ROBERT BREVING, MD

The Newest AMS Trustee Shares a Remarkable Story of Giving
Falls and Comorbid Conditions among Community Dwelling Arkansas Older Adults from a Population-based Survey

Masil George, MD; Gohar Azhar, MD; Greta Kilmer, MS; Sabra Miller M. Ed; LaTonya Bynum, BS; Appathurai Balamurugan, MD, MPH

Polymethylmethacrylate Pulmonary Embolism as a Complication of Percutaneous Vertebroplasty in Cancer Patients

Natasa Milojkovic, MD; Samer Homsi, MD
A good story tends to travel. When Robert ("Bert") Breving, MD, spoke of his association with the late S. Truett Cathy, founder and CEO of Chick-fil-A, friends listened intently. Soon, one felt moved to deliver the story to the local paper, The Sentinel-Record, which covered it in its September 14, 2014 edition. When The Journal caught wind of the story, it seemed appropriate to share it with you, his physician colleagues in Arkansas.

Upon Cathy’s recent passing, Dr. Breving could not help but reflect and speak of the philanthropist’s important role in his life – as a mentor, friend, father figure and sometimes benefactor.

This isn’t a story he shares to puff himself up, he stressed. However, it’s a story he cannot forget – one for the books, as they say, especially in a world where bad news abounds. “Seems like today when you open the paper or turn on the TV, it’s [bad news],” he said. “To see an exceptional story about a complete stranger, who helped another person and changed the course of their life, is uplifting and rare.”

Dr. Breving, a board-certified general surgeon and chief of staff at National Park Medical Center, is a prominent member of the medical profession in Arkansas. Since moving to the state in 2004, he has practiced in Hot Springs. He has also been a member of the Arkansas Medical Society and just this month, became the newest member of the AMS Board of Trustees. Dr. Breving is excited about the opportunity to serve, and he says he would not be the man he is today without the generosity Cathy extended to him in the early part of his life.

A Modest Start

Dr. Breving’s life began modestly, in Cincinnati, Ohio, where, from a young age, he and his younger sister lived with a mother who suffered from mental illness. His father was not around much. “My mother and father were divorced,” said Dr. Breving. “I can’t blame him for that. Living with a person with untreated schizophrenia will drive you crazy if you don’t separate yourself from the situation.”

Prior to her schizophrenic break, the late Mrs. Breving was regimented, smart and devoted. “My mom was incredible … completely devoted. She didn’t work outside the home, but she was interested in our education. We went to school and did a lot of home schooling as well.

“When I was 10, everything changed,” said Dr. Breving, recalling how the disease firmly took hold of his mother. “Because of her disease process, she couldn’t hold down a job, nor would she accept financial assistance.”

In response, 16-year-old Breving went to work. That sounds brave and mature for a very young man, but he indicates another motivation. “There was no other choice,” he said, simply. “My sister, Becky, was too young to work. Child support wasn’t what it is now. Frequently, there was no money coming in. Everything I made went to keep the family fed and alive. We rarely had more than one of our utilities on. I’ll tell you, taking baths in zero degree weather, in the Cincinnati winter, without hot water, is a chilly experience.”
Enter Truett Cathy

Without considering the fairness of it, young Breving forged ahead. The year was 1980, and he was growing up fast. He kept up his schoolwork and worked two jobs, the main one being at the new Chick-fil-A restaurant that opened up just outside walking distance. “It sounds trite, but it’s true,” smiled Dr. Breving. “I literally walked to work … uphill … sometimes even in the snow. Luckily, it was often only one way. There was usually someone to give me a ride home at closing time.”

He had worked at Chick-fil-A for a couple of months by the time the establishment held its Grand Opening. CEO S. Truett Cathy was among the executives who attended the festive occasion, which represented a new beginning not only for Chick-fil-A in the community, but for Breving as well.

The store operator, knowing of Breving’s difficult circumstance, made a point to tell Cathy about the hard-working young employee. In turn, Truett took a personal interest in him. “He invited me to his farm in Atlanta,” said Dr. Breving, who was not used to such attention. “We spent the weekend, rode motorcycles, walked the farm and talked about life. He was an energetic, vibrant, genuine person.”

The man must also have been quite determined by trait, judging by one of Dr. Breving’s favorite memories. Cathy truly wanted to fill a need for young Breving – one way or another. “First, he offered to adopt me,” recalled the doctor, who politely declined out of loyalty to his own family, whom he wanted to provide for.

That settled, Cathy pressed onward, analyzing the situation and quickly arriving upon a need he could fill.

Decision made, Cathy picked up the phone. “He called his son – also an executive for Chick-fil-A,” recalled Dr. Breving. “And he says ‘Son, I got Bert here, and he needs a car. Will you give him your car?’”

Within minutes, son Dan Cathy had pulled up outside in one of the first popular minivans of the time. “It was a Voyager I think,” said Dr. Breving, who, still stunned by this act of generosity, managed to help remove car seats and toys before taking over the vehicle. “They gave me the keys, and I drove away. It was surreal. I drove that thing until the tires just about came off of it.”

For many years to come, Cathy’s generosity continued. “There were times when he helped with utilities – that was an issue for a number of years,” said Dr. Breving. “And through Chick-fil-A, he helped me get a scholarship that helped me attend undergraduate school at Ohio State.” (At that time, employees who worked for Chick-fil-A for a certain period of time, could earn partial scholarships to help with school.)

“My grades were good,” said Dr. Breving, who procured a number of scholarships and school loans that allowed him to work toward an undergraduate degree and, later, attend

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medical school. Even so, Cathy’s financial assistance was what set him solidly on his future course. “If not for his help, I would not have been a doctor. [It] wasn’t even on my radar screen before I met Cathy. My goals were short-term at that time – ‘how are we going to survive the next two months? ‘How will we keep the water on?’”

“Now I’m a surgeon.”

Forging His Own Trail

While attending Ohio State, Dr. Breving worked as a ward clerk and OR scheduler in the operating room. He was touched by the excitement of the environment, the strive for excellence he witnessed there, and the need he saw in the surgeons to “fix” things. In the years since, he has put himself in that same environment, giving his all day after day for the betterment of his own patients. “I have to be at the top of my game,” he said. “With every operation, I have someone’s life in my hands.”

Dr. Breving graduated from medical school in 1993 and practiced in Birmingham, Alabama, until moving to Arkansas in 2004. He is married to Internist Nannette Vowell, and the two have three children.

As the newest trustee for the Arkansas Medical Society, Dr. Breving looks forward to House of Delegates meetings and other opportunities to learn more and contribute more to the legislative process. During medical school, he was involved in the American Medical Society as a student, and he looks forward to working with AMS on issues of medical politics and decision-making.

“The next few years are going to be challenging – with the proliferation of electronic medical records, the shrinking health care dollar, increased stress placed upon health care providers and with people’s increasing expectations of quality related to their medical care,” said Dr. Breving. “When you put stress on the system, sometimes it will break. Physicians will still need to provide medical care if it does. We’re going to encounter challenges that will require due diligence by the AMS as well as the state medical board more and the physicians of our state.”
**Time to Pay it Forward**

Cathy gave Dr. Brevig much that was vital to his early life. High on a list of gifts that included financial support, a car, and even Brevig’s first tailored suit, was *time*. “It’s easy for people to write a check when there’s a cause that they want to support,” said Dr. Brevig. “Sometimes, the most valuable thing is time. We spent time together. There was some mentoring that went along with that— he would talk to me, educate me about life, about the way people should act.”

Cathy made a habit of helping others. The restaurateur and philanthropist was also an author, educator, Sunday School teacher, scholar, mentor and supporter of those around him. “Hundreds—literally thousands— of people were affected by his generosity,” reflected Dr. Brevig. “His family is like this too… genuine and interested in providing a wholesome, quality product and creating wholesome, quality people.”

Dr. Brevig hopes someday to affect another person through the type of kindness and generosity Cathy showed to him. In preparation, he believes he must focus first on himself. “I think you’ve got to get your own life straight before you can help somebody else’s life,” he said. “Truett picked me, a complete stranger to him. He found me at a pivotal point in my life. The assistance that he provided changed the course of my life.

“I was thinking of that when he died. What have I done? Sure, I’m trying to provide the best patient care, and be nice to people, but I can’t say I’m mentoring someone right now. It’s something I owe it to him to try to do, and I’d like to do that for somebody else.”

Perhaps he has been more of a mentor already than he gives himself credit for. Sister Rebecca Rogers called her brother Bert her “role model” growing up. A realtor in the luxury residential market of Saddle River, New Jersey, Rogers recalls the sacrifices her brother made for her, and the help he received from Truett Cathy. “I told myself, ‘if Bert can get into college by working hard and making smart decisions, I can, too,’” she said. “Bert was clever and funny, and he kept my spirits up with laughter. He did the responsible thing: he stayed with me to provide for me. I’m eternally grateful to Mr. Cathy for recognizing Bert’s character and intelligence and giving him a helping hand. Mr. Cathy’s generosity had a profound effect; he steered Bert onto a course of success.”

The Journal appreciates Robert Brevig, MD, for sharing his inspirational story of courage, commitment and a generous “hand up.” Learn more about Truett Cathy at truettcathy.com. Among other things, you will find Cathy’s “Eleven Dos and Don’ts of Proven Entrepreneurial Success,” as well as information about WinShape Foundation, which he bore out of his desire to “shape winners” by “helping young people succeed in life through scholarships and other youth-support programs.”