

# About Arlen

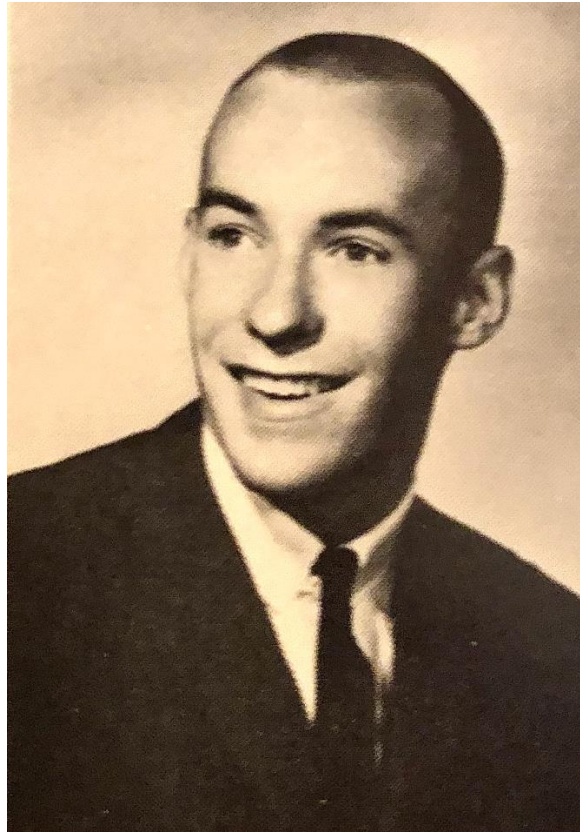


Our great friend, Dr. Arlen Holter. The son every parent wants. The father every child deserves. The friend we can always count on.

Admired, respected and loved, our old buddy, Boogs - the best of our bunch.

The CHS '64 fellowship

# Too Soon



We called him Boogs. Short for Booger, I guess. To his sister, Holly and his wife, Betsy, he was Arlen, and to his sons, just - dad. For his patients, always Dr. Holter. But to me, and to our old bunch of lifelong buddies, he'd been Boogs forever.

He passed away not long ago at age seventy-six, after a losing battle with an ailing heart. Bitter irony it was, my old friend the heart surgeon, going down with a ticker that defied repair. He deserved a better fate, should have had many more, good healthy years. But that was not to be.

For me, and for all his old friends, watching him struggle and fade was a wrenching experience. Oh sure, seventy-six years for most folks would be considered a full life, but to me, to all of us, Arlen's lingering demise seemed premature and grievously unfair. After decades of exceptional achievement in nearly everything he'd ever tried to do, he should have been the last man standing, should have still been knocking out triathlons at eighty, skiing Vail at ninety-five and winning regularly at fantasy football year after year. No, he'd never been an official Olympian, but he earned a gold medal in everything within reach. And he always aimed high, always. That was the Boogs we all knew.

Eagle Scout - of course. Scholarship to Stanford - his target since sixth grade. Medical School, University of Chicago, honors there. Residency in surgery at the most storied and prestigious hospital in the US - Mass General. Advanced training in the most demanding specialty - cardiothoracic surgery, at Harvard and Yale. And that's just an outline, just a few of the prominent bullet points in a lifetime of service and success.

I had eight consecutive years in the rollicking good company of my old friend, from fifth grade at South Side School until we graduated from Champaign High. We played football, basketball and golf together. We went to scout camp in the summer, shoveled snow in the winter. We went to the Y dances on Friday nights and movies on the weekends, liked the same girls, read the same books, took all the same classes, got the same grades. We were close.

Hotshot sixth graders at South Side School, we were both in Mrs. Miller's class. We'd finish our math as fast as we could, so that we could play geography games on the globe while the rest of the class finished the assignment. We'd try to stump each other, naming obscure places, challenging the other guy to find it in the allotted time, usually about twenty seconds. We learned a lot of geography during math class and had a lot of fun doing it.

"Hobart."

"Capital of Tasmania. C'mon gimme a tough one."

Like that. Over and over.

Our back and forth had actually geared up about a year earlier, in the fifth grade. We had nine weeks of music, and we were all given flutophones. The idea was: practice the instrument, get better and then play a tune for the class at the end of the quarter. Boogs and I both thought that was dumb, and we were both bad at first. Neither of us seemed to have any natural aptitude. I didn't care about playing a goofy plastic horn. This wasn't school work for me; it was just silly stuff. I wasn't gonna toot that stupid thing unless I HAD to. Boogs laughed, and said the same thing, swore he'd never bother with it either.

When test time rolled around at the end of the quarter, I was no better at playing the flutophone than I was on day one, and my miserable performance reflected that. But my old buddy, Boogs, I soon discovered- had foxed me. He'd been PRACTICING. He played his little tune without missing a note, and he got an A in music. Of course he did. And when he saw my grade he laughed, that great big hee-haw of his, the guffaw we all came to love. Gotcha ! Hahahahaha!!

I suppose that episode set the stage for years of good-natured competition, in sports and in the classroom. Boogs was a better basketball player than I was; he stuck with it right through high school, and I stopped playing after ninth grade at Edison. I had an edge in golf and football, but not by much. One of us scored a fraction higher on the standardized tests, the other did a bit better at grade grubbing. It all balanced out. We were tight, Boogs and I. We could rib each other, laugh at each other and know that it was all in fun. Think Maverick and Goose in high school, my Mav with less swagger, his Goose with better grades. There was a mutual respect that lasted for decades. There was buddy love that never faded.

We didn't see much of each other once we got into our medical training, started our careers, and grew our families in different states. We'd talk now and then, touch base, keep up ..... but we rarely spent any time together during those busy years. Still, we could reconnect at a moment's notice; we knew each other SO well.

I remember a phone call from Boogs that still makes me smile. I had been out on my own for a year or so after four years of residency training and a two year stint in the Navy ..... and Boogs was finally finishing his own interminable post-graduate course work in cardiovascular surgery. His agonizing call went about like this:

"Jeff, you're not gonna believe this. Because I don't believe this. I just finished the most grueling training program there is, at some of the best hospitals in the world. I sent out fifty letters, introducing myself, looking for practice opportunities. Of those fifty, you know how many responses I got ??!! THREE !!! And those aren't even offers. Jeff, I can't get a job!!!"

Of course, Boogs found employment. And the group in Minnesota that brought him in was lucky to get him, as were the thousands of grateful patients he treated in a long a distinguished career.

We were lucky, too, his lifelong friends, lucky that his life touched ours: good old Arlen - everybody's favorite wing man, the one person we could always count on - to share a laugh, lend a hand, pitch a tent, or tee it up in the rain. Our Boogs, as good at being a friend as he was at mending damaged hearts. And he didn't need thirty years of education for that. That's just - who he was. He radiated good will as easily as he tied his shoes or brushed his teeth. His eyes sparkled; his laughter exploded. Such a great guy. Such a wonderful, irreplaceable human being. The son every parent wants, the father every child deserves, a friend like no other, Dr Arlen Holter. He was our Boogs. He was a gift.



The CHS '64 fellowship

John Lindhjem, John Ingleman, Arlen Holter, John "Mort" Mulliken, Jeff Hindman

Not pictured – Bob Kell, Dave Fisher

And some day, in a better place, we'll tee it up again, Boogs and I. We'll start down the first fairway on a balmy evening that feels like June, with the whole summer ahead of us. Twilight golf, as good as it gets, the air cooling with just a hint of dew under our feet, the setting sun no more than a glowing ember, burning the sky overhead. We're carrying our clubs, walking at a comfortable pace - golf, like it oughta be. One hole after another, we stroll along, all the time the world, playing great, fairways and greens, fairways and greens. Having fun.

The banter never stops. Boogs asks me if I kept a copy of the book report on "Bring 'em Back Alive" that he claims I recycled and used every year. I said no, I retired it in eighth grade. I notice he is still wearing Izod socks, and wonder if that's the same pair he wore every day in junior high. No, he says, he got a new pair when he started high school.

"Remember when you crashed our golf cart into the creek over at Quincy?"

"Hey, YOU were driving."

"No, I think YOU were, because it would've been YOUR ball in the water, not mine."

On and on. Give and take.



About three hours later, we tap in our putts on seventeen and ease over to the final hole. The sky is still a crimson vault of burnished red and gold. A few wispy clouds drift by from west to east, but our summer sun is right where it has been on every hole, just below the horizon and somehow, always at our backs. It lights the sky but never gets in our eyes. No squinting allowed. It's Perfect.



Tee shots away, we amble up eighteen together, Boogs and I. We aren't keeping score, not officially; there's no pencil, no scorecard. But we each know we're dead even, both of us two under par. Unspoken, but still, we know the score. Some things never change.

It's a tricky hole, a dogleg right over a creek and slightly uphill. Our tee shots are both on the fairway, just a few yards apart, and it looks like about one-fifty to the green for each of us. A punched seven iron lands on the green, bounces twice and rolls to a stop just three feet short of the pin. A high fading eight iron is even better, bounces once and settles softly, just inches from the cup.

Grins. Fist bumps.

"It's good, pick it up. C'mon, I'm buyin'."

And off we go, laughing. It's 1964, all over again.

Jeffrey Hindman, MD  
November 2022

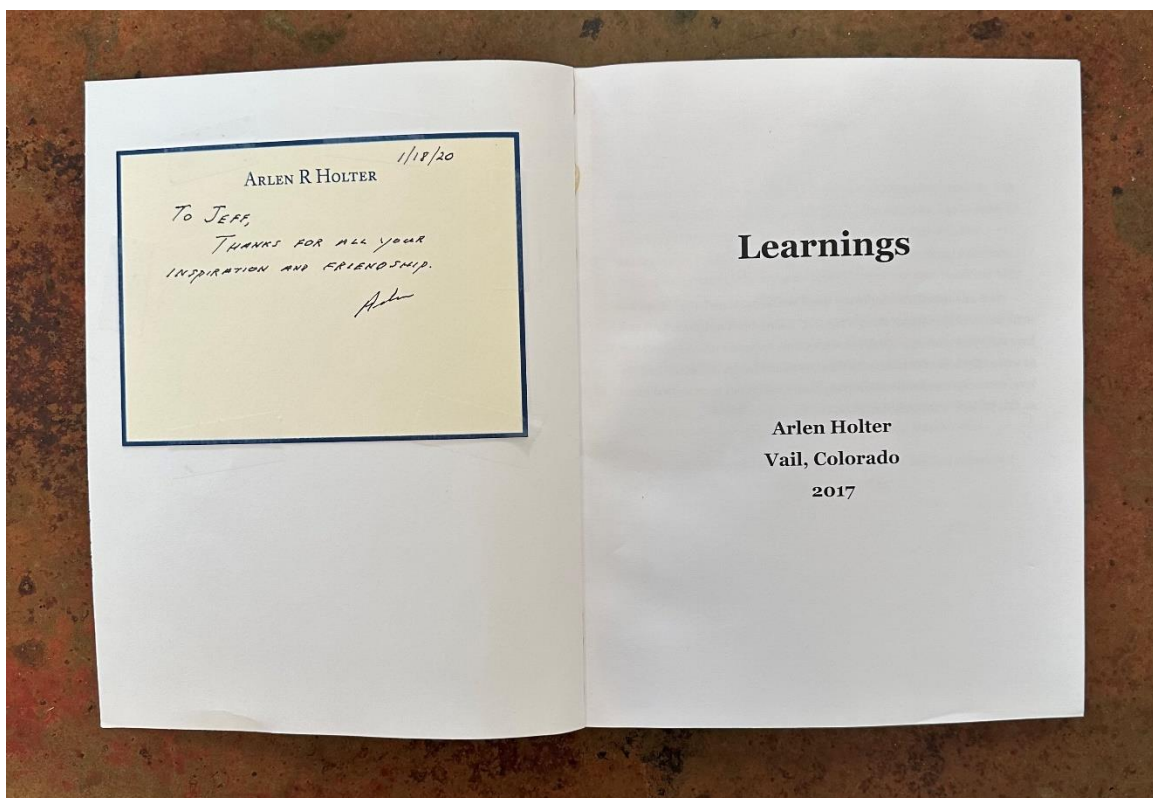
# Learnings



In my preparation for assembling the following pages, I planned to re-read “Learnings” - the short book of essays and memorabilia that Arlen wrote in 2017. When I retrieved the book from its home on my nightstand, a long-forgotten card fell out. I picked it up, shook my head and blinked away a salty tear. It was so typical of my old buddy that the note he had dropped into the book was an expression of gratitude. That’s who Arlen Holter was - generous with praise, gracious at all times, and mindful of the friendships shared since childhood.

The excerpts from his memoir have been selected, edited and organized to present readers with images of Arlen’s extraordinary life, offered in his own words.

-JH





# LEARNINGS

Arlen Holter MD

## About the Title

My first idea for a title for these writings was “Essays and Notes.” Betsy pointed out that the common theme expressed here is learning - that the first memories that had surfaced in an attempt to write about my life were all about learning. Upon reflection I realized that as a child in Champaign, if the weather prevented playing outside, I preferred to read. The Landmark series of history and biography was my favorite. I valued learning throughout my life and today, living in the mountains, learning continues easily via Amazon, the Internet and a well-educated and interesting group of people who have settled here.

It’s been a lot of fun, remembering the events, writing and editing. And it is an understatement to say that I owe Betsy much more than the title. I would not have been able to write these essays without Betsy’s support. I have been fortunate to have a 43-year-old marriage which has allowed me to have a unique career as well as the best of families and three wonderful sons. Without her love, encouragement and technical support, I would not have embarked on this project.

I am truly fortunate.

## Everything Since First Grade

In junior high school, approximately eighteen of us were placed in an “advanced” math class. What made the class special was the teacher, Mr. Williams, a no-nonsense guy who had the ability both to make algebra understandable and to maintain discipline. One of his favorite maneuvers was throwing a partially used piece of chalk at the back of the head a student who was talking or not paying attention.

One of the girls in the class, Julia Thompson, had the annoying habit of asking too many questions. One afternoon Mr. Williams announced at the end of class that there would be a quiz the next day. Julia’s hand immediately shot up, and she asked what chapters would be covered on the test. With a big grin on his face, Mr. Williams replied, “Julia, all the math you’ve had since first grade.” The whole class had a good laugh at Julia’s expense as the bell rang and we walked out the door to our next classes.

As a thirteen-year-old, I didn’t realize that his statement was quite profound, but later in life I did. Throughout my adult life, I often had to draw on “everything I’d learned since first grade.”



*1208 South Elm Boulevard , Champaign, Illinois, where I lived from 1948 until 1964. (Picture from 1955)*

## Combes Gym

The famous quote, “The battle of Waterloo was won on the fields of Eton” is attributed to lord Wellington. I initially thought that this meant one had to attend an elite prep school to develop leadership skills. Later I realized that “fields of Eton” exist anywhere if one makes the most of opportunities.

One of my fields of Eton was Combes gym at Champaign High School. The gym was named for Harry Combes, who coached at Champaign and led them to a state championship before going to coach at the University of Illinois for over twenty years. I played there in the summer as a ninth grader and then every winter for the next three years on the basketball team.

Besides all the practices and games I played at Combes gym, I remember the locker room, where scouting reports, pre-game and halftime talks were given. The court was large but the small locker room built teamwork and camaraderie. There I learned that leadership involved much more than words.

My last evening in Combes gym was the on the date of my graduation ceremony, June 4, 1964. My class of 550 sat on folding chairs on the gym floor with our families in the stands. I looked up into the rafters remembering all the time I had spent here in the past four years. All my close friends were going to college close to home, but I was headed 1800 miles west to Stanford. I had no idea what to expect there, but I was excited that one stage of my life had closed and an entirely new one was about to begin. At such a momentous time, I was glad to be in a facility where I had experienced such personal growth and good memories.

Jon Lindhjem’s comment:

*My fondest memories of being with Arlen were of our sophomore year on the basketball team. We both sort of knew we were marginal players and our future in our junior and senior years was not good, but we had a great time when we occasionally got to dress for a varsity game and experience the excitement of a packed gym. The fun we had in the pregame warmups and in our bench- warming conversations led to a friendship that lasted the rest of our lives.*

*Our careers took us in different directions after high school, but we would catch up and reminisce at the infrequent high school class reunions. One particular moment stands out. My wife had a 60th birthday surprise party for me at our home in Omaha, Nebraska. As I entered the event in shock, I looked around at all the familiar local faces, friends and business associates from Omaha. And much to my surprise, standing there with that big smile of his, laughing away - was Arlen, who came to my party from Minnesota.*

Mort Mulliken’s comment:

*When I visited him in the hospital he could still rattle off the starting lineup of the Decatur basketball team our senior year!*

[Jeff Hindman offers this email from Arlen, a response to one of Jeff's stories :](#)

Hey, Jeff - I'm honored by what you wrote about the four of us. And I really enjoyed your tribute to Fish. A seventy year friendship. That's remarkable. I realized once again the importance of lifelong friends when I heard from so many of you after my valve surgery.

I'm glad we didn't have video games or cell phones a back in the day, or parents organizing all our games. It was idyllic, what we had.

Maybe I'll send you some 'zods for your birthday in November.

Arlen

### **Lab Year**

During the fall quarter of my second year of medical school, I was asked by a transplant surgeon I had worked with in the summer if I would like to spend an entire year in the lab, then rejoin the class behind me in the summer of 1971. The plan was that I would take upper-level classes in the pathology department, do my own research, and earn a master's degree. I thought about it for a few days and then accepted. My expenses would be covered by an academic grant.

I started in the summer of 1970. In the mornings I operated with my mentor on animals that had had kidney transplants. My master's thesis involved using immunological methods to prolong the survival of kidney transplants in a special breed of rabbits. I also developed a new surgical technique for transplanting rabbit kidneys that I demonstrated at a surgical workshop in The Hague.

My lab year went well. I finished my thesis on time and published papers in surgical and transplantation journals. However, I decided that a career in medical research was really not for me. I was not adept at analyzing scientific writing like some of my colleagues were. But I did discover that I had developed a true talent for operating. Although I had been only an above average athlete in high school, I found that I had the speed and hand eye coordination necessary to perform complex surgery. I knew that a career in clinical surgery was clearly the best choice for me. I started my junior year of medical school much richer for having invested in my lab year.



## **Surgery Abroad/ Mull of Kintyre**

Many times, an opportunity results in lifelong benefits. In the autumn of 1977, I learned that I had a chance to spend the first six months of 1978 at the Southampton Chest Hospital in England.

I did a number of complex thoracic cases and on several occasions was asked to drive fifty miles to the private hospital in Surrey to assist Keith Ross with heart surgery on a private patient. Sometimes I did cases on my own there. One memorable procedure was a pacemaker change on Lady Sopwith, the wife of Lord Thomas Sopwith. His aviation company had built the Sopwith Camel of WWI fame. The surgery went fine, and neither Lady Sopwith nor her husband had any idea that her surgery was being performed by an American surgeon in training.

My mentor there, Dr. Keith Ross, liked to sing in the operating room. There was a tape deck installed in the heart king machine and it was the perfusionist's responsibility to pick music that was appropriate for a particular time in the operation. One of Keith's favorite pieces was "Mull of Kintyre" by Paul McCartney and Wings. McCartney had written "Mull" about his attachment to the countryside of southwest England where he owned a farm. After the breakup of the Beatles, McCartney spent a lot of time there, writing and grieving.

Keith could have moved to America to do cardiac surgery, but he chose to stay in England because of strong family ties. When I hear "Mull of Kintyre" today, I think of Keith's sense of family and love of his heritage. I am reminded that special places and special people exist for all of us.

Dr. Holly Holter shares this memory of her big brother:

*In 1964, my brother Arlen went two thousand miles away to college in California. Back then there was no email, no cell phones, no FaceTime, and no texting. AND, phone calls outside our area code were expensive, and we paid by the minute. So with Arlen out at Stanford, my parents and I got out pen and paper and wrote letters to him. My parents were old hands at the letter writing, and they each faithfully wrote weekly; I sent him a few letters each month filling him in on my life and CHS gossip. He dutifully wrote some letters to our family fairly often and there were occasional exciting Sunday afternoon calls. (Rates were reduced then.)*

*Then one day in history class a secretary from the principal's office walked into our class and handed the teacher a letter. My name was called, I walked up to the front and was handed a personal letter from Arlen! There was nothing particularly private in the letter, no true confessions or big romance. Nothing that had to be kept secret from my folks. But it was thrilling for me. He continued to send me letters via the principal's office throughout my years at CHS.*

*I often told him how excited I was to receive these notes at school. It made me feel so special! I never asked him why he didn't just send them to me at home. They weren't so private that they needed to be kept secret. I always believed that he wanted to show me that I was not simply "the Holter Family." I was his sister. Someone special.*

### **It Was All There**

Childbirth is a landmark event in every parent's life. But nothing I had ever read or done prepared me for the rush of euphoria that I experienced when Matt was born. I was 32 at the time and my whole life suddenly appeared somewhere in my head, from my first memories in Champaign forward to the present moment in the delivery room. It was all there, every single thing.

Afterwards I recalled mainly the pleasant memories. The incident I could remember most clearly was being open in the right-hand corner and calling for the ball. During this experience, unlike during dreams, I was aware of sounds. In this case the crowd was cheering.

I had never heard of panoramic memory, but Betsy knew all about it. She said that it usually occurs in dire situations when death seems imminent, but not in a situation like mine. I've never had anything like it in the forty years since then.

### **Philmont Trip August 1993**

In August 1993, Matt and I traveled with his scout troop from Minnesota to New Mexico to hike and camp in the Philmont Ranch. The following are notes from the trip.

Tuesday August 10

We visited the US Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs. I cried during the video showing Bonnie Blair ( she had grown up in Champaign and was the little sister of a girl who dated a friend of mine ) singing the National Anthem after winning a gold medal in 1992. I was thinking about growing up in Champaign.

Ed note :

Aug.11 -17. Hiking and camping

Tuesday August 17

Alarm at 6:00. Cheerios for breakfast. Lots of deer in camp. Great morning hike, able to climb the Tooth of Time. Proud of myself and Matthew. Felt very emotional on the way into camp. Home tomorrow.

### Philmont Lessons

- 1) I do not need to eat as much as I do.
- 2) I need to limit sugar intake.
- 3) I need to drink more water.
- 4) I need quiet time in the mornings.
- 5) I need 7 1/2 to 8 hours of sleep per night.
- 6) I need to review my goals weekly.
- 7) I need to read as much as possible.
- 8) I need to be a better listener.

### **I Was Watching You**

In the mid - 1990s, for a patient to sustain a cardiac arrest immediately after arriving in the intensive care unit was a rare event. So I was surprised when a 65 year old woman on whom I had done an uneventful 3-vessel bypass had a cardiac arrest, twenty minutes after she arrived in the ICU.

I had to reopen her chest right there in order to massage her heart directly. After many attempts to restart her heart the anesthesiologist encouraged me to stop. But for reasons I did not understand at the time, I kept going, and suddenly thought of a drug, Isuprel, which we had not used in years.

One of the nurses raced to the pharmacy for the drug while I continued massaging the heart. When she returned with the drug I injected it directly into the heart, and it responded immediately with regular rhythm and strong contractions. We took her back to the OR and re-closed her chest under sterile conditions.

Two days later she was doing fine and we had a chance to talk. I started our conversation by saying, "You know, your heart stopped in the ICU and I had a hard time restarting it."

"I know," she said, "I was watching you work on me from above the bed."

She proceeded to tell me that she was ten feet above her body at the edge of a tunnel that went up through the ceiling, with a bright light emanating from it. She had a strong urge to be drawn into the tunnel to follow the light, but at the same time she had some unfinished business with her daughter. She decided to come down and off the ceiling, back into her body. She stated, "the only way I could do this was to communicate with you."

I was shocked at her version of our resuscitative efforts. I told her that despite many people wanting me to quit, I had continued and suddenly thought of a drug to try that I had not used for years. I concluded that she had indeed communicated with me while under anesthesia, with no heartbeat and her chest open.

I did not tell Betsy or any of my colleagues about my being involved in a patient's out of body experience until after Andrew's death. Instead, I read as much as I could

about near-death experiences and of course, have an open mind about an afterlife and what sort of beings we are.

### **Speech for Andrew's X-County Dinner**

Ed note :

This is an edited, shortened version.

I gave this after-dinner talk at Andrew's cross country banquet in 2001.

I want to thank Michael for asking me to speak to you this evening about your season, from my perspective as a parent, a heart surgeon, and an Ironman triathlete. The great New York Yankees catcher Yogi Berra once said, "You've got to be careful if you don't know where you're going, because you might not get there." With Yogi's sound advice in mind, some of the country's leading health experts have announced a program they call Healthy People 2010. It outlines over 400 objectives to serve as a road map over the next decade for improving health.

The primary objective is increasing physical activity among all Americans. Number two is reducing the epidemic of obesity. About forty percent of adults report no physical activity whatsoever. Many of these folks who never exercise are the patients I see for heart surgery.

But you young athletes do not require the guidance of a federal initiative. You are already leaders in your school and great examples of physical fitness. This is not the end, it's the beginning of what I hope will be a lifetime of physical activity and leadership.

And please, all of you, heed Yogi's advice: set goals. Whether you run a 5K in 16 minutes or 26 minutes is not as important as becoming the best your generic makeup allows you to be. Whatever it is, just make up your mind to do it.

Bob Kell's comment:

*During junior high Arlen and I began selling programs at the U of I football games. The program cost was 25 cents each and we were supposed to sell 100 each at every home game.*

*At the first game after Arlen joined me, we tried to think of the best location to sell the most programs. We were each responsible for selling our own, but we decided to work together until all of our program allotment was sold. We chose a parking lot near the Illinois Central tracks where fans arrived from Chicago and St Louis for the games. That worked great. We sold all of our 200 in no time. What if we had more, we wondered ?*



*The next game we each took 150 each and sold all those well before game time. So, why not try 200 apiece for the next game, which was Ohio State and Homecoming?*

*We had to hustle that Homecoming Saturday, but we sold them all and our pockets were bulging with coins and crumpled dollar bills when we finished up.*

*We had a blast working together, watching the games and making some money, too. And while we did many things together since first grade, Boogs' ever-present smile and can-do attitude made these some of the most enjoyable times we ever had.*

### **Ibiza Triathlon**

In 2001, I qualified for the US Triathlon Association age group team by placing in the top five in my age group at a half-Ironman in Florida. Being over 50 and without significant orthopedic issues made it easier to qualify.

Ibiza is a Mediterranean island which is a popular vacation destination for northern Europeans, and is known for its lively nightlife. It turned out to be the most beautiful location I ever raced.

Here are my notes from race day:

Up at 5:00. Peanut butter and jelly sandwich and Endurox for breakfast. Spanish national anthem before the 7:00 AM start.

Swam well and did not tire.

Bike was three laps of 26-mile loop.

On the run my right calf started to cramp after mile 6. Had to walk some. Ball of left foot sore at the end.

Breakdown : swim 4Km - 1:28.07

transition 1 - 9:59

bike 120 km - 4:39

transition 2 - 6:34

run 30 km - 4:20

Total - 10:44.41

Memories of the day: Arriving at 6:00 AM in the dark and thinking the people in the transition area were fans. In reality, they were leaving the clubs. Spanish national anthem at the harbor. Seeing the citizens of San Joan sitting in cafes three times on the bike loop. All the men wore white shirts, black slacks and hats, as they had been to the parish church. Having the ocean on my right and the pine forest on my left during the major bike climb. Cheers on my last lap of the run.

## **Imponderable**

Somewhere during the past twelve years I lost the eulogy I gave at Andrew's memorial service on Memorial Day weekend, 2005. I do remember that I started the speech by recalling the last time I saw him. It was at the airport where he was boarding a flight to London. Betsy and I waved to him as he passed through security. It was February 1, my birthday.

I then spoke about how I learned the true meaning and usage of the word "imponderable" from Dr. Jim Kirklin, with whom I shared an on-call room at MGH. Jim's father John had been head of cardiac surgery at Mayo Clinic before accepting a similar position at the University of Alabama. John Kirklin had used the phrase "risks and imponderables" in discussions with patients and families about upcoming surgery. Imponderable was an appropriate adjective for me because it was impossible that afternoon to conceive that I would never see my son again.

Over 800 people attended Andrew's service. Friends from our pasts in Champaign, California, Chicago and Boston, family from both coasts, friends from Minneapolis, friends of all three boys and classmates of Andrew's from Richmond were there.

Before March 11, 2005, we had never considered the biggest imponderable of all, but by that May night we were deep into living it.

## **Arne**

Ed. note: This is an excerpt from Arlen's eulogy for his father - Dec.1, 2007.

I have so many memories of my father and too little time to recount them, but there is one that I want to share with you that concerns the time when I realized my father was a special and insightful man.

It was early June and I was six years old. I went with my father to a friend's house, because the friend had a wonderful Swiss Family Robinson tree house that could only be reached by climbing a rope ladder. When it was time to leave I decided to jump from the treehouse to the ground rather than use the ladder. Ladders were for wimps. As soon as I hit the ground I knew something was terribly wrong. When I couldn't stand up the adults gathered around me and I heard the dreaded words "broken leg."

My father gathered me up as only a father can and placed me in the back seat of the family Ford. On the drive to Carle Hospital, I remembered that they put horses out their misery and pain when they broke their legs. Dad turned around and reassured me that the staff at Carle would not do that to me. They would set the fracture and I'd be all well, running around again by the end of the summer.

Only years later, when I reflected on that day as an adult did I realize that Dad had showed me the guiding principles of his life: to accept your responsibility as a parent, to act with a sense of duty and to show your love and concern for others whenever you can.

Jeff Hindman's comment:

*Arlen did just that, showed concern for others, literally his entire life. Yes, as long as he possibly could. Here's an example:*

*In recent years I have enjoyed doing some recreational writing - memorabilia, an occasional essay, and "random musings" as one friend describes them. I write them on my phone in an email format and send them to friends and family when I'm done. There's no expectation on my part that I will get a response from anyone, but I do appreciate feedback when it happens. Some of my regular readers never comment at all, others respond occasionally, and a rare few - often. Only one person in the past three years has had a thoughtful appreciative response to every single one of more than two hundred emailed pieces that I have sent him. That would be Arlen, of course. In fact, his last response to me was in October, 2022, about three weeks before his death. He sent me what may have been one of the last emails of his life.*

*"Jeff, sorry it took me awhile to get back to you. I really liked your story about the singing golfer. I was in the hospital with congestive heart failure. I'm home now, trying to get better."*

*Typical Boogs. Expressing his interest in me, and my silly little story, while he's barely hanging on to life, his damaged heart failing and his lungs filling with fluid.*

### **Fourth of July Fireworks**

In 2010 I was called at about 11 PM on the 4th of July to see a 15-year-old boy with a live skyrocket embedded in his chest. My biggest problem was just getting the boy to the operating room.

The anesthesiologist wanted to wait until the fire department could come to the hospital and assess the situation. After the fire department refused to come, she wanted me to transfer the boy to either the Mayo Clinic, 65 miles away, or to the University of Minnesota Hospital. When I refused to do either, she demanded that I not use electrocautery during the procedure. She was convinced that a spark from the electrocautery could trigger a rocket explosion at any time.

I had done without electrocautery many times in Boston and in England - tying off all the bleeders with ligatures, so we went ahead.

The rocket was seven and a half inches long and had missed the top of the heart and aorta by about an inch. The tip of the rocket had been stopped in the back by

one of his ribs. I pulled it out, resected the damaged lung and irrigated his chest with a liter of saline to minimize the chance of infection.

The patient and his stepmother never seemed to realize how serious this situation had been, but we received many compliments from hospital staff for perceived bravery and for removing that rocket without complications.

### **Wedding Toast**

Ed. note: this is an excerpt from Arlen's wedding toast for Peter and Ade, Oct. 25, 2013.

St. Joe's is the oldest hospital in Minnesota and it is steeped in Irish Catholic tradition. There I got to know and work closely with the pastoral care staff. When a patient or family needed a boost in faith and hope prior to surgery, I was often paged by the staff to join them pre-operatively. Those sessions often included the familiar Gaelic blessing that I'd like to share with Peter and Ade tonight. It goes like this: "May the road rise up to meet you, may the wind always be at your back, may the sun shine upon your face, may you be poor in misfortune and rich in blessings, and may you know nothing but happiness from this day forward."

But the road does not always rise up to meet you, and as every cyclist and triathlete knows, the wind isn't always at your back. And the sun doesn't shine upon your face every day no matter where you live. You need faith that things will get better. George Will, the renowned author and political columnist from my hometown of Champaign, Illinois profiled four Major League Baseball players in his book "Men at Work." Will concluded that the most successful athletes were those who had faith that they could overcome inevitable adversity.

I'd like to return from examples of faith in heart surgery and athletics to St. Paul. Faith is the basis for his teachings. In his letter to his protegee Timothy he reminds Timothy that he, Timothy, comes from a faith-filled family and that this faith will help him succeed in a new position.

Both Peter and Ade come from faith-filled families. What I have observed about their relationship is that their love has both the strength and faith of their family heritage. Poet and pilot Antoine de Saint Exupery wrote that, "A beautiful life together teaches us that love does not consist of gazing into each other's eyes, but in looking outward with faith in the future."

So, let's now toast Peter and Ade and wish them a long and happy marriage, always looking outward with love and faith. Cheers!



## Art

I can't remember exactly when I got interested in art and art history, but it was probably in the mid '90s when Betsy and I visited northern Italy and Rome. As I viewed the frescoes and paintings in the churches that we toured, I became intrigued with the technical expertise that was required for their creation and with the history and storytelling behind them.

Subsequently we made several additional trips to Europe and sought out art museums there. We've also visited many smaller museums in the United States on trips around the country. I started watching art history DVD's while cycling indoors or running on the treadmill in the morning before work.

Looking back, I never imagined that when I was so focused on science and medicine that I would come to appreciate such a different discipline, and that I would someday look forward with great anticipation to spending hours walking through art museums. And not just the big well-known ones in major cities, but also the smaller ones in places like Laguna Beach, Des Moines and Omaha.

Jeff Hindman's comment:

*When I heard about Arlen's late-in-life discovery of art I should not have been surprised. But I was ..... and I should have known better. I have always envied and admired Arlen's unflagging intellectual curiosity. He had it in grade school, in high school and it was still there many, many years later, when he retired in Vail.*

*While I was spending my golden years reading thrillers, westerns and noir fiction, Boogs was brushing up on his German, reading theology and plowing through the scientific source materials cited for the Covid vaccines. That he found a passion for art and art history in his seventh decade is perfectly consistent with the behavior of the gloriously inquisitive soul I've known forever. Always a student, Boogs loved to learn.*

## Reformation Sunday

In the fall of 2016, I learned that the Stanford Travel Study office was offering a trip to Germany in September 2017 in commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. Betsy and I signed up, looking forward to once again being with the professor who had guided our Camino de Santiago trip in 2010.

The Reformation trip took us to many cities in Germany, and I gathered more information about Luther's life and the course of the Reformation than I ever could have on my own.

After touring Germany and visiting all the cities where Luther had lived, we returned to our retirement home in Colorado. But I thought it would be an appropriate

wrap-up to our Reformation experience to return to Minnesota and attend the Reformation Sunday service at our old Mt Olivet church in late October.

Mt Olivet had been our church for 31 years when we lived in Minnesota. All the boys had been baptized and confirmed there. And Betsy and I had undergone grief counseling there after Andrew's death.

On that Reformation Sunday at Mt. Olivet, Betsy and I were able to talk with Kurt Kalland, the pastor with whom we had spoken after Andrew's death. He is the one person we can never thank enough.

During the opening procession the high school choir sang A Mighty Fortress, which had been a part of both my father's and Andrew's services. As I stood there, too choked up to sing, I realized that I had probably attended over a thousand services there over the thirty years we lived in Minnesota. This Sunday was special for me. I felt a connection to my family and to all the other religious people who had taught and helped me over the years.

The remainder of the service was a blur, but just being there was the ending of my Reformation journey that I hoped it would be.

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Ed. note : This biographical section is complete with the addition of the following piece by Betsy, Arlen's wife of 48 years and the mother of their three fine sons.

### **The Gratitude Attitude: The Five Best Days**

Elizabeth Reid Holter, MD

Gratitude is an attitude that mental health professionals say promotes mental well-being. They advise practices such as noting three good things about each day and writing them down at night. Studies actually show that such habits durably improve mood. I would like to share with you one of our family traditions that, in retrospect, I realize promotes the gratitude attitude over the course of each year. Arlen would never have taken sole credit for the Five Best Days tradition, but without him it would not have happened or continued and spread.

We began taking our boys to Colorado to learn to ski when they were very little. Economic and time constraints meant one week a year, determined by Arlen's surgical on-call schedule. That week included the turn of the year on New Year's Eve. Children's skiing torchlight parades, followed by dinner at a Chinese restaurant and early bedtimes gradually gave way to a movie (usually laughably bad) followed by dinner at a locals' Italian restaurant with paper-covered tablecloths and crayons for doodling. The family

expanded to include our boys' friends - first as children and teenagers along for a vacation, then as young men who worked as ski instructors. Somewhere along the way we began the habit of discussing our five best days of the year over New Year's Eve dinner.

The crayons and the paper table covers are very convenient – everyone begins jotting down their five best days, in order, almost as soon as the menus arrive. The entire dinner time winds up devoted to going around the table in five rounds, hearing from each person about what made each wonderful day and how they decided where to rank it in the list. The choices are life stories in snapshots, changing with growth and priorities. They are funny, poignant and surprising. We also hear from people who have been with us on past New Year's Eves, calling, e-mailing, or texting their top five days, sometimes accompanied by pictures. They all get heard.

The reason this tradition promotes gratitude is a very practical one. If you know you are going to have to come up with your five best days of the year on New Year's Eve you learn pretty quickly that memories are weak. You cannot cram for this test. You have to start noticing potential top five days as they happen over the course of the year. You start writing them down. Pretty soon you actually have a little journal and it contains good stuff. The good things that happen in life start to break into your awareness and compete with danger-surveillance program that runs continually in the background of your mind. All good, with none of the side effects of mood enhancing drugs (which fail in the long run anyway).

Just as a matter of historical interest, we traced this tradition back to its origins. It actually began with Arlen's surgical training at Massachusetts General Hospital. The surgical interns and residents met at the end of each day and were asked to talk about the cases they helped with and to explain what they had learned. The practice helped everyone process what they had done and learn from their experiences. As a family, we were always sit-down dinner people, with candles even when there was still a high chair at the table. Like the surgery residents, we always talked about everyone's day. Skiing days included lots of bests. Best fall, best jump, best run, best lift ride. The evolution to a summing up of bests at the end of a year was inevitable. What is a surprise is the way the practice has continued and spread from our families to others.

New Year's Eve 2022 was our first without Arlen to get the ball rolling at dinner. We frittered away the time initially, but then Peter, our second son, took over Arlen's role. And he demonstrated that best days sometimes include the gamut of human emotions, since one of his was a day spent in Arlen's hospital room shortly before he died. Peter recalled the angle of the sun through the large window that looked out on Arlen's favorite mountain, the chatter of his three little boys, the softness of Arlen's hand as he held it and the coming and going of friends who had come to say goodbye. It all spoke to him of the most important things in life and the love that undergirds them. Arlen must have been proud.