

Chapter 23 - Time to Retire

When looking back on retirement, I must admit it wasn't easy. Retirement, that mystical term that we think of for many years, and suddenly the time is here.

Retiring from surgery was the most difficult thing I have ever done. Surgery meant so much to me. I had worked hard for so many years to become a qualified surgeon. My life as a doctor and surgeon had taken me to Massachusetts, Maine and Florida. Nevertheless, time marches on.

In 1976, I was 65 years old, had no malpractice problems, felt good, and believed one should retire while still healthy.

Dr. Walter Reagan, Dr. Charles Carr and I talked over who should be my successor. We contacted the American College of Osteopathic Surgeons and they recommended Dr. C.W. Elliot. Dr. Reagan flew to Dayton, spent a day with him at his hospital, and was satisfied he was the man to take my place. I retired knowing the surgical department was in good hands.

Dr. Elliott was an excellent replacement, both as a skilled surgeon and instructor of surgical residents. I retired from the Operating Room, but I found that I was still dropping into the hospital daily, not doing much, but enjoying the association with other physicians, employees and patients.

Then why not be productive? Why not have patients, but refer the surgery to my former partners, Dr. Walt Reagan and Dr. Charles Carr?

Thus, I rented space in my old office, hired a delightful lady, Mrs. Sawyer, and began family practice. Now that was a joy! My finances were all taken care of – I did not need to make a large profit, I could take as long as I wanted with a patient. My practice became partly social and partly therapeutic.

Many days I just broke even, but my association with the patients was very satisfying.

I still felt the pull of the aura of the operating room, but I never set foot in the O.R. after retiring, not even to assist on my cases.

Finally, in 1994, at age 82, I felt I should retire from medicine completely, and did.

Now, what to do, for I felt healthy and somewhat alert. Charlotte and I put our heads together. The hospital did not need me. It was governed by a Board of Directors. I asked for Board privileges, but I would not be compelled to attend all Board meetings. I could do so when it was convenient, like when I was in town.

Our eight children, Charlotte's three and my five, have all left home, were all educated and set up their own lifestyles.

At this point our hospital attorney, Steve Hughes, who attended all Board meetings – to keep us out of trouble – dashed into a Board meeting short of breath. He said, "You should see what I saw on my way back from Atlanta in my plane. A resort called Wolf Laurel in the mountains of western North Carolina. It was so pristine, so beautiful. The area was surrounded by mountain peaks, and I parked my plane in Asheville, rented a car and drove to it. A realtor took me by the hand, showed me the 5,000 acres, I was so impressed I bought two lots."

Now, I had always thought that Steve Hughes was as tight as the bark on a tree, so if he bought two lots, that must be spectacular.

Charlotte and I drove up -- 700 miles – the next week and had the same feeling. We bought a lot.

There was an inn and restaurant on the property, and we came up to the mountains several times, but decided to not build on the lot, just sell it.

We notified the realtor of our decision, and he said, "Don't leave until I show you a house." He showed us a new comfortable house and we bought it, turning in the lot as part payment.

This was the smartest thing Charlotte and I ever did. We decided to divide our time almost evenly between our home in Largo in the winter and this new mountain home in the summer.

We have had over 20 years of complete enjoyment by this decision, and our whole family seems to enjoy the lifestyle too, since they all spend some time with us each summer.

In the meantime, Sun Coast Hospital is chugging along without me. I receive monthly reports from the Board and other happenings, but no longer am I under the strain of the hospital operation. I am satisfied.





