Obituary

Obituary: A Remembrance of Francis M. Howard MD (1922–2016)

Marlene Woodson-Howard MA, EdD

Francis (Frank) M. Howard MD, former member of The Association of Bone and Joint Surgeons® died at his home in Bradenton, FL, USA on July 24, 2016. He was 94 years old.

Frank (Fig. 1) and I met in late 1987 when we were both at the height of our careers; Frank had a busy practice in Bradenton, FL, USA and I was in my second year in the Florida State Senate. We married in December 1988, and 3 years later he retired from surgery, choosing to leave at the top of his game at the age of 70.

Frank continued to practice general orthopaedics and did evaluations for attorneys and insurance companies. In this endeavor, I was his assistant,

scheduler, and transcriber when needed. In that capacity, I experienced his genius firsthand. He was a natural sleuth. During a patient exam, rather than focusing only on patient's area of discomfort, he would take the time to study the patient's entire body. When I

complained of cramping in my toes (standing in high heels, of course), he laid on the floor and told me to remove my shoes. He studied the meeting of my foot with the flat surface and created an orthotic pad for me to place in my shoe. I never had the pain again.

Fig. 1 Francis M. Howard MD.

The author certifies that neither she, nor any members of her immediate family, have any commercial associations (such as consultancies, stock ownership, equity interest, patent/licensing arrangements, etc.) that might pose a conflict of interest in connection with the submitted article. The opinions expressed are those of the writers, and do not reflect the opinion or policy of *CORR*® or The Association of Bone and Joint Surgeons®.

M. Woodson-Howard MA, EdD (✉)
12 Tidy Island Boulevard, Bradenton,
FL 34210, USA
e-mail: marlenewhoward@aol.com

Obituary

His understanding of the human body and how it worked was uncanny.

What few of his friends or peers knew, however, was that prior to his medical training, Frank studied to become a priest. His path to the priesthood diverted only when he contracted tuberculosis while studying at Mundelein Seminary in Chicago, IL, USA. After watching the doctors treat him back to health, Frank left the seminary to enter medical school at Loyola University in Chicago [1].

Frank trained at both Cook County Hospital in Chicago and the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center. During this time, he developed a strong interest in hand surgery and treating the upper extremities. Frank was told that if he wanted to study with the best in hand surgery, he would have to meet Erik Moberg MD, a renowned hand surgeon widely considered the pioneer of hand surgery in Sweden [5]. Ever passionate about his craft, Frank moved his family of seven very young children to Gothenburg, Sweden so he could train with Dr. Moberg for a year.

His 50 years of practice began in Chicago, where he specialized in wrist injuries and hand trauma. In 1976, Frank moved to Florida, becoming the first hand surgeon on the west coast of the state. Frank's love for hand surgery and scientific education came through in his writing. Leaning on his background in history and philosophy from

his time studying at the seminary, Frank published more than 85 articles in various orthopaedic publications, including *Clinical Orthopaedics and Related Research*® [2, 4]. In 1989, as

an associate editor of the *Journal of Hand Surgery*, Frank wrote an editorial focusing on malpractice and tort reform. In it, he asked a simple question that revealed his tremendous

Fig. 2 Frank and Marlene were married for 28 years. (Published with permission from Marlene Woodson-Howard).

Obituary

character not only as a physician, but as a person: “Who speaks for the patient? The physician must be a patient advocate. This is mandated by American tradition, by the enduring patient-doctor relationship, and by response to patients’ needs and desires” [3].

Frank took on several leadership positions for the American Society for Surgery of the Hand and thoroughly enjoyed working alongside his peers and seeing friends while attending meetings even after he retired from surgery. Among the many letters I received from some of his colleagues, a note from Preston Whaley MD, a physician from Bradenton, FL, USA stood out: “His accomplishments were most important and his presence in Bradenton lifted the prestige of our profession.”

I was privileged to be married to this man for nearly 28 years (Fig. 2). The week after he put down the scalpel, he walked in and announced, “I will cook on Wednesdays.” He scheduled cooking classes and became

an outstanding chef with a broad repertoire.

Frank was the consummate Renaissance man. He played tennis throughout his career, but when he fractured his right hip 8 years ago, Frank gave up tennis and started playing golf—and (in his 90s, mind you) promptly achieved two holes-in-one. When he developed balance problems, his golf partner would tee up the ball for him and then they would continue playing. Frank was not afraid to rely on his friends. When he was using a walker, he would invite a friend to come and bring lunch or breakfast. Of course, I thought that tookchutzpa, but nobody minded.

As I read again the cards and notes I received from friends, colleagues, family and former patients, the outpouring of love and respect humble me. Perhaps contracting tuberculosis was a gift—it led him to a career that meant so much to so many.

Frank is survived by his former wife, Loretta “Mickey” Owens. He also leaves sons Steven (Judy), Kevin (Cindy), Brian (Diane), Martin (Miryam), Michael

(Elizabeth) and daughters Kathleen Fairbairn (Michael Hullihan) and Christine (Philip Smiley). He leaves five stepsons: George Woodson (Lisa), Bert Woodson (Michelle), Robert Woodson (Gwen). Daniel Woodson (Patricia), and David Woodson (Pamela). There are 35 Woodson/Howard grandchildren and 18 great-grandchildren.

References

1. Dr. Francis M. Howard 1922-2016. Available at: <http://www.legacy.com/obituaries/heraldtribune/obituary.aspx?page=lifestory&pid=180789984>. Accessed January 19, 2017.
2. Howard FM. Fractures of the basal joint of the thumb. *Clin Orthop Relat Res*. 1987;220:46–51.
3. Howard FM. Malpractice update. *J Hand Surg Am*. 1989;14:763–765.
4. Howard FM, Simpson LA, Belsole RJ. Silastic condylar arthroplasty. *Clin Orthop Relat Res*. 1985;195:144–150.
5. Lundborg G, Erik Moberg (1905-1993). *J Hand Surg Br*. 1993;18:407.