



Department of Surgery
East Bay

September 16, 2010

Ben Eiseman, MD
c/o B. Mark Evers, MD, President
Society of University Surgeons Foundation
341 Maitland Avenue, Suite 130
Maitland, FL 32751

Dear Dr E.,

This is a note on the occasion of your receiving the SUS Lifetime Achievement Award, happily remembering our two decades together in Denver. Upon my arrival as the most junior department chair possible at age 42 in 1983, you immediately took me under your wing. I remember staying at your home and reviewing the departmental "wiring diagrams" that were formidably helpful in permitting me to understand the vicissitudes of the Colorado system. As we both remember, Colorado General was then the base hospital, and line items for departmental activities were still vetoed from the governor's office. In the ensuing five years, we evolved into a university hospital and developed our own separate practice plan and hospital financial entity. This was a tumultuous administrative time for me as I had absolutely zero prior administrative experience. Your guidance at that time was invaluable.

Your focus on surgical education and research formed the basis for my departmental philosophy, and your signature and footprints were delightfully emblazoned on my next 20 years in Colorado. I have happy memories of our 6 AM Friday morning conferences. I remember when we evolved from some physiological animal studies into a twelve project SCOR grant application from the NIH. Again, your guidance in coordinating much of that was pivotal. You advised about relating the various projects to each other and how we might emphasize the synergy of the projects so that the National Institute of General Medicine Studies might find it deserving of approval and funding. Putting that application together and the final site review was taxing and frightening, but your guidance, leadership and coordination of those events made us all think it was possible.

On multiple subsequent occasions, your attendance at our Friday morning conferences added a level of educational and investigative authority that was welcome and extraordinarily helpful. As our department grew, you proved to be the most effective recruiter that we ever had. You were the person who identified both Larry Norton and Fred Grover as potential recruits and as they say, "the rest is history." Our relationship with Denver General and Gene Moore was initially arranged by you and your emphasis on incorporating the county hospital into our residency training program was characteristically superb advice.

Your administrative innovation was frequently breathtaking. I happily remember your idea that all of United States health care should be coordinated within a Veterans' Administration model and that the VA should become the HMO for the country.

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I was amused that the VA locally and regionally were frightened by this concept, but couldn't come up with any good reason not to accept it. You made it all the way up to the Cabinet-level Secretary for Veterans' Affairs before that individual simply said "No". When you asked why, there was clearly no good reason. I remember this as a nice example of your innovative mind.

You can look back on multiple generations of academic surgeons who have looked to you as a mentor. We always point out that it's more effective to show people how to act than it is to tell them how to act, and you have always exemplified the ultimate in academic surgical inquiry.

Under your guidance in Denver, our department had more SUS presidents than any other department in the country. It is clear that you were pivotal in coordinating that recognition. I can't imagine someone who is more appropriately identified for the SUS Lifetime Achievement Award.

Laurie and I remain indebted to you and Mrs Eiseman for your abundant hospitality. I am also indebted to you for your lifetime achievement but more specifically to your lifetime example of everything that is gratifying, rewarding and fun about academic surgery. Thank you for serving as the kind of example that without your help would not be reachable—but with your help, is in everyone's grasp. I look forward to seeing you in Huntington Beach in February. Once again, many thanks.

Sincerely,

Alden H. Harken, MD
Professor and Chair
Department of Surgery
UCSF-East Bay

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