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Obituary: A Remembrance: Joseph H. “Skoot” Dimon III MD (1930–2014)

Xavier A. Duralde MD

A Note from the Editorial Staff: The following is a personal remembrance of Joseph H. “Skoot” Dimon, III (Fig. 1) written by friend and former colleague, Dr. Xavier A. Duralde. Considered a world-class orthopaedic surgeon, Skoot initially pursued a career in teaching medicine before traveling to Atlanta, GA, USA on the recommendation of a friend to meet with Drs. Robert E. Wells and F. James Funk regarding an open position at their practice, Peachtree Orthopaedic

Clinic (POC). After a night out to dinner with Dr. Wells and his wife, Skoot joined the Atlanta-based practice with a simple handshake agreement. He would stay with POC for 40 years until his retirement in 2000 [2] (Fig. 2). His published studies in CORR® spanned a wide range of orthopaedic topics, including manuscripts examining medial displacement osteotomy for unstable fractures [1], to recommending the Scottish Rite Hospital abduction orthosis for Legg–Calvé–Perthes disease [3]. CORR® joins with the orthopaedic community in honoring the memory of Dr. Joseph H. “Skoot” Dimon, III.

Joseph H. “Skoot” Dimon, III died peacefully in his sleep on March 24, 2014 after a long struggle with Parkinson’s disease.

I first met Skoot in 1993 when I joined POC in Atlanta. I was happy to have the opportunity to join such a prestigious group in my native Atlanta, and was even more excited to have the chance to work with such a world-renowned surgeon. I remembered giving a Grand Rounds presentation as a resident on the “Dimon Osteotomy” for complex intertrochanteric hip fractures several years before, and I looked forward to working with such

an innovator. I must admit that I was curious as to how such a prominent man went by the nickname “Skoot.” Of course, my curiosity was further piqued when I found out his children’s equally whimsical names, Scoot, Roz, Moppy, Booley, and Jenny.

Skoot was born in Columbus, GA, USA on February 16, 1930. According to family folklore, he earned the name Skoot as a boy because he managed to stay a step ahead of an older brother who would chase him with a hatchet. It is unclear whether this was a real or toy hatchet. When Skoot was asked directly about this [2], he would answer that his older brother, Charlie, came up with it somehow and it just stuck. Skoot was president of his senior class in high school and graduated at the age of 15. He attended the University of the South (Sewanee), graduating in 3 years with a degree in chemistry with Phi Beta Kappa honors. While applying to medical schools, Harvard University advised him that 18-year-olds were too young for medical school and that he should reapply after getting his Master’s degree. He went to Columbia University instead, always planning to return to Georgia eventually to “be a country doctor.” When he arrived in New York City, he decided it was time to get respectable and told everyone his

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X. A. Duralde MD (✉)
Peachtree Orthopaedic Clinic,
2045 Peachtree Drive, Suite 700,
Atlanta, GA 30309, USA
e-mail: xaduralde@pocatlanta.com;
mminerva@pocatlanta.com

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name was Joe. After 1 month, he could not keep up that front and reverted back to Skoot. In 1953, the year of his graduation, The Columbia Yearbook contained the following passage:

“The diploma reads (or so I’ve heard)

JOSEPH HOMER DIMON,
THIRD

Salvage class spirit! Catastrophes come.

Remember the roll call, the name of a chum

“Is Demon here” – the preceptor’s scan

“Scootie’s on duty” (or out chasing Ann [sic])

Strike! Unite! Refuse your MD
Til one of our sheepskins
reads simply SCOO-TIE.”

During his 3 years of Army service that followed, Lloyd Taylor MD (Skoot’s eventual mentor) introduced him to orthopaedics. He was hooked, and soon moved on to Harvard University, where he developed the reputation as the hardest working resident in the program. His wife, Anne, relates a story that when Skoot went to Boston, MA, USA to begin the program, he was told to start looking into housing for their growing family (they had three children by then). After 1 week, he telephoned Anne and sheepishly admitted that he

had never once left the hospital. In 4 years he seldom did. He finished his residency in the Harvard program with a hip fellowship under Dr. Otto Aufranc. At the ripe age of 30, he came back to Atlanta and joined Drs. James Funk and Bob Wells in a practice that included private patients, teaching opportunities, and mission trips to Haiti and other underserved third-world countries. Although he initially practiced general orthopaedic surgery and published in many areas including the shoulder, Skoot eventually focused on conditions of the hip and developed an international reputation in this area. Skoot practiced at Peachtree Orthopaedic

Fig. 1 Joseph H. “Skoot” Dimon III

Fig. 2 Skoot practiced at POC for 40 years before retiring in 2000

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A renowned innovator and educator throughout his career, Skoot enjoyed great success in orthopaedics. He performed the first total hip replacement in Atlanta. From 1969 through 1975 he served as the first team physician for the Atlanta Hawks basketball team (Fig. 3). He was the Chief of Orthopaedic Surgery at Piedmont Hospital, Clinical Professor of Orthopaedics at Emory University School of Medicine, and State Chairman of the Georgia Orthopaedic Research and Education Foundation. He served as President of the Georgia Orthopaedic Society, the Atlanta Orthopaedic Society, the Association of Bone and Joint Surgeons®, and the Society for Arthritic Joint Surgery. In midcareer, he decided to give academic medicine his full time attention and served as Chairman of the Division of Orthopaedic Surgery at the Medical College of Georgia. He soon discovered that he was most content back at POC, and made his way back to Atlanta. His was a truly decorated man with a distinguished orthopaedic career.

Despite these great and numerous accomplishments, Skoot was one of the most unassuming people you could ever meet. Friends and family asked to describe him following his death uniformly remarked on his humility and humanity. To me, he was incredibly

approachable. He was the guy who stood up at meetings and actually asked the question the rest of us were too embarrassed to ask. He would stand up at partner meetings and start by saying, “First of all, I would like to thank all of you for allowing me to do what I do.” As a young partner, I was shocked by this. He was a world-class surgeon and he was thanking me? He once left a wing retractor in a patient that was not discovered until the recovery room x-ray. He approached the patient and told her, “I left this in you. I have asked God for forgiveness and now I am asking you for forgiveness. We need to go back and take this out.” The patient did forgive him and nothing more came of it. For many

years beyond that episode, Skoot showed that film at his Real Life Orthopaedics (RLO) course to demonstrate that no one was infallible. He even went as far as publishing this as a case report for others to learn from his mistake. He spent more time talking about his failures than his successes, emphasizing that we all had to admit our mistakes and move forward.

Although he did not work in a formal academic setting, Skoot was a great educator. He published a manual on orthopaedic nursing and was instrumental in the founding of the National Association of Orthopaedic Nurses. He trained countless fellows in the intricacies of hip surgery and served as Visiting Professor in

Fig. 3 Skoot (top row, second on the left) served as the first team physician for the Atlanta Hawks basketball team from 1969 through 1975

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Mumbai, India, Mexico, and the Dominican Republic. His RLO course continues to this day through his protégés and is lauded for its honesty in reporting and practicality. He taught us all that real life orthopaedic care does not always work out like the textbooks say. He suffered bouts of depression and shared his experiences and strategies through Instructional Course Lectures at the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons and through the Depression Ministry. He understood human frailty, reaching out to help other physicians in the community with similar struggles. He published on varied orthopaedic topics, and shared his experience with me on the closed management of posterior fracture dislocations of the shoulder, allowing me to revive the concept and publish a series 30 years after his.

Any conversation about Skoot inevitably concludes with laughter because of his joy for life, as well as his antics. He loved tennis, and was known to phone various colleagues around the country before the Academy meeting with “tennis emergency

calls” to set up matches during the meeting. He played washtub bass for a band made up of physicians called “Unmanaged Care.” He drove the worst looking, beat up, small pickup truck you could imagine and called it the “POC Pace Car,” much to the chagrin of our founding partner.

For 40 years, he would spend 2 weeks at Camp Sea Gull in North Carolina. One of his passions was to make sure that all campers there learned how to wiggle their ears before they left. His wife, Anne, relates that nothing tickled him more than seeing a mature gray-haired individual stop him in Atlanta and demonstrate the ear wiggle that Skoot had taught him so many years before. There was nothing pretentious about him, and no one in his vicinity remained a stranger for long. He was always the first to extend a hand and say, “Hi, Skootie Dimon from Atlanta.”

I had the honor of attending Skoot’s funeral in the church where he was an active member of for so many years. It was standing room only with a representation across multiple generations.

His impact on so many people was truly impressive. As I heard two of his children give eloquent and touching eulogies, I realized that he had passed on so many of his great qualities to them. His reach was far beyond the countless patients whom he helped and the advances in orthopaedics that he fostered. His humanity and humility touched us all in a way that will affect us for the rest of our lives.

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