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## IN MEMORIAM

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### **John M. "Jack" Baker, MD, 1917-2005**

A SURGEON'S SURGEON, a true gentleman, respected and admired by his colleagues and devoted to his patients, John Mack Baker, MD, was the first fully trained and certified cardiothoracic surgeon to practice in Sacramento.

He grew up in Gardnerville, Nevada, the son of the state's first veterinarian. He recalled going with his father on farm calls, treating cattle with brucellosis or assisting with the difficult delivery of a calf using a block and tackle. He regaled us with the antics of a pet goat chewing up the soft part of the roof of his dad's Model "A" Ford.

After graduating from Douglas County High School, he worked for a year, traveled to New York City to audition on the radio with his whistling talent and represented Nevada in the National Sharp Shooting Competition in Ohio. Jack took premed with Max Shaffrath, MD, at Stanford University, where he played trombone in the marching band. He graduated from Stanford Medical School and interned on the Stanford service at San Francisco County Hospital.

He served in the Army Medical Corps, at the School of Tropical Medicine at Walter Reed Army Hospital and the School of Malariology in Panama. Military duty took him to Rhodes General Hospital in Utica, NY, where he met Patricia Gibson, at the time on the Red Cross Social Service Staff. They married in 1946, and have a daughter, Sally; sons David, Jonathan and Stephen; six grandchildren and two great grandchildren.

After military service, he and Pat spent five years at Columbus, Ohio, for general surgery, research and cardiothoracic surgical training - and also a masters degree.

He began practice in Sacramento in 1951, and became active in the medical society and many of its committees. In 1997, he received the society's highest honor, the Golden Stethoscope Award. He was also active in local, state and national thoracic surgical societies.

He spearheaded efforts to attract the first physician anesthesiologists to Sacramento. He organized a cardiac research lab at Mercy Hospital, did his own diagnostic cardiac catheterization and performed 24 successful open-heart operations using hypothermia. He later focused on surgical management of pulmonary, esophageal and vascular problems.

He loved hunting, horseback riding, camping, and hiking and had a passionate love of western history and genealogy. This translated into restoration of the first Mayor's House in Salinas City, originally built by his great-grandfather, Isaac Julian Harvey. Because of his efforts, it is now a museum for all to enjoy. He was justly proud of receiving the Pioneer of the Year Award of the Sacramento Pioneer Association in 2005.

During his 51/2 year battle with pancreatic carcinoma, he enjoyed his home library which revealed his varied interests - family photos, mementos of hunting trips and historical treks, Indian baskets, his many awards and certificates.

Jack was an extraordinary and very special mentor and friend. He was a treasure of knowledge and experience, which he freely shared with honesty and integrity. He retired in 1987, but for the next 12 years we shared an office, and he continued to assist at surgery. His steady hand, calm demeanor and mere presence added respect and dignity to the operating room.

Jack will be missed by his patients, colleagues, friends and family. However, he left each of us with our own wonderful memories.

- Donald M. Hopkins, MD

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