Maurice E Müller: a tribute

Maurice E Müller, AO Founding Father, passed away peacefully in the presence of his family on May 10, 2009, at the age of 91. “While Maurice may have left us for his eternal reward, his legacy lives on in the millions of patients who have been treated according to the AO Principles he was central in formulating. What a noble life he lived.”

These were some of the moving words written by Paul Manson, President of the AO Foundation and Markus Rauh, Chairman of the AOVA acknowledging the impact Maurice Müller had on so many lives. Not surprisingly tributes flowed in from around the world and the AO network from people who had been touched by “A remarkable man who was fortunate to lead a remarkable life. He was given great gifts and used them extraordinarily well,” Dan Beery’s concluding words from his tribute at the Trustees Meeting in Chicago.

We have taken excerpts below from the wonderful eulogy given on behalf of the international community by Joseph Schatzker, Past-President of the AO Foundation at both Maurice Müller’s funeral and the tribute event at the Trustees Meeting in Chicago.

“The sadness many will feel upon his passing is directly linked to the very many achievements and friends he made during his life.”

Paul Manson and Markus Rauh
Excerpt from the funeral eulogy for Maurice E Müller by Past-President Joseph Schatzker.

Two great advances revolutionized orthopedic surgery in the twentieth century. Maurice Müller played a pivotal role in both. He was an innovator in joint replacement, helping to bring relief and mobility to those, especially the aged, suffering from crippling arthritis. He and his friend and colleague, Sir John Charnley, are the fathers of total hip replacement.

It was Maurice alone who pioneered one of the most significant surgical advances of modern times, ie, the treatment of fractures through stable internal fixation with plates and screws, allowing immediate movement and rehabilitation of the injured extremity...

...Becoming a surgeon in Switzerland in the 1940s was not easy. There were no formal training programs. Young doctors had to go from hospital to hospital, seeking out the experience and teaching needed to enter surgery...

Maurice subsequently (after returning from a year working in Ethiopia) traveled throughout Europe to visit the famous surgeons of the day. One such visit, to Robert Danis in Belgium in 1950, would be the most important experience of his professional life... That visit to Danis laid the foundation for the revolutionary principles of osteosynthesis Maurice would go on to develop...

...While on military service in 1952, Maurice met an old high school buddy, Robert Schneider, who was chief of a small district hospital in the Canton Bern.

Schneider was so impressed by the concepts advanced by his young orthopedic colleague that he invited Maurice to join him at the hospital and operate on difficult trauma. With time he introduced Maurice to a number of his friends: Bandi, Schaefer, Willenegger, and other general surgeons who worked as chiefs in the district hospitals in Canton Bern... Willenegger introduced Martin Allgöwer to Müller. Martin was so impressed with what Maurice was able to achieve with complex injuries that he soon joined the group, and in the spring of 1958 he and Maurice organized a practical workshop in Chur where Martin was chief of surgery. This meeting, which consisted of talks
given by members of the group and then followed by practical exercises on bone, generated such enthusiasm and resolve that on November 6 1958, the group met in Biel and formally founded the Swiss AO.

With the help of Robert Mathys, an instrument maker from Bettlach, Maurice had within just two years designed, built and tested an entirely new armamentarium of screws, plates, nails and power tools. By late 1960, Mathys produced twenty full sets of the now-famous standard four boxes, which contained all that was needed for the internal fixation of any fracture. These were used by the participants of the first AO course held in Davos on December 10 1960...

...The fledgling Swiss AO realized that courses and publications were also necessary. Concepts had to be taught so that the new implants wouldn’t be misused. When Maurice began organizing the now-famous AO courses full of hands-on training on fracture models, postgraduate surgical education entered a new era.

Maurice also understood what is perhaps the most fundamental problem of all in science, funding. Maurice solved this problem by creating the first ever, joint enterprise between medicine and commerce, one that was a model of how industry and science could work together to advance medicine.

Maurice himself was a visionary donor of remarkable generosity. He gave to Synthes AG Chur, the financial arm of AO he had created with the help of von Rechenberg, all the intellectual property, patents, instruments and implants that he had developed over the years. This personal sacrifice—for he could have sought commercial gain—became the enduring model for members of the AO...

...Switzerland could not contain Maurice. He brought his formidable talents to the world stage, becoming a founding member of the International Hip Society and, later, its president. In 1984, he became president of SICOT. His legendary generosity, flowed to foundations he established in Spain and North America, and he endowed chairs of orthopedic surgery in several countries.

Maurice “retired”—if that’s the right word—in 1981 at the age of 63. This was merely a release from his administrative burdens, and Maurice now threw himself into his passion: Classification, documentation and evaluation, the pillars of evidence-based medicine. His efforts resulted in the Comprehensive Classification of Fractures of Long Bones, also known as the Müller/AO classification of fractures which has become the universal standard and will remain his enduring legacy...

...Maurice’s final big project in life was to return to his dream of early years, a dream of creating the perfect community. “Das Letzte...das Höchsterrungene” was the Paul Klee Zentrum that became a reality through the magnanimity of Maurice and Marti Müller...

...The contributions of Maurice Müller have not gone unrecognized: Switzerland gave him the Benoit prize; Bern proclaimed him as an Honorary Citizen and SICOT declared him “the orthopedic surgeon of the century whose achievements and success have exceeded all others”.

...But from his colleagues, Maurice deserves the noblest titles that we surgeons can confer on members of our profession: Maurice Müller, healer and teacher.