

# Claude H. Organ, MD, FRCSSA, FRACS

James C. Thompson, MD

Other contributors to this collective paean for Claude Organ will cover his immense formal contributions to American surgery: at the college, at the board, as academic chair, and as editor nonpareil of these ARCHIVES. Few, actually very few, leaders have been more innovative, enlightened, enthusiastic, and committed to the improvement of surgical learning and practice as he.

The remarks that follow are personal. I have had the privilege of knowing Claude for 30 years, and as fellow Texans and fellow liberals (not exactly an oxymoron—nor, in fact, much of a crowd), we talked a lot. He would phone or I would phone, and we would consider the verities. We talked about evolutions in technical surgery, about surgical education in South Africa (after a visit to Johannesburg, he sent Dilip Parekh to our laboratory), about operating on celebrities, about investing (he told me to buy Berk-

shire when it was at 17, but I waited until it had doubled 2½ times), about church schools (he had a Jesuitical education), about how hard it is to achieve relevance and fairness in board examinations (we were both admirers of George Cruft), about friends in far places (I told him that I'd seen his photo on the wall of surgeons' offices in Sydney, in Cape-town and Jo'burg, in LA and New York), about the validity of the Bushs' Texan credentials, about fads in surgery (from tonsillectomy to adrenalectomy for hypertension to gastric freezing to mandatory drains in abdominal and thyroid surgery), and about Betty (his lifelong compass) and his 7 children (overachievers all—Claude, Jr, a bank executive; Brian, a general surgeon; Gregory, a pediatric surgeon; Paul, a psychiatrist; David, a professor of geography; Rita, a museum curator; and Sandra, a stunning ballerina who used to dance for the Houston Ballet and now has her own company).

Claude was one of the founders and a guiding spirit of the Society of Black Academic Surgeons. He had a lifelong commitment to education of

all minorities: he'd roll his eyes, throw back his great head, and chortle that we were all minorities, that some just hadn't yet learned to accept it. Claude had read Jefferson's words that all men are created equal, and he believed and practiced them.

He was troubled by the current priorities of our society, about the profligate expenditure of individuals and treasure in war, and about our lack of proper attention to health care. (He was especially troubled by the immense sums siphoned off by drug and insurance companies.)

Overall, however, Claude Organ was a great optimist. He closed his presidential address at the American College of Surgeons urging new initiates not to forget where they came from and "in the serenity and quietude of our profession" to test the depths of truth . . . and to touch the hem of heaven. And that's what Claude is doing right now.

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## Reflections on Claude H. Organ, Jr, MD, From the American Board of Surgery

Ward O. Griffen, Jr, MD; Wallace P. Ritchie, Jr, MD, PhD; Frank R. Lewis, MD

Dr Claude H. Organ, Jr, was one of the most talented, respected, and honored figures ever to grace American surgery. He was an astute ob-

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server of the surgical scene, and his extensive friendships, keen intellect, and incisive insights allowed him to predict or understand events often missed by others. He had a unique ability to define the core of an issue and to address it forthrightly, courageously, and honestly. His sense of humor was subtle, pervasive, and infectious. When

Claude would give you a wink and a grin, you knew he was about to unleash some outrageous barb, usually on an unsuspecting colleague who had begun to take himself too seriously.

He was a tireless champion of black surgeons, always with the caveat that they must have equivalent ability and skills. He directly men-