Obituary

Obituary: A Personal Remembrance of Robert W. Bucholz MD (1947–2016)

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Robert (Bob) William Bucholz MD was born in Omaha, NE, USA on July 31, 1947. His father, physician Donald J. Bucholz, specialized in internal medicine and spearheaded the vaccine program in Omaha. Bob's mother, Frances Seiler Bucholz, was a community volunteer while also managing to keep up with the four Bucholz children. Bob spent his summers in the mountains of Colorado where he would later send his children to camp. He found every reason to return there with family, friends, or by himself.

After graduating from public high school in 1965, Bob headed to Yale College where, being from Nebraska, he was convinced that he had been admitted to fulfill a “geographic diversity” quota. The Vietnam War, along with his father's influence, nudged Bob towards medicine. He applied to only one medical school, which could be considered a sign of confidence or arrogance, relying on Yale as his “safety” school.

Before matriculating to Yale School of Medicine, Bob and several friends traveled in the Soviet Union. It was a heady time for American kids when the world watched with wonder as Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin landed on the moon. Even the Soviets were welcoming. Forty years later, Bob discovered that the CIA had questioned his friends about his motivation for traveling to the USSR.

Bob and his wife, Marybeth Ezaki met in October 1969 when he started medical school and she entered Yale College as a freshman. It was the beginning of a relationship that lasted almost 47 years. In medical school, Bob found that his aptitudes leaned toward surgery. He decided against urology on the advice of his father, who told him that the specialty “was one drug away from becoming

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nonoperative.” Always wise, his dad told him that orthopaedics was a specialty that had job security because it relied on aging and human stupidity, the former inevitable and the latter endless. Bob chose orthopaedics.

During his surgical internship at the University of Colorado, he realized that he would be happier back in New Haven. A phone call to Yale Chief Wayne O. Southwick MD, was rewarded with a quick check into his small black notebook in the breast pocket, and the response “I'll pencil you in.”

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Drs. Bucholz and Ezaki had a great time at Yale. Dr. Ezaki tried hard NOT to like orthopaedics, but could not resist working with friends doing interesting things. Her advisor recommended that she go far away from New Haven and sample a different flavor of orthopaedics. When asked for a suggestion he said, "There's a place in Dallas called Parkland." Drs. Bucholz and Ezaki arrived together at Parkland and UT Southwestern in 1977—Dr. Ezaki for residency and Dr. Bucholz started on the faculty. Dr. Bucholz never "rotated off service" and he championed the orthopaedic care of the patients at Parkland. They stayed in Dallas, TX, USA for their entire careers.

At Parkland, they both managed to keep their personal lives out of the work setting. To her dismay, Dr. Ezaki was the only resident who never rotated on Dr. B's Ortho B service. He was known as the best teacher on staff, and held his residents to high standards. They succeeded so well in maintaining their professional relationship that a PGY-3 once commented to his senior that "not to spread any rumors, but I think there is something going on between Dr. Bucholz and Dr. Ezaki."

Following residency, Dr. Bucholz worked on cyclic loading of external fixation devices (at the time the most expedient treatment of tibia fractures) at the Nuffield Orthopaedic

Engineering Centre in Oxford, England. This was just at the cusp of intramedullary nailing of long bone fractures. Some of the first femur fractures to be treated with intramedullary nails in Oxford occurred while Dr. Bucholz was "observing."

Early career recognition came his way in the form of a Berg Sloat Fellowship, and then the American Orthopaedic Association-American-British-Canadian traveling fellowship in 1985. When Dr. Bucholz became Chairman in 1989, Dr. Ezaki moved out of the department and reported directly to the Dean to avoid any semblance of nepotism, clearly the best and most ethical step to take, especially in politics.

Though he never sought office nor academic accolades, opportunities came Dr. Bucholz's way because of his dedication and hard work. Everyone was his friend and everyone knew he was a man of his word. He served as a member of many orthopaedic professional societies; probably his favorite was the Twenty-first Century Orthopaedic Association. He served on the Residency Review Committee because of his passion for resident education, and on the American Board of Orthopaedic Surgery because he believed that orthopaedics must hold itself to the highest standards to protect our patients. He rose through the American Academy of Orthopaedic

Surgeons (AAOS) ranks due to his commitment to its educational mission.

A voracious reader of orthopaedics, Dr. Bucholz loved his work for the *Journal of Bone & Joint Surgery*, spending evenings and weekends reviewing and editing manuscripts. The multiple editions of Rockwood and Green (and Bucholz) were a labor of love, and the authors that he enlisted wrote their chapters because it was Dr. Bucholz who asked them. Amazingly, most were submitted on time!

At home, Bob loved learning about the American Civil War, Twentieth Century US history, Russian history, and orthopaedic history. He excelled in all categories of Trivial Pursuit, except for pop culture, and he delighted in defeating his daughters in Scrabble. As he weakened, Bob and Marybeth became frequent customers of *The Great Courses*, watching lectures on everything from Art History to Astronomy. For music, his tastes varied from The Chieftains to the Beatles to the soundtrack of Ken Burns' *Civil War* documentary. He was known as having the most interesting music collection for carpool, singing along to the soundtrack of the *Rocky Horror Picture Show*.

There was a mischievous, some would say twisted, side to Bob. His family watched *Monty Python's Life of Brian* every Christmas Eve; the closing

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song at his memorial was “Always Look on the Bright Side of Life.” He loved sports and games, and played anything and everything with a passion and a good dose of trash talk. He enjoyed hiking and mountains—never stopping to smell the flowers or identify birds. He wanted to best his daughters in claiming summits of the Colorado 14ers, but this was not to be, as his girls all have his passion and competitiveness for this goal. While he was in the presidential line for the AAOS, Stuart Weinstein MD, Richard Kyle MD and Bob summited the Grand Teton in Wyoming with the Exum Climbing School. It’s impressive what a little peer pressure can do.

He was always up for the next grand adventure—planning well in advance. His family visited all the great National Parks, and many smaller ones. He spent Christmases with his family in New Zealand, Macchu Picchu, the Galapagos, and the Amazon. Bob would dangle travel invitations

hoping to lure his daughters into vacationing with us. Their “boys” were often the quickest to respond.

His guilty pleasures included ice cream with Kahlua, maple syrup and walnuts, and chocolate. He did the *New York Times* Crossword puzzle every Sunday before noon in ink. He loved thunderstorms with his girls.

Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis was a particularly cruel disease to befall this vibrant man. Bob and Marybeth were realists, and knew what they were facing when the diagnosis was confirmed in January 2015. Neither of them wanted false hope, only the opportunity to make the most of the time they had together. With family and friends, they went on bucket-list trips, and welcomed their first grandchild, named for his grandfather, in May 2015. Bob walked his oldest daughter down the aisle at her wedding in October 2015. And in true form, he hosted *JBJS* Journal club in our home 3 days before he died.

Bob’s advice:

1. There are only three lasting things that we can give our children (other than our DNA): A moral compass, an education, and a set of memories.
2. Always live below your means. Save for later. Sleep well now.
3. Feign incompetence at household chores. Maybe someone will do them for you.
4. Always have chocolate stashed somewhere. Lots of it.
5. Always have the next trip or vacation planned (and get Marybeth to sweat the details).

Bob was a colleague, best friend, and husband to Marybeth. To his daughters he was Daddy, and to his grandson he was Papa.

He was many things to many other people, teacher, surgeon, leader, editor, clinical researcher, advocate, and most of all, friend.

When he died on May 20, 2016 we all lost someone very special.