

# “He wanted his gift to go to the Medical School...so that it could make a specific difference.”

Robert Brear never married, belonged to no church or social clubs, and had but a few close friendships in life. So, last winter, only a handful of people gathered in Detroit to bury this quiet, private man. And yet Brear, a pattern-maker at General Motors for 40 years, will be remembered for many, many years to come. His name will be spoken by people who never knew him. He will be honored not with black-tie receptions or speeches, for these would have made him uncomfortable, but by the things he valued deeply: hard work, diligence, and the chance to help others — the opportunity to make a difference.

Several months ago, the University of Michigan Medical School learned that Brear, who never himself attended U-M, had left his entire estate, nearly \$4 million, to the Department of Neurology. The funds will be used to endow the Robert W. Brear Professorship in Neurology.

By all accounts, Brear was devoted to his parents, both of whom died in 1968. Says Brear's attorney, John Nitz: “I asked if his gift was related to his own health, and he said, no, it had to do with the fact that the Hospital had treated his father — treatment he greatly appreciated.”



Robert Brear



James Brear

Dean Howard, a stockbroker for Salomon Smith Barney in Detroit who handled Brear's finances for nearly seven years, recalls a mild-mannered man of extreme thrift and very high standards. “Robert Brear was an incredibly intelligent man, very much the analytical engineer. He spent a tremendous amount of time doing research, and he read a great deal. Every time he came in he would have three or four articles on investing, and he researched the University of Michigan just as closely. He chose Michigan's Medical School for his bequest in part based on the standards and quality of the School's work. Brear was a person who found value in the highest of standards and wanted to deal only with people at the top of their fields. And he wanted his gift to go to the Medical School rather than to the University's general fund so that it could make a specific difference.”

“It's gratifying that an experience at this Hospital, so long ago, could have had such a powerful impact and result in such an important gift,” says Sid Gilman, M.D., chair of the Department of Neurology. “The Brear Professorship will be used to support basic and/or clinical research in neurological diseases.” Gilman, who is stepping down as chair, will leave the Professorship open for his successor to fill.

Some measure the worth of people by the number of mourners who grieve their passing. Others point to the richness of the memories or count the things left behind: the houses, cars and artwork. But Robert Brear was an unusual man who left behind one simple thing: a future. A future of teaching and learning and research and discovery, the accomplishments of which we cannot even begin to measure. One hopes that from time to time, as he labored over his investment ledgers in his little brick house on Romeo Road in Rochester, Robert Brear smiled with satisfaction at his masterwork.