

Obituary: Thomas D. Cronin (1906–1993)

Thomas M. Biggs, M.D.

Houston, Texas, USA



“Well, Doc, what would you do with this case if I dropped dead right here and now?” These were the first words ever spoken to this writer by Thomas Dillon Cronin. With his death on October 21, 1993, his words have ceased, but not his contributions.

Tom Cronin was born in Houston on April 8, 1906, graduated from Houston public schools, attended Rice University, and received his M.D. from the University of Texas Medical Branch–Galveston in 1932. He interned at Kansas City General Hospital, served a resi-

dency at St. Joseph Hospital, and a fellowship in Plastic and Oral Surgery at the Mayo Clinic. In 1939 he returned to Houston to begin his private practice that, with a three-year detour to England during WW II, continued until shortly before his death.

During his long career, Dr. Cronin published 112 scientific articles or chapters ranging from cross finger flaps to the treatment of burned neck contractures, cleft lip and palate, the silicone gel breast implant, breast reconstruction, and many others. In 1963, he served as president of the American Association of Plastic Surgery, the Houston and Texas Societies of Plastic Surgeons, and the Houston Surgical Society. He served on the American Board of Plastic Surgeons and was the recipient of the American Society of Plastic Surgeons’ 1975 Honorary Citation, and the American Associations’ 1979 Clinician of the Year Award. He was Clinical Professor of Plastic Surgeons at Baylor Medical University and the cofounder, with Raymond Brauer, of the preceptorship of plastic surgery that in 1969 became the residency at St. Joseph Hospital.

Dr. Cronin is survived by his wife of 58 years, Anne Heyck Cronin, his sons Thomas D. Jr., and Robert Cronin, and his daughter Anne Cronin Bagge. Besides his family, he will be long remembered by approximately 40 residents of St. Joseph Hospital, thousands of plastic surgery colleagues from the U.S. and around the world, and many more grateful patients from over 50 years of active practice.

Perhaps the greatest beneficiaries of all from his long and faithful devotion to plastic surgery will be future patients whose care will be made better by the fundamental building blocks of knowledge he provided. These blocks are arranged by the simple but piercing and profound thought process he passed on to others who have picked up his baton and are asking other young residents, “Well, Doc, what would you do with this case . . .?”