

Obituary: A Remembrance: Gael R. Frank (1930–2012)

Editorial Staff

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Gael R. Frank MD, long-time member of the Association of Bone and Joint Surgeons®, passed away in his home on August 26, 2012 at the age of 82 from Parkinson's disease.

Gael's boundless passion for knowledge made him the ideal surgeon and educator. In 1964, Gael was part of a five-man surgical team that reimplanted the arm of Bob Swaffer, a 20-year-old Oklahoma State University basketball player. Swaffer was washing his jeans when he reached into a high-powered dryer in the team's athletic department laundry room and accidentally severed his arm. He was rushed to Oklahoma University Medical Center (OUMC) where Gael and four other surgeons reimplanted the arm in a 6-hour operation [1]. Gael and the surgical team gained national attention for their replantation surgery, and were even featured in *Science Year: The World Book Science Annual, 1965*, an annual supplement to the *World Book Encyclopedia*.

As an associate professor in the Department of Orthopaedic Surgery and Fractures at OUMC, Gael (Fig. 1) worked alongside the orthopaedic surgeon, Donald H. O'Donoghue MD, who is widely regarded as the father of modern orthopaedic sports surgery. Together, they worked on the 1971 study, *Repair and Reconstruction of the*

Anterior Cruciate Ligament in Dogs. Factors Influencing Long-Term Results [2].

Grady L. Jeter MD was a resident at OUMC in 1971, and worked on the study with Gael. "He wanted me to feel like it was my project," Jeter said. "Gael was tactful with suggestions, always making me feel like they were my ideas all along."

Gael used his wit and charm to teach his residents the reasoning behind each technique, but did so from a distance, affording his residents the latitude to make (and learn from) their own mistakes.

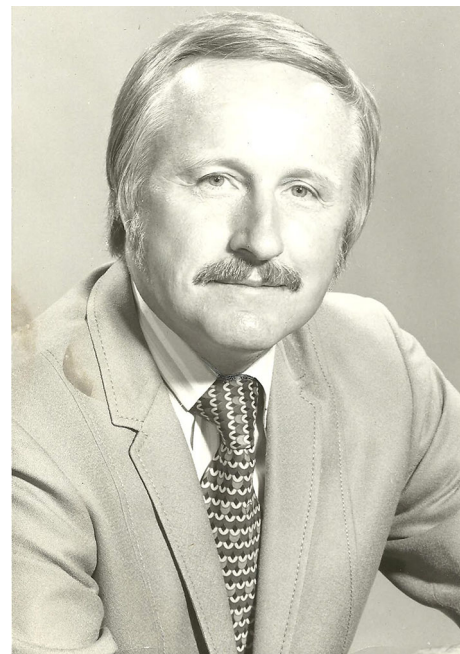


Fig. 1 Gael R. Frank MD.

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“He had that natural gift that allowed everyone to have their own experiences,” Jeter said. “That’s how you gain knowledge. It was a real fun experience.”

In late 1971, Dr. O’Donoghue sent letters to orthopaedic surgeons interested in sports medicine, asking for their attendance in a meeting at the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons meeting in Washington D.C. in January 1972. Gael attended the meeting, which became the first meeting of the newly established American Orthopaedic Society for Sports Medicine (AOSSM). Gael was named one of AOSSM’s founding members [3].

Born on July 8, 1930 in Manhattan, KS USA, Gael chose to stay close to home and graduated from Kansas State University in 1951. Following his graduation from Northwestern University Medical School in 1955, he joined United States Air Force Medical Corps as a resident.

At his private practice, Gael would work conservatively with his patients, taking the time to clearly explain treatment options. He practiced in Oklahoma City, OK USA, Kansas City, MO USA, Sedalia and Marshall, MO USA.

“He always enjoyed teaching,” his wife Beverly said. “Teaching and education were always on his mind.”

When it came to his hobbies, Gael had no trouble switching roles and becoming the student. He took photography and poetry classes at the University of Missouri at Kansas City. He was known around his family as the “Grand Paparazzi” and he even built his own darkroom in their basement.

“Everywhere he went, he had that camera,” Beverly said. “If we went out to eat, you would inevitably see flashbulbs going off at the restaurant. Eventually, his daughter would have to plead with him to put the camera down.”

If working in his darkroom was Gael’s favorite indoor hobby, skiing was certainly his favorite outdoor activity. Every winter, he would travel to Aspen or Beaver Creek, CO USA with his family and hit the slopes.

Beyond photography, traveling to tropical islands (Fig. 2), and skiing, Gael also had a love for poetry. He participated in poetry readings at the University of Missouri at Kansas City. In her eulogy, Gael’s granddaughter Kelly, described how her grandfather could recite rare poems from John Donne and then spend hours talking about Salinger, Hemingway, or Shakespeare.



Fig. 2 Beverly and Gael take a ride on a sailboat in St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands. Republished with permission from Beverly Frank.

“Everything he did, he did with enthusiasm,” Beverly said.

Gael is survived by a large and loving family including his brother, Robert Frank, DVM, his wife, Beverly Frank; daughters: Carolee Frank, Mary Frank, and Kathleen Fisher (David); sons: Jonathan Frank (Diane) and Paul Frank (Kerry); step-sons: Thomas Haus (Jill), Daniel Haus (Deborah), Mark Haus (Danielle), Paul Haus (Tamara), and step-daughter Patricia Haus. Gael is also survived by 10 grandchildren, two great-grandchildren, 12 step-grandchildren, and three step-great-grandchildren.

References

1. Associated Press. Severed arm reimplanted: For Bob Swaffer, recovery has been slow. *Spartanburg Herald-Journal*. July 18, 1965:B-5.
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3. The American Orthopaedic Society for Sports Medicine. The history of AOSSM. Available at: https://www.sportsmed.org/About/History/AOSSM_History/. Accessed March 21, 2014.