



REMEMBERING JOHN ALEXANDER

I thoroughly enjoyed the article on John Alexander, M.D., thoracic surgeon at the University of Michigan (“Unavoidable Conclusion,” fall 2012). It clearly explains why my mother described him as a great surgeon.

My mother, Jane Skillen, graduated from the University of Michigan Medical School in 1928. Over the years she repeatedly told me how fortunate she was to have studied under Dr. Alexander. The bulk of her career was spent running the surgery unit of Los Angeles’ Olive View tuberculosis sanatorium. There, the procedures described in the article were regularly performed. In the pre-antibiotic days, these offered the best hope for some patients.

My mother wrote of her medical school days, “I loved medical school and having my brain crammed full of new facts, new knowledge daily. It was a great privilege to be there.”

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My dad, Bob Hastings Sr., graduated from the U-M Medical School in 1928 and interned at the U-M Hospital in 1928-29. He did family practice in Elk

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Rapids, Michigan, then returned to the U-M for a residency in orthopaedic surgery under Carl Badgley, M.D. He then came to Tucson as the second fully trained orthopaedic surgeon in Arizona in 1936.

John Alexander was a friend of my dad and, at the time, was in Silver City, New Mexico, on a “Bradford Frame” under treatment for spinal tuberculosis. My dad attended him every three or four months during the late 1930s, and I went with him on several of those trips. I understood that John Alexander had tuberculosis of the prostate as well before he died.

I was a general surgery intern and resident under Frederick A. Collier, M.D., at the U-M from 1956-59. During that period I saw a patient in a surgery outpatient clinic whose old chart showed that he had undergone a thoracic splanchnicectomy by John Alexander for malignant hypertension in the 1930s. He was without any evidence of hypertension when I saw him.

As an aside, I met my wife Ann, a U-M junior nursing student on her surgical rotation, at one of Cameron Haight’s long surgical procedures while on the Thoracic Surgical TB Service. An additional irony is that Bill Bailey, whose obituary is in the same issue of Medi-

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cine at Michigan, resided with me at the interns and resident quarters in 1956-57. We were both members of the Frederick A. Collier Surgical Society, and Ann and I enjoyed a lifelong friendship with Bill and his wife, Joan.

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