

# A Tribute to Claude Organ, MD, From the Association of Women Surgeons

Leigh Neumayer, MD, MS

The mission of the Association of Women Surgeons is “to inspire, encourage and enable women surgeons to realize their personal and professional goals.”<sup>1</sup> Claude Organ personified this mission statement not only for women surgeons but for all surgeons. To him, surgeons were surgeons, no matter their packaging. He was noted for providing that needed push or pull, especially to those who for reasons of race, sex, or socioeconomic status were not able to make it over the hurdles on their own. He understood that for many, a small intervention was all that was needed to put them on the path to greatness.

In 1993, Dr Organ was awarded the Nina Starr Braunwald Award from the Association of Women Surgeons. The award was established by Nina’s husband to memorialize her ideals. The award is “given to a member or non-member surgeon in recognition of outstanding contribu-

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**Author Affiliations:** Past president, Association of Women Surgeons, Downers Grove, Ill; and Department of Surgery, Salt Lake City VA Health Care System and University of Utah School of Medicine, Salt Lake City.

tions to the advancement of women in surgery.”<sup>1</sup> Dr Organ’s support of women surgeons was longstanding and widespread. He supported women surgeons in all areas of his work: in his role as a department chair and in his role as a leader of American surgery. Dr Organ saw these positions as an opportunity to serve those around him: younger surgeons, patients, and the community.

During the last months of his life, Dr Organ led a contingent of American surgeons to South Africa. Dr Denise Johnson remembers that even though this trip was clearly difficult for him physically, he had a smile on his face continuously (oral communication, August 2005). It was his gift to South Africa; he was ensuring that the foundation was solid for the work yet to be done. More importantly, it was a gift to the surgeons who participated: not only a gift of his time, but also a chance to show them the needs of people outside our country.

As we mark his passing, we should remember and emulate what Dr Organ brought to our profession. We can use 3 words to describe his life and work: honor, re-

spect, and passion. Dr Organ embodied these 3 ideals. He brought and showed honor for the profession. He was respectful of people despite their differences. And he was passionate about many things, but first and foremost about surgery and the benefits it brings all people.

The Nina Starr Braunwald Award, although specifically designated for someone who has contributed to the advancement of women in surgery, is for Dr Organ a symbol of his honor, respect, and passion for all those who choose to pursue and promote surgery as a career. It is with great sadness that we commemorate his passing, but with great honor, respect, and passion that we celebrate his life.

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**Correspondence:** Leigh Neumayer, MD, MS, University of Utah School of Medicine, 50 N Medical Dr, Salt Lake City, UT 84132 (leigh.neumayer@hsc.utah.edu).

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## REFERENCE

1. Association of Women Surgeons Web site. Available at: <http://www.womensurgeons.org>. Accessed on August 21, 2005.

## Claude Organ, a Legend of Advocacy

Patricia J. Numann, MD

Claude Organ was the conscience of American surgery with regards to is-

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**Author Affiliations:** Lloyd S. Rogers Professor of Surgery, Department of Surgery, State University of New York Health Science Center, Syracuse.

sues of black surgeons and also women surgeons. I came to understand Claude’s passion for raising these issues when he was writing *A Century of Black Surgeons*. He called me one day and asked whether I knew any black women surgeons: a strange question coming from him,

I thought. He explained that he was writing this book, that he believed it important to point out the valued contributions of black surgeons despite their small number, and that he realized (because, as he acknowledged, his administrative assistant had pointed it out to him) he hadn’t