

# Claude H. Organ, Jr, MD, FRCSSA, FRACS

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Dr Claude Organ was a person with real presence. That is, he had a distinguished bearing and poise that assured all observers of his effectiveness. And effective he was with everything in which he became involved. His material achievements—academic rank, awards, officer-ships, editorship, etc—were legion but paled when compared with his ability to help people. All of this was

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the result of one special characteristic: he cared.

I can't think about Claude without smiling. It just felt good to be in his presence. His dry humor, pithy remarks, and nonverbal body language were educational and entertaining. No meeting was boring if Claude was present. And his writing emulates his persona. I recall a letter from him to an author that stated simply, "Dear Dr \_\_\_\_\_, Please assure the Editor that the material in your submitted paper is not essentially contained in ref-

erence 17." This was truly a clean surgical cut.

The medical profession has lost a true gem, but Claude Organ's presence remains through those who had the good fortune to know him.

**Accepted for Publication:** August 22, 2005.

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## Claude H. Organ, Jr

Thomas R. Russell, MD

Claude H. Organ, Jr, MD, former editor of this journal, 84th president of the American College of Surgeons (ACS), and a mentor of mine, died of heart failure on Saturday, June 18, in Oakland, Calif, at age 78 years. I had the good fortune to have trained under Dr Organ; to have worked with him after entering practice in San Francisco, Calif; and to have helped him achieve his goals as ACS president.

### OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

Dr Organ's roots were humble, and he never forgot where he came from or how much determination it took for an African American individual born in the segregated South to succeed in this demanding and, frankly, often elitist profession.

He was born October 16, 1926, in Marshall, Tex, and received his

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secondary education in the public schools of Denison, Tex. He graduated cum laude with his bachelor of science degree from Xavier University, New Orleans, La. He was then accepted to the University of Texas Medical School, but when the school's administration discovered that he was black, they offered to pay the difference in tuition for him to matriculate elsewhere.

Although such discrimination may have driven some people to cynicism or despair, Dr Organ held onto his dream of becoming a surgeon. He went on to earn his medical degree from Creighton Medical School, Omaha, Neb, where he also completed his surgical training. His dissertation for a master of surgery degree focused on the acid-reducing mechanisms of the duodenum and was completed with the assistance of his scientific advisors, C.M. Wilhmenj, MD, and R.S.K. Lim, MD.

### DEDICATED EDUCATOR

After serving as a lieutenant commander in the US Navy Medical Corps, Dr Organ joined the faculty of the department of surgery at Creighton University, where he rose to the rank of professor and was appointed chair. While at Creighton, he developed an elective surgical honors program for senior medical students who wanted to pursue a career in academic surgery. He went on to serve as professor of surgery at the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center, Oklahoma City.

In 1989, Dr Organ established and became chair of the surgical residency program at the University of California San Francisco—East Bay. His work to support and encourage surgical residents to engage in biomolecular research and enter academic surgery was a valued part of his career. Approximately 30 residents in the University of Califor-