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As a senior medical student about to graduate from Baylor College of Medicine, my fellow students and I were asked to form a line in alphabetical order that we might tell Michael DeBakey goodbye and inform him of our future plans. I was near the end of the line, and by the time I entered his office, I assumed he was probably ready for that exercise to end.

He said to me, "OK, Mr. Willerson, what are your plans?" I thought he might be pleased when I told him I was going to Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston for an internship in internal medicine. Instead, his response was, "Who is next in line?" I later came to learn that he had a very competitive relationship with Massachusetts General Hospital and Harvard Medical School. It was then that I realized this was his way of showing his competitive spirit.

At the same time, Dr. DeBakey was incredibly supportive of those in the Texas Medical Center whom he believed were making important contributions. When I returned to Houston in 1989, he sent a letter inviting me to come and see him in case he could provide any help.

After that, on a fairly regular basis, I received notes of congratulations from him when something I had been involved with had been successful, and, on other occasions, encouragement of my efforts that he thought were properly directed and of merit.

In the last years of his life, there were several times when he encouraged my efforts to bring the U.T. Houston Medical School, Baylor College of Medicine, and Texas Medical Center hospitals together in working collaborations. I remember his saying, "Today, this is the right thing to do" because "it would give students and patients the run of the place," meaning the entire Texas Medical Center.

I am forever grateful for having the opportunity to attend Baylor College of Medicine and having inspirational role models like Michael DeBakey demonstrate to me and my colleagues the importance of always doing one's best and really trying to make a difference in peoples' lives as a physician, educator, and builder for the future.