

MERRILL A. RITTER, MD

My first encounter with Merrill occurred in November of 1972 when he participated in the first Clean Air Symposium held in the United States at the Cleveland Clinic. Merrill was passionate about minimizing infectious opportunities that occurred in the operating room during the performance of total hip arthroplasty procedures, humorously placing Agar culture plates around the OR so that the surgeon attendings and nurses had to literally “tip toe through the tulips.” Such imagination could only occur with an individual who goes on to publish significantly in these regards.

As total knee arthroplasty gained prominence, Merrill was out in front with the one-piece, metal-backed, AGC tibial component and again, was ahead of the pack in appreciating and expanding our understanding of knee joint replacement, its materials, its design and its implantation. In these regards, his publication list on topics of both hip and knee reconstruction well exceeds 300 and he has always been a consummate teacher. In the latter regard, Merrill has always played a significant and prominent role as an educator, personally appreciated through his continuous contributions at the Current Concepts in Joint Replacement® (CCJR®) meetings dating back to 1989. His matter of fact, but impassioned delivery, both in talks and debates, always left the listener better informed for the privilege.

Merrill led the way in the optimal organization of a group practice in Mooresville, and to my mind, set the stage for the ambulatory surgical centers (ASCs) now becoming the optimal facility for joint replacement procedures. Many will also remember the conduct of his fellowship program in Mooresville to which I continue to be in awe of the fellows who returned annually to speak and the success in their careers.

Few may appreciate that Merrill's sojourn into orthopaedic surgery was significantly influenced by an ability as a wood sculptor, a unique artisan in his own right.

What I most appreciate about Merrill is a decent human being who manifested the welfare of his patients much beyond the norm. His sense of humor embodied in his ability to teach is one of the characteristics I so admire.

In closing, Merrill A. Ritter is a complete and unique surgeon who has contributed significantly to the advancement of our discipline. He is an individual who is never short of giving credit to others for his own learning. I have hanging in my office a photo of Merrill, autographed with words from Sir Isaac Newton's Principia, “If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.”

Written by A. Seth Greenwald, D.Phil (Oxon) /

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