

HUMANITARIAN AWARD

Alan L. Breed, MD

Class of 1965



I was born in Norwich, New York, to parents who were children of World War I and the Great Depression. My parents did not have a college education, but they did have big dreams for their five children to go to college.

In high school, I was drawn to science and engineering and the Cold War challenge of the space race spurred my decision to go to *Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute for electrical engineering*. However, during my freshman year in undergraduate school I found my personal life headed in the wrong direction. Although my grades were good enough to receive a generous scholarship from the Square D Corporation, my passion was not in the physical sciences but in biology and a desire to serve people. With a change of major from electrical engineering to premed, I sacrificed the electrical engineering scholarship. My parents did not understand giving up a generous scholarship for the uncertainty of acceptance to medical school, to say nothing about the cost of medical education. Cost was a very big factor; my summer job after undergraduate school paid more on an annual basis than my dad earned that same year.

I was accepted at SUNY Upstate Medical University but had not fully considered my financial needs; by the middle of the first semester I was out of money to pay for room and board and went to see the dean to say I would need to leave medical school. Before that week was over I was offered a job cross-matching blood at University Hospital that paid room and board plus \$40.00 a month. That job, the New York State Scholar incentive program, and a med school scholarship allowed me to leave SUNY Upstate with no debt.

I had entered medical school wanting to be a surgeon and after graduating went into a straight surgery internship at the Yale New Haven Hospital. All surgical subspecialties were of interest except orthopedic surgery. Oh how perspectives can change with great mentors—orthopedic surgery went from exclusion to life passion. It also allowed me to use some engineering.

I met a nurse during my internship and Carol and I were married in July after my PG-2 year. The Berry Plan was in effect, and I, like most others leaving medical school, wanted to defer entering the military during the Vietnam war as long as possible. There were two opportunities to extend departure to Vietnam in the Navy and I chose the flight surgeon program. I was accepted, but flight surgeon school did not begin until January and I was graciously given the opportunity to do five months of orthopedic surgery before leaving for Pensacola. As a result, I was rewarded for my work with acceptance to orthopedic residency at Yale when my military service ended.



I served in a training squadron in Key West, Florida, and then returned to Yale for orthopedic residency. I developed a passion for caring for children and was accepted for a pediatric orthopedic fellowship at Newington Children's Hospital in Newington, Connecticut. Pediatric orthopedics was a new subspecialty and after completing my fellowship, I was offered a position at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. During my 27 years at Wisconsin, my practice was heavily weighted to children with cerebral palsy and myelomeningocele, but I also treated all the other orthopedic problems of children.

Our home in Madison was close to the UW campus. This is where we raised our three children (every member of our family was born in a different state). Our house had an extra bedroom so we decided to look for college students who might have a need for a place



to stay, and through the years have had more than 20 different students live in our home.

Our first student was a young lady from Kenya. She became "family," so when she needed to leave graduate school suddenly because her father was ill we said we would visit her in Kenya. On safari at a Masai village, we saw a boy with a two-day old laceration of his foot with tendons exposed and no opportunity for medical care. This experience provided the catalyst to return to Kenya in 1989 with our three children to do mission work at Tenwek Hospital. During that time, we went with friends to Kijabe Medical center and heard about plans for a pediatric rehabilitation hospital from a career missionary. I made the commitment to return if the hospital was built.

The hospital became a reality and I retired early so Carol and I could spend a year in Kenya at the CURE International hospital at Kijabe, where I cared for children and taught residents just as I had at the University of Wisconsin. We returned to Kenya other times and also went to Madagascar and Afghanistan. Now at the CURE International Hospital at Kijabe, the career missionaries have turned over the administration of the hospital and most of the service to national Kenyan orthopedic surgeons and other health care professionals—they are very talented people.

When we take risks we never know what will happen. In the 1980's, many graduate students came from Nigeria to study at the UW. Many foreign students will study in the United States for several years and never enter an American home. The challenge we were given at church was to invite a foreign student for Thanksgiving dinner. We accepted this challenge with the same fear that the Nigerian families felt, but we had a great time and the numbers of Nigerians who came for special events at our home grew. These Nigerian

students had children in the United States, and of course their children grow up and these children have returned to the United States to study. We considered their children our children. Now some of our Nigerian children are married and are having children, so we have Nigerian grandchildren.

We also hosted an American Field Service student from Liberia for the school year 1987-88. Liberia went through a long civil war with many people in refugee camps. Our student and his family were refugees. We funded our student's college education so he could come to the United States, and later his brother came and we also funded his college education. Now his mother and other brothers are in the U.S. and have gotten advanced education, jobs, and families. We have Liberian grandchildren.

Carol and I celebrated 48 years of marriage this year and now have 17 of our own grandchildren. A decision I made back in college has guided my life in ways I could never have expected. The risks and challenges have yielded blessings and satisfaction in abundance.

**BIO SUBMITTED BY DR. BREED*

