Obituary

Obituary: A Personal Remembrance of William C. Allen (1934–2016)

James P. Stannard MD

William Corwin Allen MD, former president of the American Orthopaedic Society for Sports Medicine (AOSSM), and an emeritus member of the The Association of Bone and Joint Surgeons®, died Monday, Sept. 12, 2016, at his home in Columbia, MO. He was 81 years old.

Dr. Allen wore many hats well: Surgeon, teacher, orthopaedic research mentor, inventor, sports-medicine pioneer, department chairman, and avid outdoorsman. No matter the academic or personal pursuit, he was a jovial and dedicated family man to his wife of 59 years, Kathryn, and to their three

children, Elizabeth, Matthew, and Benjamin.

“He was a man who moved through life with gentle strength, hard work and a soft heart,” Matthew Allen said. “He had the good fortune to find his life’s mate and find his life’s work quite early on in life.”

In 1956, Bill earned a Bachelor of Science degree from Hiram College in Hiram, OH, USA where he lettered in wrestling and football. Hiram College is also where Bill met Kathryn Engelhardt. They were married on June 22, 1957.

Dr. Allen began his residency in orthopaedic surgery at Stanford University in 1961. He was drafted into the US Army Medical Corps in early 1962 to serve as a Battle Group surgeon at Fort Lewis, WA, USA. By the start of the Vietnam War, Dr. Allen had been discovered for his surgical skills and was operating at Madigan Army Hospital at Fort Lewis.

In 1963, Dr. Allen returned to Stanford as chief resident until 1965, when he joined the faculty of the University of Florida. There, he served as the director of the orthopaedic residency program and as team surgeon for the school’s athletic department.

Noted orthopaedic oncologist and mentor William Enneking MD, tabbed

William C. Allen (1934-2016)

Dr. Allen to start biomechanics education at the University of Florida. To prepare for the role, Dr. Allen took a 1-year biomechanics fellowship at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, OH, USA, which fostered his interest in invention.

In partnership with biomechanics pioneer Albert H. Burnstein PhD, Dr. Allen worked to develop a more-durable fluted femoral intramedullary rod than those used at the time. The so-called “Sampson Nail” was castellated to provide alternate sharp cutting surfaces and angled-face guide projections to facilitate placement in the medullary canal [7]. The increased

The author certifies that neither he, nor any members of his 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®.

J. P. Stannard MD (✉)
Department of Orthopaedic Surgery,
Missouri Orthopaedic Institute,
University of Missouri, 1100 Virginia
Ave., Columbia, MO 65212, USA
e-mail: stannardj@health.missouri.edu

Obituary

strength and rigidity of the device was determined useful for nonunions, pathological fractures of the femur, and resection-fusions of the knee [2].

Years later, during a visit to the US Army Medical Museum at the Walter Reed Army Hospital in Washington DC, the Allens, along with ABJS member Randall E. Marcus MD, were viewing various displays of medical care provided during wartime. Dr. Marcus spotted the fluted nail in a display.

“The curator of the museum was interested in what it was because they didn’t have any information on it,” Mrs. Allen recalled. “So Bill and the curator corresponded, and Bill sent him a copy of the patent and its description. Museums certainly like to know the provenance of the items they display.”

Dr. Allen had a great camaraderie with his colleagues and residents at the University of Florida. Barry Gainor MD (Fig. 1), was a resident with Dr. Allen in the mid-1970s and later followed him to the University of Missouri. As a junior resident new to Florida, Dr. Gainor recalled the first time he had to drive Dr. Allen’s pickup truck for an early morning fishing trip.

“I drove the truck hauling his boat while he dozed in the passenger seat,” Dr. Gainor said. “On this morning, the fishing boat and trailer silently disengaged from the pickup truck and

disappeared a few miles into our 20-mile trip. This threw me into a panic since this was my first week on the service. When awakened, he calmly suggested that we turn back and look for it in the Florida scrub brush countryside. To my relief, we eventually recovered the undamaged boat, put our shoulders to the wheel and reattached it to the truck. Unruffled, he returned to dozing in the passenger seat as we journeyed on to Watermelon Pond.”

Dr. Allen joined the faculty at the University of Missouri in 1976 as Chief of the Orthopaedic Surgery Division. His statewide and national prominence continued to grow throughout the next 30 years. His early

clinical research concentrated on coxa saltans, or the so-called “snapping hip” [1, 3–5].

In the 1980s, he helped cofound foundations that were dear to his pursuits. He and Dr. Gainor started the University of Missouri Orthopaedic Association, which supports resident research and humanitarian activities.

“Although research is a vital and requisite part of academic life, we viewed it as valuable fun and instruction,” Dr. Gainor said. “We shared intellectual curiosity and enjoyed learning new things, especially in the realm of biomechanics.”

Dr. Allen was a founding member of the AOSSM, serving as initial

Fig. 1 Barry Gainor MD (left), was a resident with Dr. Allen (right) at the University of Florida in the mid-1970s and later joined the University of Missouri in 1979. The two were fixtures in the department for nearly 40 years. (Published with permission from Dr. Barry Gainor).

Obituary

treasurer and then president (1984–85). He hosted an international sports medicine symposium in 1985 at the University of Missouri featuring the AOSSM European Traveling Sports Medicine Fellows. He also was one of the organizers of the Mid-America Orthopaedic Association in 1982, serving as its initial treasurer and as president from 1991 to 1992.

Though Dr. Allen officially retired in 2001, he maintained a love of biomechanics and translational research studies that partnered animal researchers with orthopaedic surgeons, which led to his funding of a professorship in 2004.

“I certainly would not be in the position I am or doing the things I am blessed to be able to do without the support of Dr. and Mrs. Allen,” said Dr. James L. Cook, DVM, PhD, the William & Kathryn Allen Distinguished Chair in Orthopaedic Surgery at the University of Missouri. “I am so proud to represent the Allen family and legacy.”

Outside of orthopaedics, Dr. Allen had a passion for the outdoors including fishing, hunting, and camping. It was also common for residents to come out to his homestead and help him tend to his bees and harvest honey. When his children were young, the family vacationed together with his brother’s in the Boundary Waters Wilderness Canoe Area in Minnesota (Fig. 2).

Fig. 2 Kathryn and William were fond of their Minnesota summer vacation cottage on Lake Vermilion, Cook, MN, USA. The winter of 1989 was the only time they visited the cottage in the cold months. (Published with permission from Kathryn Allen).

Another of Dr. Allen’s passions was amateur athletic competition. In the mid-1980s, as Chairman of the Governor’s Council on Physical Fitness, he took up the challenge by then Governor Christopher Bond to start the athletic competition to be known as the “Show Me State Games.” Mrs. Allen said that while there was initial opposition to having the games in Columbia, MO, USA and general criticism that it lacked funding and enough participants, the games received wide praise and state-wide acceptance. It has grown from the initial 600 entrants in 1985 to more than 32,000 in 2015 through 42 events [6].

We surely miss Dr. Allen’s dynamic presence with our department, but we are all better off through his dedication to academic pursuits and his generosity

of time and resources. It was his friendship to everyone he encountered that may just be his greatest gift of all.

References

1. Allen WC, Cope R. Coxa saltans: The snapping hip revisited. *J Am Acad Orthop Surg*. 1995;3:303–308.
2. Allen WC, Heiple KC, and Burstein AJ. A fluted femoral intramedullary rod. Biomechanical analysis and preliminary clinical results. *J Bone Joint Surg Am*. 1978;60:506–515.
3. Cope R, Allen WC. The snapping hip syndrome. *Imaging*. 1997;9:33–37.
4. Jacobson T, Allen WC. Surgical correction of the snapping iliopsoas tendon. *Am J Sports Med*. 1990;18:470–474.

Obituary

5. Schaberg JE, Harper MC, Allen WC. The snapping hip syndrome. *Am J Sports Med.* 1984;12:361–365.
6. Show Me State Games. Available at: <https://www.smsg.org/>. Accessed January 23, 2017.
7. United States Patent. Albert Burnstein et al. #3,783,860. Jan. 8, 1974. Intramedullary Rod. Available at: <http://patft.uspto.gov/netacgi/nph-Parser?Sect1=PTO1&Sect2=HITOFF&d=PALL&p=1&u=%2Fnetacgi/nph-PTO%2Fsrch-num.htm&r=1&f=G&l=50&s1=3,783,860.PN.&OS=PN/3,783,860&RS=PN/3,783,860>. Accessed January 22, 2017.