

Mentorship and the Inquiring Mind

Melvin P. Rosenwasser, MD

Robert E. Carroll, MD, inspired all who knew him to ask questions and, most importantly, to seek answers.

Born in Fall River, Massachusetts, on November 7, 1916, Dr. Carroll received his undergraduate and medical degrees at Yale University. He was trained in orthopedic surgery at Massachusetts General Hospital and, then, in hand surgery at the prodding of his new boss, Dr. Alan DeForest Smith, at the New York Orthopaedic Hospital of the Columbia University Medical Center. Dr. Smith further encouraged Dr. Carroll to travel to the leading hand surgeons of the day for on-the-job training in the yet undefined specialty of hand surgery. The observership and direct mentoring that Dr. Carroll received motivated him to organize a full-year postgraduate clinical fellowship in orthopedic surgery focusing on the hand, which he initiated as the first hand fellowship in the United States in 1958. This hand fellowship was based on principles of anatomy and physiology and the careful and comprehensive reading of the scientific literature. Dr. Carroll always looked

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back and gleaned critical insights from previous investigators and he imbued his contributions with these. His love of the process of teaching was evident to all who knew him. He believed anatomy was fundamental to the mastery of hand surgery, and his rhetorical queries about the identity of various structures were legendary. Bob Carroll began his journey as a mentor to his fellows, residents, and medical students with a style all his own. He challenged each of us to be better.

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Dr. Rosenwasser and Dr. Carroll.

He loved the aphorism from St. Jerome, translated into William McGuffey's famous nineteenth-century readers, "Good, better, best. Never let it rest. 'Til your good is better, and your better, best."

Dr. Carroll prized documentation and long-term follow-up of the patients he treated. He extolled the intellectual process and the value of scholarship along with the satisfaction of authorship.

He loved to show the 25-year follow-up of a wrist fusion on the neighborhood baker or the young mother feeding her newborn with a pollicized thumb. Although he treated thousands of patients in his 45-year surgical career, his legacy to hand surgery is the many residents and fellows from around the world who all cherish the training and anecdotes of Dr. Carroll.

Dr. Carroll was a true mentor; we, his fellows, all looked to him as our leader, and he thought of us as his extended family. He spoke with pride of the many accomplishments of his trainees. In his later years, he initiated the New York Orthopaedic Hospital Foundation for Orthopaedic Research and personally supported 1-year visiting hand fellowships for surgeons from Japan, Turkey, and Germany. His life and career impacted so many of us, but his often-stated purpose was only to teach and so he did.

Thank you, Bob.

AUTHOR'S DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The author reports no actual or potential conflict of interest in relation to this article.