

**My Life as a Surgeon:
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Questions:

1. Growing up

I was born in New England, but after 35 years, I've become a Pittsburgher. I was born in Springfield, MA at the end of the baby boom. My father was a frustrated singer (Old Brown Eyes) and small businessman; my mom was a teacher and homemaker. None of my family had ever been involved in medicine except as a patient. I was a freshman at Columbia University in New York in 1969, an interesting and exciting time to be coming of age. Focus, however, was not one of my strong points. As a psychology major, I quickly realized that shocking rats was not for me. But what was I to make of my life?

2. Why did you become a doctor?

Walking down Broadway with my girlfriend (now wife of 45 years!), I asked myself, "what's next?" I loved science and helping people, so combining the two in a career in medicine suddenly made sense after years of ruling it out. I spent my senior year completing ALL of my pre-med courses and then applied to medical school.

The University of Massachusetts Medical School in Worcester was still under construction when I arrived for an interview. I was lucky enough to be accepted into one of the very first classes and, as a state resident, finished medical school with fewer loan payments than I had from college.



3. Why did you become a surgeon?

The ability to actually confirm a diagnosis and "fix" it at the same

time drew me towards surgery initially, and then vascular surgery. While the time commitment was daunting, the rewards were worth it.



4. When did you decide to become a surgeon? Did you have an epiphany? What was it?

The choice between medicine and surgery was easy. Several mentors inspired and encouraged me to specialize in vascular surgery.

5. Did you develop a clear vision/mission for your surgical career? What was it?

Early in my career, I didn't have a strong vision or sense of mission. But as I developed, that sense of mission became clearer. My career has centered on two primary areas: expanding the scope of limb salvage surgery and improving quality in the Vascular Laboratory.

6. Who were your mentors? In what way for each?

H. Brownell (Brownie) Wheeler was my Chief of Surgery during training and was the epitome of a surgeon, an educator, and a philosopher.

John Herrmann was my Chief of Surgery at Worcester City Hospital and showed me how to get out of any problem (as well as how to get into a few). His steady commitment and fatherly approach steered me towards vascular surgery from my first experiences as an intern.

Bruce Cutler was my primary attending and teacher at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center. He taught me both the art and the science of vascular surgery. His unwavering drive, skill, and high expectations put me in good stead when I went off on my own.

7. Has your career been as envisioned/expected?

My career has been better than I ever envisioned. As time has passed, I feel honored to have taught so many young surgeons how to approach this rich and complex specialty. My practice today is so different from when I began - it would have been impossible to envision.

8. Expected and unexpected challenges

My biggest challenge has been to adapt to the “new” field of endovascular surgery without losing sight of the basics of open surgery. Young surgeons today lack some of the open experience and depend heavily on endovascular techniques. Keeping a balance is critical.

9. Tell us about a low point as a surgeon that led to a life lesson.

Having to make a change in mid-career as I left my comfortable position at West Penn Hospital and my partner of 15 years (Tom Reifsnyder) was a huge challenge. My move to UPMC, however, has been the best thing that could have happened. It allowed me to evolve as a vascular laboratory administrator and educator and to mature as a clinical surgeon and mentor for many young vascular surgery residents.

10. What has been the biggest challenge in your career?

I have seen two major challenges - professional and personal.

Professionally, having to adapt to a quantum change in vascular surgery with the advent of endovascular techniques has made me develop my skills while preserving a balance with open surgery. Maintaining and expanding the field of limb salvage surgery in the face of these changes remains a challenge.

Personally, the importance of family to me has grown steadily over the years and has now become my strongest motivator. Watching my three boys grow up and begin families of their own has made them the center of my attention. My wife’s second career as a law librarian at Pitt Law has opened my eyes to the potential we all have of living our dreams, even as we age past what seems like the end of a career. My family has remained the most important thing in my life.

11. Expected/unexpected rewards in your career?

Helping patients, saving lives and limbs, has always been a major reward for me and always will be. Shaping young



surgeons has become the unexpected benefit of working with residents and fellows both at West Penn and UPMC.

12. What has been the biggest reward(s) in your career?

I took an interest in non-invasive vascular testing and turned it into a major focus of my career. I trained with Paul Cardullo, who taught me the basics of the vascular laboratory and introduced me to and involved me with the organizations that shape the modern vascular lab. My involvement with these organizations has been a gratifying result of this early interest and has allowed me to oversee an extensive system of high quality vascular laboratories at UPMC.

I've maintained an active commitment to limb salvage surgery, including both open and endovascular approaches, and the coordinated care of complex foot ischemia inherent to this approach.

13. What would you do differently in your career?

Very little.

14. Of what accomplishment are you most proud/gratified in your career?

I'm especially proud of taking part in the training of hundreds of young residents and fellows. The calls, emails, and texts I receive almost every day asking me for advice, help, or general support makes all the sacrifices worthwhile.

15. What advice do you have for those entering a career in surgery?

Don't let any of the negatives deter you. Surgery is a wonderful and rewarding career and will remain so.