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Fifty Years of Memories

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Your Life Your Health

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In September 2018, UT Health San Antonio Long School of Medicine marks its fiftieth year training physicians in Texas. As the school looks back on fifty years, my wife, Carolyn Bellue Holly and I look back on our journey which brought us to San Antonio in 1969 as first year medical students. I use the plural because as much as it is possible for two people to occupy one place in a professional school, we did. After graduating from college in May, 1965, Carolyn and I married, August 7, 1965. That first year we taught school in Golden Meadow, Louisiana and then moved to Waco, Texas to enter graduate school at Baylor University.

In August of 1966, after moving to Waco, Carolyn and I had a portrait made. When she commented that we did not have a lot of money, I told her that someday, we would be very glad to have that portrait. Fifty-two years later, we are. This is the portrait. Alas, all was not so great. For our first anniversary, I gave Carolyn a tall, pole ivy with a note that as this plant grew and flourished it would reflect our love and marriage. One week later, it was grave-yard dead from a cut worm.



During that first year at Baylor (Fall, 1966 – Spring 1967), it became increasingly obvious that while I had started college in Pre-Veterinary Medicine at Texas A&M, human medicine would be my life's work. In the fall of 1967, I worked full time and began doing part-time pre-med courses at Baylor. In the spring of 1968, I took the Medical College Admissions Text (MCAT) and applied for admission to medical school. One of the ironies of our journey was that the American Association of Medical College (AAMC) sponsored the MCAT. It was impossible to know at this time that in 1970-1971 and 1971-1972 I would serve as a voting member of the Executive Committee of the AAMC and would vote twice on the accreditation of the Long School of Medicine, and would be the first medical student to serve as a voting member of a medical school accreditation site visit (Cornell Medical College in New York).

In the fall of 1968, in class one day, I learned of my future, when a fellow student said to me, "I hear you are going to be a doctor." I looked at him in amazement because he knew something which I did not. The Pre-Med Advisor, a remarkable man, Dr. Virgil Tweedy, had received a copy of my acceptance letter which I had not yet received. Immediately, I knew where the letter was. It was at our previous address. Immediately, I left school and drove to 2623 Bosque where we had lived. For several minutes, I stood at the mail box. I knew my letter was in that box, but I also knew that it was illegal for me to open that mail box and no one was home.

For the first and for the last time to my knowledge, I intentionally broke a Federal Law. I opened the box. In it was my future. It was December 8, 1968 when I opened that mailbox, but my acceptance letter was dated November 22, 1968, which curiously was a Sunday. I still have that letter as Carolyn had it framed for me. As we look back on those days and remember the events that marked our journey, we both remember that as my acceptance letter was received with one semester and a summer left before I was to start medical school in September, 1968, I still had to complete three semester hours of biology, eight hours of organic chemistry and eight hours of physics. Working full time and completing nineteen hours of science by August, 1969 now seems daunting, but we did it.

The letter also instructed me to send in a \$30.00 deposit to secure my place in the 1969 class. I did.

As we look back on those halcyon days fifty years ago, we realize that we have lived the entire history of UT Health San Antonio Long School of Medicine. We have participated in the momentous events which have created one of the premier medical schools in America.

In August, 1969, we loaded up a U-Haul trailer and moved our little family which included Nina, our Shetland Sheep dog, to an apartment complex across the street from Fort Sam Houston Beach Pavilion Medical Center in San Antonio. Carolyn was to teach and we were to manage the apartment complex. It meant a long drive each day to school, but it was worth it for free rent and a one hundred dollar monthly stipend. Our first day there, the owner came to our door and told Carolyn to get a bucket and mop. I asked what that was for. The owner said that Carolyn was going to clean an apartment and that I needed to climb up to the roof of the third story of the complex and reset a switch for the air conditioner system.

When I objected, she said, "You didn't think you were getting free rent and a salary just for showing apartments did you?" I reminded her that that was our agreement and she indicated that it was being changed. I thanked her and told her we would be out in one hour. I rented another trailer, went to the Work Force office and hired two men and we moved.

These fifty-year-old memories are crystal clear in our mind. What at the moment seemed like a crisis, over the next four years it was a blessing as it would have been impossible with only one car to work out the details of transportation to and from Carolyn's teaching job and my classes.

Again, ironically, on January 22, 1973, I was in a clinical rotation at Fort Sam Houston Beach Pavilion when the word spread over the facility that former President Lyndon Johnson had been brought into the emergency room. He had died at home. I was not in the building where he was brought but it was just one more remarkable event which marked our time at UT Health.

On the first day of medical school, we had an assembly in the main auditorium. Forty-three-years later, due to the benevolence of a friend, that auditorium would be named after Dr. and Mrs. James L. Holly. This portrait hangs in that auditorium today.



In 1975, I began moon lighting in the emergency room at Christus St. Elizabeth in Beaumont, Texas, and in 1976 moved my young family, including our two children, two dogs, a cat and a bird to our home for the next 45 years.

The years have been filled with wonderful, sometimes sad, and sometimes glorious, memories. It has never crossed our minds to live anywhere else. We have never had any regrets about our choice of where to raise our family. We have given our best to this community and we have received back the best the community has to offer.

As we attend the 50th Anniversary Gala in San Antonio later this month, we will retrace our trip which we made in 1976 when we moved to Beaumont. We will sit with some of my professors who taught me medicine and we will visit with classmates who made a different journey to the same destination forty-nine years ago. We will celebrate the remarkable advances which UT Health San Antonio has made from a two-building campus to a packed landscape of world-class facilities for teaching students, training doctors, researching new treatments and treating patients.

Carolyn, our family and I look back on these last fifty years with awe and wonder for the honor of having the privilege of being a physician and for having the joy of serving this community. And, when we soon offer our valedictory to the Golden Triangle, it will be with unfettered and unconditional thanksgiving and gratitude.