

DOING IT *HIS* WAY

THE REMARKABLE CAREER OF GEORGE MORLEY

George Morley grew up in Toledo, Ohio, where his father, Frank, was a homeopathic physician. Morley knew by age eight that he too wanted to be a physician. Showing early surgical interest, he impressed the neighborhood kids when he did a “post-mortem” on a dead bird on a picnic table, and by age 13 he had already witnessed his first autopsy. Morley entered the University of Michigan in the fall of 1941, earning a bachelor’s degree in 1944 and an M.D. in 1949, then completing his residency in obstetrics and gynecology in 1954 and a master’s of science degree in 1955. During a career spanning more than five decades, he has served under five department heads, been elected by his peers as president of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, the Society of Gynecologic Oncologists, the Society of Pelvic Surgeons and the Society of Gynecologic Surgeons. Nationally, Morley was one of the founding members of the gynecologic oncology subspecialty and served as the program director of the Gynecologic Oncology Fellowship at U-M for 15 years. He considers himself blessed to have practiced medicine during a time that allowed him to have a large practice in obstetrics, gynecology, reconstructive surgery and oncology.

“I learned a lot about medicine from my father,” Morley says. “I could see the caring feelings about the patient and the family. He wasn’t brusque, he wasn’t in a hurry, he was very professional and he loved caring for patients. I could tell that by the way he interacted with them and the way he talked about them with me. That to me is the art of medicine.”

Photo: Marcia Ledford



Morley proudly displays the Distinguished Alumni Service Award he received from the Alumni Association of the University of Michigan in 2003.

“I got to treat [patients], and I got to train to treat. What more could one ask for?”

Morley trained under Norman Miller, another of Michigan’s great surgeons and teachers.

“Dr. Miller was a giant of a man. He was tall in stature and his purposeful gait

characterized his personality. He was a perfectionist and a true gentleman. We all thought very highly of him. When I was a senior resident and we were going to operate with Dr. Miller, we used to go to the locker room ahead of his entry and we would get down his scrub suit and put it on a chair and put his shoes on the floor in front of his locker. We loved doing it and people can’t believe that when I tell them that story! But we had so much respect for him. If we were in the nursing station and Dr. Miller walked on to the unit, we’d all stand up. It wasn’t that we had to — it’s just that we wanted to. It was respect.”

Colleagues and former students of Morley hold much the same sense of respect and admiration for him as Morley had for Norman Miller. “I held what I called ‘the 4:30 p.m. meeting’ and that was a tradition with the residents — they’d handed it down to all of the residents who came through: ‘Don’t wait to be asked to be at Dr. Morley’s office at 4:30 p.m....’ One day I was walking down the hall with Dr. [J. Robert] Willson and one of the residents who was in trouble much of the time came around the corner. Dr. Willson, with his wry sense of humor, cleared his throat and said, ‘It must be 4:30 p.m.’ Another time, I came to my office at 4:30 and found one of the residents sitting in the chair outside my office.” Morley laughs, “He said, ‘I didn’t need to have you call me. I just thought I better get here.’”

Margaret Punch (M.D. 1986) trained under Morley. “Chief residents arranged their schedules so that everybody would get their fair share of Dr. Morley’s time,” she says. “Dr. Morley encouraged us to learn from all of our faculty members,


HARVARD PUPILS TO PRESENT PLAY



Pupils in the eighth grade science classes of Harvard school will present their original play, "A Change for the Best," before the Parent-Teacher association tomorrow at 8 p. m. in the auditorium. Taking part are, left to right, Ebba Daxenfelser, nurse; James Carrithers, father; George Morley, doctor; Jane Eldridge, patient, and Patricia Meyers, mother.

Morley's passion for medicine manifested itself at an early age. He's shown here, in 8th grade, examining his "patient" with a stethoscope in a play at Harvard Elementary School in Toledo, Ohio.

but when you were operating with him you knew he did it a certain way and you didn't mention other people's way of doing it. If you did, he would say, 'Do it *my* way or watch *me* do it my way.' I think the more specific thing I remember learning from Dr. Morley is respect for your superiors, respect for your patients, and respect for each other. You didn't use slang and you didn't say things that were inappropriate. He talked about patients the same way with the door open as he would if it were closed."

Looking back on his long, distinguished and satisfying career, George Morley muses, with the modesty and clarity for which he was always revered, "I got to treat, and I got to train to treat. What more could one ask for?" 

George Morley is the Norman F. Miller Professor Emeritus of Gynecology and professor emeritus of obstetrics and gynecology in the University of Michigan Medical School. He lives in Ann Arbor with his wife, Marcheta, and remains actively involved in affairs of the Medical School and the Medical

Center Alumni Society. Morley was a driving force behind the creation of the Medical School's MCAS Hall of Honor, which pays tribute to past greats of the school, during the school's sesquicentennial celebration in 2000. The MCAS Hall of Honor is located in the lobby of the Dow Auditorium in the Towsley Center for Continuing Medical Education.

Contributed by Christine Bass, Ph.D., for the U-M Center for the History of Medicine.

Students and colleagues of Morley remember him fondly, in part, by the "Morleyisms" for which he is well known, such as:

"I have come not to torment, but to teach."

"I don't care how much you swear *at me* during your training as long as you swear *by me* afterwards."

"Every difficulty is an opportunity."

"They are all *private* patients on the *inside*."