



IN MEMORIAM



Howard A. Black, MD, 1912-2004

IN JUNE 1946, Sacramento welcomed its first fully trained neurosurgeon, Howard Alfred Black, Jr., MD. When he applied for membership in our Medical Society, one of the forms asked, "Is any part of your work, in your opinion, of such character that consideration should be given to declaring you essential? Yes No."

I smiled and felt a warm remembrance recently when I read his answer, "This is to be judged by the community." He did not circle "yes" or "no." This was Howard - frank, to the point, honest, work hard, do your best, strive for excellence, accept the result.

Howard sent me my very first patient about two weeks before I opened my office in Sacramento. He somehow got my phone number and called me at home. He was very professional and polite. I had already heard of his reputation as the outstanding neurosurgeon in Sacramento, and I remember how intimidated I felt speaking directly to him. Howard had a way, however, of putting you at ease, and it was not long before I lost some of my fear of inadequacy.

Howard tried to be humble, but could never hide his great stature and dedication as a physician. He was very supportive of advancing the treatment of neurological disorders in Sacramento. In fact, he brought to Sacramento our first neurologist, Dr. Howard Petzold.

When thinking of Howard and my admiration for him, I smiled again when I recalled having coffee with him in the coffee shop at the old Sutter General Hospital. Howard was going on vacation the following day, and when I left, I said, "Well Howard, have a nice vacation."

He shot back, "G_ _ D_ _ _ , you can't do anything without someone saying something." Yes, Howard had his feisty side, but I think we even admired him for that.

I have many other fond memories of Howard, like the time he took us sailing and my wife wondered if we would get back to shore. In 1939, in spite of being a Yankee (Howard was born in New Jersey and reared in New Jersey and New York), Howard had the good sense to marry a delightful southern girl from Tennessee. Howard met Flora while in medical school at Vanderbilt Medical School in Tennessee. Flora now lives in Roseville.

Howard did his internship from 1936 to 1938 and his residency in neurosurgery from 1938-1943 at Kings County Hospital, Brooklyn, New York. In World War II, he was a surgeon with the rank of Major and served from 1943 to 1946 in Africa and Italy. After the war, he and Flora drove across the states, "fell in love" with Sacramento and settled here in 1946.

Howard was certified by the American Board of Neurological Surgery in 1946 and accepted into our medical society in 1947. He was also a member of the Harvey Cushing Society, West Coast Neurosurgical Society, American College of Surgeons and the San Francisco Neurological Society.

Howard and Flora had one child, William Howard Black, who lives in Dallas, Texas, and

is a physician specializing in cardiac electrophysiology. They have two grandsons, John William and Matthew William.

Howard retired in 1983. He had a full, active life, and there are many who are grateful to him for his care. Regrettably, the latter part of his life was affected by loss of vision and Alzheimer's Disease. Howard died on December 1, 2004 at the age of 92 years.

Our community will always be grateful for the standards of medical care that Howard set for us.

- By Bryant Sheehy, MD

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