In Memoriam: Wilfred S. Goodman, MD, Pioneer Surgeon, Consummate Educator, Renaissance Man (1922-2015)

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“I think it is malpractice to make that scar in the columella.” So said a senior staff surgeon to Dr Wilfred S. Goodman during a grand rounds presentation on External Rhinoplasty at the Toronto General Hospital in 1977. Notwithstanding this and similar expressed sentiments by many rhinoplasty surgeons of the day, Dr Goodman persisted in espousing his pioneering work. Today, the acceptance and popularity of the external, or open, technique are a constant confirmation of his foresight and persistence.

Dr Goodman was born in Baldur, Manitoba, Canada, on December 21, 1922. By the age of 22 years he had graduated from the University of Manitoba with a degree in medicine. Following military service he married his wife, Gwen, and began practice in Saskatchewan as a general practitioner. He decided to pursue a career in otolaryngology at the University of Toronto and completed his training with a fellowship at the Radcliffe Infirmary in Oxford, England. In 1955 he joined the Toronto General Hospital and practiced for 50 years until his retirement in 2005.

In 1970, Dr Goodman attended the First American Academy of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery Symposium in New York City and heard Dr Ivo Padovan of Yugoslavia speak on “The Decortication of the Nose.” He began performing this procedure and published his early results in the Canadian Journal of Otolaryngology and then in the Laryngoscope in 1974. The latter article was recently selected as one of the 2 “historical classics” in facial plastic and reconstructive surgery in the past 50 years.

Dr Goodman became the first program director for postgraduate education in otolaryngology at the University of Toronto. He was known as a talented surgeon, outstanding teacher, and respected academician. Affectionately called “the Woofer” by the residents (but not to his face!), he set high standards, which were expected to be unequivocally met, and direction, which was to be unquestionably accepted. He had his opinions, and you knew what they were! He was a thoughtful listener and wise counselor who brought out the best in his trainees.

For his exceptional contributions to our specialty, Dr Goodman was honored at the World Congress of Otolaryngology in Dublin, Ireland, in 2006, and has had a named award created to recognize the best annual paper by a resident in facial plastic and reconstructive surgery in Canada.

The focus of Dr Goodman’s life outside surgery was his beloved farm, Vanarheim, “home of the four winds,” outside Toronto. He restored the 1872 farmhouse, built a pond, planted thousands of trees (his favorite, blue spruce), and crafted beautiful gardens. Here he became a cabinetmaker and woodworker, crafting hundreds of bows and stools as gifts. The entrance was graced by 3 exquisite whalebones arching to the sky. Vanarheim was the focus for family gatherings—his 5 children, 14 grandchildren, and 5 great-grandchildren. Dr Goodman also appreciated and supported the arts, especially the Toronto Symphony and the Canadian Opera Company, and was a patron of Canadian artists. He was an active Freemason for 60 years.

Dr Goodman reflected many valuable and admirable qualities throughout his life. One of his favorite expressions was, “Expect excellence in all that you do, and seek that from others.” Dr Goodman achieved this for himself and also helped hundreds of others maximize their potential. This formidable legacy to our profession, his family, and friends lives on.


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Conflict of Interest Disclosures: None reported.

Additional Information: The author was a student, colleague, and admirer of Dr Goodman.