Wheat was delivered by the senior Dr Longmire, but never had the chance to meet him in person. In any case, Dr Longmire returned from Oklahoma to Baltimore and completed his residency, along with Dr Muller, and they became great friends for a lifetime.

PORTAL HYPERTENSION

Dr Warren's time in Charlottesville was enormously productive. He did some remarkable, but largely unappreciated, work on models of pancreatic pseudocysts and, in a useful series of experiments, established the issues with respect to internal and external cyst drainage. More importantly, he became intensely interested in portal hypertension as a complication of cirrhosis, most often due to excessive alcohol use. Many parts of America lay claim to leading the country in that competition (ie alcoholism), but Dr Warren found the issues related to portal hypertension very challenging, technically and conceptually.^{1,2} Interestingly, his own first major paper on the subject concerned 7 patients treated in Charlottesville, with very precise observations regarding blood flow and pressure on either side of an intraoperatively clamped portal vein. This paper was also of enormous aggravation to Dr Warren because it was quoted so seldom. He selected key words that included *hemodynamic* and *hepatic blood flow*, and omitted terms such as *cirrhosis* and *portal hypertension* in the paper, which likely contributed to the paper's obscurity. A word to the wise: "Be sure your key words are correct!"

Dr Warren's rise to prominence as the outstanding young academic surgeon in Charlottesville was precipitous, to say the least. Dr Muller was a wonderful mentor to him, and Dr Warren liked very much to recount how they often roomed together to keep expenses down when attending meetings such as the Clinical Congress of the College of Surgeons or other major surgical society meetings such as the American or the Southern. On 1 occasion, Dr Muller, who was a very formal man, suggested, "Dean, why don't you call me Harry when we are out of town?"

While at Virginia, he was selected as a John and Mary Markle Scholar and appointed as a research associate at the Institute for Experimental Surgery of the University of Copenhagen and the Rigshospitalet in Denmark, where the Warren family moved for a year. In 1962, he



Figure 2. W Dean Warren and Margaret Perdue, RN, chief nurse at Miami's Jackson Memorial Hospital. (Reprinted courtesy of Hiram C Polk.)

had risen to the rank of associate professor at Charlottesville.

THE MIAMI YEARS

Dr Warren was chair of the department of surgery at the University of Miami School of Medicine from 1963 to 1971 (Fig. 2). He had some sound and farsighted ideas about surgical education, and the opportunity to accept the chair of surgery at the relatively new University of Miami School of Medicine and in the hospital where he was born, was an easy sell. Vignettes that are still extremely clear to us today marked the multiple lives of Dr Warren. On the first Saturday that Dr Hiram Polk worked for him in August 1965, Dr Warren said, "Let's go get coffee." This was where he sketched out on the back of a napkin his mission for developing the surgical curriculum in which Miami students, who were exposed to all aspects of surgery, were actually asked to take responsibility for patient care. Responsibility was always associated with his favorite, "accountability" (Table 1). Having outlined this, he handed Dr Polk the napkin

and said, "I think you ought to manage the student program. I am sure you can do very well with that."

REMARKABLE COINCIDENCES CONTINUE

To further intertwine the complexity of this remarkable story of talents, Dr Warren arrived in Miami to hear memorable stories about a just-departing chief resident who completed his own training program there after leaving Baltimore and then went on to Northwestern University to begin studies on organ transplantation; of course, that person was Tom Starzl, who once again kept the connection clearer when he moved to Colorado to work for another Barnes-trained surgeon, Ben Eisenman. Not entirely parenthetical, Dr Starzl then later returned east to build the great program in Pittsburgh, but that was under the mentorship and support of Henry Bahnson, the ultimate Blalock man.

Dr Warren inherited a very young department in Miami that had essentially been dismantled by internal conflicts. He very quickly corrected these problems and recruited such notables as Robert Zeppa, Hiram C Polk (Fig. 3), Mark Rowe, and James Jude, as part of the rebuilding process, inheriting the creative plastic surgeon Ralph Millard. In addition, he would bring with him the basic ideas behind a new operation: the distal splenorenal shunt (DSRS). The procedure was based on the theory that the increased incidence of death from accelerated hepatic failure and chronic hepatic encephalopathy seen after a direct portocaval shunt was the result of the significant and at least partial diversion of portal blood flow from the liver produced by the procedure. The distal splenorenal shunt was designed to decompress the critical gastroesophageal area while maintaining portal perfusion of the liver, obviating the deleterious effects of the portocaval shunt. His careful scientific approach to this development and evaluation of the procedure is evident.

With these clinical building blocks, Dr Warren would rapidly transform this infantile disorganized department into a national and internationally recognized entity. In addition to his contribution to the department, he was appointed dean of the medical school in 1967; and, the following year, became the University's first vice president for medical affairs. Advice to all: "never accept an interim appointment." His disregard for protocol was reflected by his choice of dress for his picture as dean at Miami. He is most certainly the only dean in Miami who has ever chosen, as his official portrait, a picture without a coat of some kind—probably the only such surgeon in the world. In 1971, rumors of his departure from Miami would develop related to his visiting Emory. These quieted for a while but resurfaced after another visit and a meeting

Table 1. Aphorisms of W Dean Warren, MD

Aphorism
“More people are harmed by timid surgeons than bold surgeons.”
“Oh, ye of little faith.”
“Responsibility is sought by many; accountability is what really matters.”
“The best surgeon in America... lives in a small rural town with minimal support, inadequate pay, selflessly dedicating their life to the care of their people.”
“How about them Dawgs!”
“If you throw a brick out the window and it goes up, that is significant, even if it only happens once.”

with Mr Woodruff—it was thought that everyone knew “the jig was up.”

New medical schools undergo many changes, and the University of Miami certainly was having some of those. Dr Warren was successful in recruiting Emmanuel Papper, an anesthesiologist from Columbia, to become vice president and dean of the medical school. Faculty grew and new buildings popped up all over the campus. The ophthalmology program quickly became recognized as one of the best in the world. There were other departments that paralleled the growth in surgery. As Drs Warren and Zeppa were beginning to see the fruition of these efforts, other opportunities began to arise that ultimately were attractive. The Emory chair of surgery, after the retirement of Professor JD Martin, was vacant for a time. It was clear that a surgeon of stature, with both clinical and intellectual achievements, would be required for the job. It required the full forces and power of the Coca Cola empire to get Dr Warren to Atlanta, but that is exactly what evolved during the Thanksgiving/Christmas season of 1970 and the first months of 1971. Dr Warren, with Dr Zeppa’s concurrence, selected some people to move with him to Atlanta, especially those closely involved with the distal splenorenal shunt, and that began to evolve. Coincidentally, Dr Polk (first author) first had been asked to interview for several chairs, but found and believed there was a possibility for growth at the University of Louisville. Dr Polk was somewhat biased because the advisor to the search committee was Dr Tom Shires who had been a medical school classmate with then dean, Dr Douglas Haynes, in the very first graduating medical class at the University of Texas Southwestern Dallas. Their professor of surgery was Carl Moyer. Several better-known surgeons had declined the opportunity but Dr Shires persisted, and Dr Polk chose to move to Louisville in August 1971.

In following his move to Atlanta, one of Dr Warren’s favorite sayings was “how fleeting is fame.” He had said about those 2 weeks after his departure from Miami, that his name would come up in conversation and



Figure 3. From right to left, Hiram C Polk, Jr, W Dean Warren, and Robert Zeppa at the Capital City Club in Atlanta for the American Surgical Association President’s Dinner in 1983. (Reprinted courtesy of Duane G Hutson and the family of W Dean Warren.)

someone would say, “Warren! Warren! Oh! Dean Warren, yes, I vaguely remember him.” Although time may erase the memory of him saying “POW” in the operating room while touching the Bovie to the resident’s gloves, his accomplishments in the field of portal hypertension will remain truly everlasting.³

THE ATLANTA YEARS

In 1971, Dr Warren resigned from Miami to become the Joseph Brown Whitehead Professor and Chair at Emory. Dr Warren’s time at Emory was cut short by his progressive illness with a nasal sinus cancer, but he continued his ongoing work with the shunt and recognized that the Emory Clinic was, in itself, both an asset and a liability. It was a route by which many members of the faculty secured an enhanced income and brought great respect to the institution by the high quality of practice at the Emory Clinic and its suburban hospital, while much of the bread and butter teaching in general surgery went on at the Grady Hospital downtown. At Emory, Dr Warren would assemble a distinguished group to continue this work. They were Robert Smith, Michael Henderson, Atef Salam, and Bill Mickelson. This would be an extremely productive period, generating more than 40 publications. With Dr Warren there inheriting a strong clinical department behind him, Emory became one of the most sought-after sites for residency and faculty appointments in surgery in America.⁴

DR WARREN’S IRON HAND

Dr Warren began to exert his influences on the national scene through the American Board of Surgery, the Surgical Residency Review Committee (RRC), and the

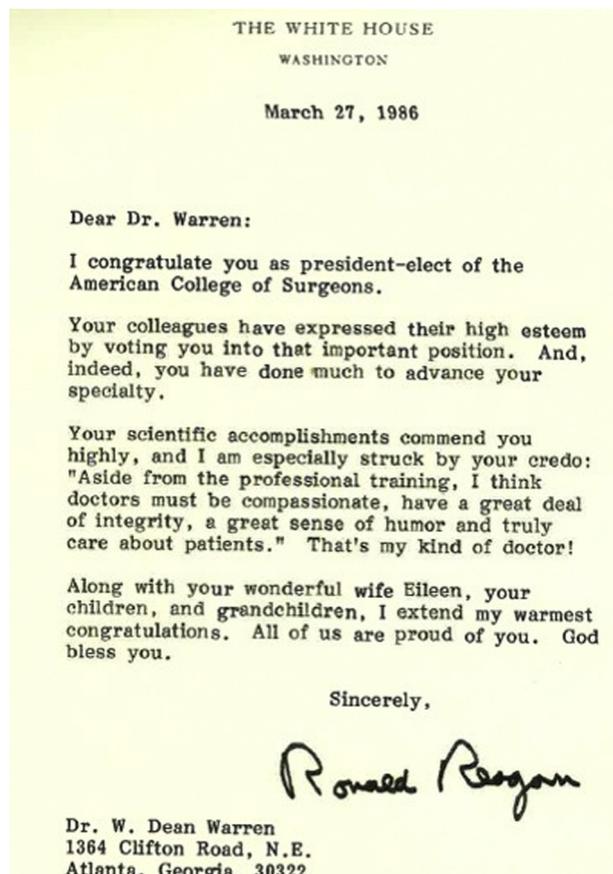


Figure 4. Letter to Dr Warren from President Ronald Reagan, whose step-father-in-law was a long-time editor of *Surgery, Gynecology, and Obstetrics*, the forerunner to the *Journal of the American College of Surgeons*. (Reprinted courtesy of Duane G Hutson and the family of W Dean Warren.)

American College of Surgeons (Fig. 4). Interestingly, only a few surgeons recognized the separation of church and state that is common in American surgery—the College is an educational entity, the Board examines individual graduates, and the RRC approves whole programs and/or schools of surgery. Dr Warren was opinionated and put his own personal seal on these organizations. As chair of the RRC for surgery through the Accrediting Council of Graduate Medical Education (ACGME), he left an impression on those who witnessed it.

Dr Warren was a vocal critic of the quality of the educational process for training surgeons at the time. He expressed this in his Presidential Address to the American Surgical Association in 1983. He had the temerity to chastise the AMA on their influence in surgical training. He stated, "...the AMA is not committed to the fundamental concept that surgery should be performed by the completely trained and tested surgeon." Dr Warren was not always successful at everything. He attempted to wrest

control of the ACGME process from the AMA with the statement, "As long as the staff paycheck comes on an AMA letterhead check, they are employees of the AMA, and they take their orders from no one else." Interestingly, he led a short-lived revolt to try to move all of the Surgery Residency Review committees under the parentage of the American College of Surgeons and as its own committee. Many surgical specialties, as they would call themselves "super specialties," chose to remain with the AMA rather than join the College of Surgeons, which had a strong cardiac and lesser general surgery focus. As a result of Dr Warren's words and efforts, we were able to reduce the number of accredited surgical residency programs in America by about a hundred. This fostered quality surgical training at academic, high-volume programs, stimulating the scholarly pursuits of residents and medical students.

What his opinion would be of more recent changes in the educational process—such as the 80-hour work-week—is not known. We can speculate, however, based on the recollection of Dr Duane Hutson (as a junior resident in Miami). When he complained that he had not been home for a week or slept for 2 days, Dr Warren responded "Son, your sad story touches my soul." With that, it was clear, the issue was deemed resolved.

PRINCIPLES OF STEEL

Dr Warren was a man of enormous honor, integrity, and a steel-nerved will to do the right thing. A sense of purpose and the acquisition of meaning were bases for his innate personal and professional resilience.

Dr Warren's respect for the small town practicing general surgeon was expressed clearly by Dr James Easley when, as a resident, he had the experience of meeting him. He describes the experience as a session in which Dr Warren was "holding court." As part of the discourse, Dr Warren would ask the residents the following question: "Who is the best surgeon in the country?" There being no response from the residents, he then responded as follows: "I don't know his or her name, but I know where he or she works. He or she lives in some rural town using all their resources with minimal support, inadequate pay, little time off, devoid of professional recognition, dedicating their life to the care of their people. This selfless physician is the greatest surgeon in America." Dr Warren was often overextended but never detached or disconnected from his patients or pupils.

The title of his 1983 Presidential Address to the American was "Not for the Profession...for the People." His 1986 address to the College picked up a theme from that work and ended with an ultimate salute to Dr C Rollins Hanlon. He was a vocal critic of poor scientific work.



Figure 5. Claude Organ (left) and Hiram C Polk Jr (right) (circa 1999); the former saying of Dr Warren, “He walks with kings.” (Reprinted courtesy of Hiram C Polk.)

His disdain for the work of Eck was expressed in his Presidential Address to the Southern in 1979, as was his admiration for the more careful work of Pavlov. He states that Eck’s career seems characteristic of many who have been ill suited to their profession.⁵

He would become president of many elite surgical organizations in the world.^{6,7} These included the American College of Surgeons; the Southern Surgical Association; the American Surgical Association; the Society for Surgery of the Alimentary Tract; the Whipple Society; and the Society of University Chairmen. In addition, he was appointed vice chair of the American Board of Surgery and granted honorary fellowship in the Royal College of Physicians of Glasgow.

His love for the Southern is well known to all. Until his illness, he had never missed a meeting. His presentations were both entertaining and informative. The continuous debates between the direct portocaval and the distal splenorenal shunt groups were often the eagerly anticipated highlight of the meeting. As president, he would use his often-demonstrated talents in selecting the right person for the job by recruiting the skills of the membership of the Southern as performers at the banquet. The magic of Dr Oliver Beahrs (Mayo Clinic) was a highlight. For years, Dr Warren would be seen strolling through the foyer of the Breakers carrying an outdated briefcase stuffed with manuscripts, smiling, with quips for everyone encountered. For those old enough to remember, lounging by the fire at the Breakers today might well produce the expectation that Dean’s figure would again appear fulfilling the desire for a return of the “good old days.”

Dr Warren exerted a lasting influence on surgical societies beyond that discussed in his views of graduate medical education. Leading the Southern Surgical Association is a good focal point for his absolutely rock-hard commitment, honesty, integrity, and fairness. Few people in this

audience realize that the president of the Southern Surgical has relatively little influence on what happens in the Council. The fact is, he technically had no vote. The vote is of the Council, ie the 5 former past presidents. As rising president, Dr Warren was infuriated by the refusal of membership to an incredibly highly qualified African-American surgeon who had represented our country in a gallant and exhausting way throughout many of the minority countries in the world as ambassador without portfolio. When that surgeon was declined for membership in the Southern, Dr Warren vowed to correct this when he had that power. Without any discussion with one of us, and probably others on the Council, just before the conclusion of his term as chair of the Council of the Southern, he pulled out of that briefcase a completed application on behalf of Asa Yancey, MD, who was a respected and respectable African-American surgeon from Atlanta.⁸ The form was completed, properly signed by the appropriate number of endorsers, and Dr Warren made a motion as the chair that he be elected to the membership.

The discussion that followed was tense and unpleasant. Dr Yancey was elected by majority vote and shortly thereafter, the surgeon who was first declined, LaSalle Leffall, was welcomed into membership and soon followed by the inclusion of Claude Organ, another exemplary leader of American surgery. The Southern always had certain characteristics, but it has always been a social club, and the acceptance of all of the people, including women, those of different religions and of other skin colors, have made it a truly national organization. The eulogy that Dr Leffall presented at the memorial service for Dr Warren before a packed audience in a huge auditorium in Atlanta was the best and most meaningful such tribute that we have ever heard in our lives. Dr Claude Organ noted this about Dr Warren: “He could walk with kings (Fig. 5).” Dr Zeppa described him as “the consummate academic surgeon.” Notably, Dr Organ’s son, Bryan, and Dr Shire’s, Tom, chose to train at Emory with Dr Warren.

To reiterate, the long-term follow-up of surgical patients and the search for flaws within your own concepts and ideas, and the willingness to revise those concepts and ideas in search of better quality patient survival, are the essence of Dean Warren’s version of portal hypertension surgery. Therefore, the selective shunt became a nearly ideal decompressive operation, literally within the decade to follow; shunting procedures declined dramatically and sclerotherapy took their place along with endoscopy, transjugular intrahepatic portosystemic shunt, and hepatic transplantation. Do recall that sclerotherapy does not impair hepatopetal blood flow.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

When one breaks down Dr Warren's lifetime of effort, graduate medical education was important to him as well as to the authors. He set the posture for the RRC that has generally been followed for the past 30 years. Interestingly, the effort to build alumni support of past RRC members has been turned down repeatedly, depriving each current RRC committee of the counsel and advice of its senior partners. Conversely, the American Board of Surgery has always, at least in name, passed major ideas by its senior members in a regular and organized way, and invited commentary and suggestions. How much of this is appearance, and how much of this is substance is another matter altogether, but Dr Warren believed, from the start, that the quality of the school house, the educational program, and the teachers were at least as important as the graduates. The way to influence graduates in a consistent and positive way was to improve the quality of what went on in the schoolhouse.

Dr Warren literally carried the University of Miami past milestones toward its maturity as a major leading medical school in this country. He put the hospital on a sound economic base with a practice plan in the School of Medicine that has survived and thrived. The new VA hospital has been successful, as were a various sundry of affiliations with other hospitals in the community, as warranted by Dr Zeppa, Dr Alan Livingston, and others since then.

Even Dr Warren experienced some miscues, though, with respect to the Southern. After one meeting, the Ephraim McDowell gavel disappeared. He told Dr Polk: "We have a problem. I'll bet you can fix it." So another trip to Danville, KY, and wood from another poplar tree recreated what is actually the McDowell-Warren-Kentucky gavel, now too precious to even travel to the annual meeting. A year later, it was reprised: "We have another problem. I don't know how to fix this one." He had forgotten the contract for the next Florida location, therefore the 3 consecutive years at The Homestead (1977, 1978, 1979).

The evolution of the selective shunt, which was Dr Warren's favored name for the operation, was a classic example of observation, imagination, and careful science. Data, essential to evaluate the procedure, was collected at all stages and carefully analyzed. Randomized trials were used where appropriate. He was determined to adhere to the principles that he had so often espoused.

He would live to see the precipitous decline in the use of shunts in the management of portal hypertension. In some countries, the DSRS remains a major consideration in selected patients. It would be hard to imagine that discussion about which shunt, timing, and whatever else was

a subject of ongoing discussions with Drs Warren, Zeppa, Drapanas, Orloff, and numerous others. It was surely entertaining, and Dr Warren's popularity in the world of surgery was overwhelming.

How does one gauge success in the world of academic surgery? By every imaginable measure, Dr Warren excelled. He designed an operation; built a department from scratch; became president of many of the most respected surgical organizations in the world; became chair of one of the most prestigious surgical facilities in the country; championed the rights of minorities; and was elected to membership in 2 of the most prestigious academic organizations in the country: Phi Beta Kappa and Alpha Omega Alpha. What more could one do? Nothing! We trust this is a fitting tribute to a man for all seasons. We might add that he was the quintessence of a Southern surgeon. Dr Warren died on May 10, 1989.

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Discussion



DR DAVID LEVI (Charlotte, NC): Raised in Miami, I literally grew up hearing Dr Warren's stories from my mentors, Drs Zeppa, Hutson, and Livingstone, and my father, Dr Joe Levi. My education regarding Dr Warren was formalized during my study of the history of surgery for portal hypertension, which I had the privilege of presenting here 3 years ago.

Dr Polk, your tribute to Dr Warren was eloquent and comprehensive. The profound influence he has had on you, and directly or indirectly on all of us, is clear.