



W. Winters Jr., M.D.

MICHAEL E. DEBAKEY, M.D.: A WHIMSICAL TRIBUTE

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There once was a long-lived man named Mike
Who lived a life like you would like.
With Lebanese roots
And family in cahoots,
He grew into a strong-minded tike.
His parents and siblings were there
To support, nurture and share
The growth of his mind,
Enabling him to find
The skills he'd never have dared.
He read everything in sight,
Even the Britannica at night,
To open his eyes
As wide as the skies
In an effort to get everything right.
He then left his hometown in "L" "A",
Lake Charles, the name, by the way
To seek his good luck
And perhaps make a buck
While finding his life track, as they say.
He plotted his course very clearly
Toward medicine for which he paid dearly.
First, college at Tulane,
Starting in the fast lane,
Combining college and med school together — verily.
In med school his true colors emerged.
His talent for new things really surged.
A finger pump you could see
Would move blood from you to me
With most complications finally purged.
Then Dr. Alton Ochsner showed him the way
In Old New Orleans by the Bay
To sharpen his skills
With repetitive drills
Into becoming the world's best, day-by-day.
A sojourn to Europe was ahead
Where new skills lay, it was said.
After being exposed to the best,
He headed back to the West
For a fabulous career stitched by the thread.

One day a call came from Houston
To come see a department to run.
Surgery was its name.
Most certainly quite lame
And needed a leader to move on.
That's how Dr. Michael E. D.
Came to Baylor and Methodist, you see,
With enthusiastic expectation,
Tinged with serious trepidation
To build something special for you and me.
The rest of the story is well known.
His shadow and influence were strown
Over landscapes widespread,
And in publications well read,
All of which were truly home grown.
His principles were simple and steadfast
As many found out and were aghast.
That he stuck to his line,
"Do it right the first time
Or move on and become part of the past."
His creativity led him to try
New techniques and devices by and by,
For all parts of the body,
Never mind how worn or shoddy,
To be fixed before they would die.
Along the way he taught many a friend
How to properly sew and to mend.
Cotton, Dacron or linen,
Whether they be young men or young women,
And no matter the problem at hand.
His training techniques were severe
Not designed to praise or revere
His persona or style,
Though forgotten after awhile
When his trainees learned to persevere.
People from the world came around
To see him on his hallowed ground.
Kings, queens, and many of us
Arrived by car, plane, or bus
To seek his judgment and skills deemed so sound.

His fame spread wide to hallowed halls.
Presidents and politicians all made their calls
To hear his wise words
To counter the surge
That so often spread nonsense from their stalls.

The Army in the Second World War
Wisely placed him in the Medical Corp,
Where with aplomb and some dash
He created the MASH,
Thereby saving more lives than before.

After the War came to an end
He found veterans unable to mend
For lack of some places,
For those of all races,
For first-class doctors to attend.

So he recommended that service hospitals on hand
Be reserved for service veterans so grand.
So came about the V.A.,
Healing veterans to this day
Still celebrating his stand in the sand.

He lived life hearty and hale,
Up before dawn without fail.
Elevators were a sin,
Walking stairs was for him,
Like a ship on the sea in full sail.

His research interests rapidly grew,
But organized reference sources were few.
So with the help of his pals
And maybe a few gals
The Medical Library of Congress came into view.

These laurels were only a start
Of a mosaic, if you will, as a part
Of a larger grand plan
He envisioned for Man
That would actually replace the heart.

His "firsts" came one after another
Be it vascular, heart, or some other
He never slowed down,
Always adorned in his gown,
Traveling world wide — no bother.

One country he visited with acclaim
Was Russia, becoming known by first name.
When Boris needed a guide,
Michael E. was there to provide
Advice to return him to his main game.

His legacy is there for all to see
No quarter for incompetency
Always do your best
Let Fate do the rest
And you'll be proud of your own legacy.

One special event is duly noted
When Congress unanimously voted
To give him the Gold
In a congressional medal it's told
To honor all things he promoted.

I remember most what he said about people.
Keep your goals as high as a steeple.
Pay attention to details no matter how small.
Your rewards will be there ready to fall
And your reputation will grow exponential.

He could not have foretold what was coming next,
His own aorta chose to dissect,
But the surgeons who brought
The techniques that he taught
Restored his health to an amazing context.

At age 97 it was a sterling achievement,
Postponing the fully expected bereavement
For over two years,
Midst high spirits and cheers,
He enjoyed accolades and outpouring sentiment.

When finally he left at age ninety-nine
Without any preliminary sign,
Done quite abruptly
Without any subtlety
As though he knew it was time.

Now that he's gone what can be said —
That he lived his life as he led,
With wisdom and vigor,
Creativity and rigor,
Sleeping well every night in his bed.

We'll miss him as no other man
As a Christian who lived life with a plan
To help those that he could,
Pass on those that he should
As he steadfastly established his brand.

He is as safe now as he can be
From this world's crazy vagaries.
He can sit back and relax,
Watch the world wane and wax,
Content he was all that he could be.

There will not be another of his kind,
Combining unique skills with a very sharp mind.
That to his very end
He did manage to send
Lessons, which defy most of us to find.

One last thing I might say
As I lay down at night to pray —
As we live it all up
to the brim of our cup,
That we do not his rich legacy betray.