Legends and Legacies Book Chapters

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Epilogue

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Two women, in particular, have had influential roles in helping me achieve my own research success. Bettie Sue Masters, Ph.D., now at The University of Texas Health Science Center in San Antonio, served on my dissertation committee when I was at The University of Texas Southwestern Medical School in Dallas and provided valuable advice and guidance while I received my graduate training. Terri Stadtman, Ph.D., my research mentor for a National Institutes of Health summer fellowship that I completed as a medical student, has been another key influence for me. In fact, without her positive recommendation, I doubt that I would have been selected later for a postdoctoral fellowship and Howard Hughes Research Associate position in the laboratory of Nobel Laureate Daniel Nathans, M.D., at Johns Hopkins Medical School. The importance of these and so many other women as teachers, mentors, coaches and friends cannot be overstated.

The engaging stories shared in Legends and Legacies prove that the path to accomplished academic careers is not always direct and there may be many pitfalls along the way. One common thread among the authors is their desire and drive for success. As we look to the future in an increasingly fast-paced environment, all physicians and scientists — both men and women — will need even stronger mentoring and support for career development, which means that those already established in their fields must make time to pass along valuable experiences and advice to those just beginning to plan careers in academic medicine. I believe the personal journeys of the women faculty included in this book will help inspire others to provide such crucial mentoring.

Of course, it must be noted that over the past century women have made some of the most significant contributions in the arenas of science and medicine. Among early pioneers are Rosalind Franklin, a gifted scientist whose X-ray data on the structure of DNA laid the foundation for Watson and Crick’s research; and Marie Curie, world-renowned physicist, discoverer of radium and Nobel Prize winner for her work in the fields of physics and chemistry. The achievements of these women are valued not so much because women made them, but because gifted scientists who happened to be women overcame obstacles and were ultimately judged by their contributions rather than their gender. This is as it should be.

Concerning the role of women in the development of M. D. Anderson, it is obvious from reading Texas history books that Frances Goff (born in 1916 in Kenedy, Texas) had a remarkable role. Frances was neither a scientist nor a clinician, but she was truly devoted to assuring the success of M. D. Anderson. From 1937 to 1944, she served in several positions with the
Texas House of Representatives, State Senate, the Office of the Governor and the Texas Railroad Commission. After a stint in the military (1944 to 1946) during World War II, she then worked for Governor Allan Shivers for five years. In 1951, she joined the staff of R. Lee Clark, M.D., who was President of M. D. Anderson, and she had a pivotal role in obtaining state funding to build our initial hospital, which opened in 1954 in the Texas Medical Center. She helped direct fundraising, planning and construction of what would ultimately become the most comprehensive cancer center in the world. Of relevance to the topic of this book, Ms. Goff also served from 1952 to 1994 as director of the American Legion Auxiliary Bluebonnet Girls State that each summer gave young women from throughout Texas opportunities to learn about government and how to become future leaders. Among highly accomplished leaders who emerged from the Girls State program was Ann Richards, who eventually was elected state treasurer and governor of Texas. In 1965, Ms. Goff invited the first black woman, Barbara Jordan, who then was a state senator, to speak at Girls State, thereby opening opportunities for young African-American women to participate in Girls State.

The career paths of women pioneers in science, as well as many of the women celebrated in this book, were often convoluted and contained few signposts. With the insights, guidance and mentoring offered by the women who share their stories here — and by others like them — future generations of women in academic medicine hopefully will have smoother journeys. We must discard past gender stereotypes and do everything possible to attract, train and support the best and brightest minds to meet the challenges of conquering such relentless and stubborn problems as cancer. Future generations are counting on all of us.

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