CLASS NOTES

'60s

Early in his career, neuroradiologist **Charles Kerber** (MD '62) was shown an image of a little girl with a tangle of abnormal bleeding

Kerber at the controls of his L39 Albatros.

vessels in her brain. "You think you're so damn smart with catheters," said his frustrated colleague, a pediatric brain surgeon preparing to operate. "Why can't you get up there and fix this?" The tools didn't exist then. When the little girl died, Kerber went home to his basement workbench and made a tiny flexible catheter with a silicon balloon. Later a woman came into the hospital with the same condition. This time, Kerber was ready. With the husband's permission, he threaded the microcatheter into an artery and applied an experimental glue-like suture substitute. "She woke up the next day," he says.

Kerber, a professor of radiology at the University of California, San Diego, now uses MRI to study the way that blood flows in the body. He also flies his own Russian-made military jet. "I got into flying because I was a kid working on a farm, ankle deep in cow manure, and when the first jet flew over, it was wonderful," he says.

As professor of surgery at the University of California, San Francisco, **Nicholas Feduska** (MD '67) was part of one of the most active kidney transplant centers during the 1970s. He completed more than 2,000 successful transplants. In 2005, Feduska decided it was time to shed the white coat. He says he reached a point where continuing to practice became financially foolish. "The cost associated with practicing was progressively increasing, and income from practicing was progressively decreasing." Since 2006, he's been a realtor in the Las Vegas area.

'70s

Randolph Miller (MD '76, Internal Medicine Resident '79) was a second-year med student—a physics major from Princeton University who knew how to program computers—when he volunteered to help Pitt's Jack Myers with a project in computer-assisted diagnostics. Today, Miller is the Donald A.B. and Mary M. Lindberg University Professor at Vanderbilt University and was recently elected to the Institute of Medicine.

"I was recruited here as chair of what became the Department of Biomedical Informatics," he says, noting he has since stepped down. Now, he's considering a return to his original work, trying to build a national model for computer-assisted diagnosis.

Miller was elected to the IOM.

'80s

Mark Hoch (MD '88), a family medicine practitioner, considers health in terms of mind, body, and spirit. He is an adjunct assistant professor of family medicine/community health at

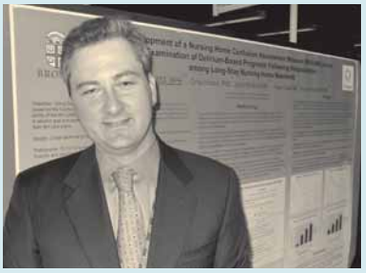
ROBERT YELLON

WHITTLER OF RIBS

To make a new ear, **Robert Yellon** (Fel '93) harvests rib cartilage from directly below a child's breast area. He carves the cartilage like an artist creating a sculpture—laying down a general shape, manipulating it with a scalpel, and suturing small pieces of cartilage onto it. The final product is a constructed ear that Yellon, associate professor of otolaryngology and of neuroscience at the University of Pittsburgh, implants on the side of the head of a child born missing an ear.

The implant is stage one of a four-stage procedure completed over the course of one year. In the final stage, if the child's anatomy permits, Yellon can potentially open the ear canal so the child can hear through it. In the United States, about one child in 6,000 is born lacking an ear. Yellon is one of a few surgeons in the country who specialize in this procedure. He's also in demand internationally. When he was interviewed for this story, a family in Israel was in touch with him about performing the procedure on their daughter.

As a carver of cartilage, Yellon works in other areas of the body, too.



Dosa on care, catastrophe, and cats.

the University of Minnesota and recently received a Bush Foundation fellowship to pursue a master's degree in theology and spiritual healing. He is past president of the American Holistic Medical Association, which seeks to make holistic medicine a board-certified specialty.

'90s

Richard Pan (MD '91) chairs Healthy Kids, Healthy Future, a five-county collaboration based in Sacramento, Calif., that provides insurance for uninsured children who do not qualify for other public health coverage. He won a 2007 award from Sacramento's Child Abuse Prevention Council for his work. Pan also directs Communities and Physicians Together, which sends University of California, Davis, resident physicians into neighborhoods to partner with organizations that improve health care for families. He is chair of the California Medical Association's Council on Legislation and an associate professor and associate residency director at UC Davis.

Jair Soares (Psychiatry Resident '97) was appointed professor of psychiatry and director of the Center of Excellence for Research and Treatment of Bipolar Disorder at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, in March. Soares says the new center will combine clinical care and research.

'00s

David Dosa (Internal Medicine/Geriatrics Resident '03), an assistant professor of medicine at Brown University, participated in a roundtable discussion in August 2006 in Washington, D.C., about how long-term nursing care suffered in New Orleans during the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Dosa says the catastrophe magnified existing problems in nursing home systems. In July, he made headlines with his *New England Journal of Medicine* essay about a cat named Oscar. (See page 40 for more on Oscar.)

Before **James Gagermeier** (Pulmonary, Allergy, and Critical Care Fellow '05, Transplant Medicine and Interventional Pulmonology Fellow '06) came to the University of Pittsburgh to train, he was employed by Indian Health Services as a physician for the 2,000 residents of Prince of Wales Island in Alaska. Gagermeier describes a day that began with him surgically repairing one patient's facial lacerations inflicted by a wolf/dog hybrid and ended with another's premature labor, which required her being life-flighted to the mainland. In the middle of all that, he administered chemotherapy.

Now an assistant professor of medicine in the division of pulmonary and critical care at Loyola University Chicago Stritch School of Medicine, Gagermeier helps some of the sickest patients in the hospital weather the ups and downs of lung transplantation. He is currently the medical director of Loyola's lung transplant program.

—Sarah Evans, Matt Minczeski, and Chuck Staresinic

Yellon repairs a boy's airway.

This spring, at the Airway and Voice Center at Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh of UPMC, he operated on a 7-year-old Nicaraguan boy who had fallen from a tree, landing on a metal fence. He crushed his trachea. Doctors saved the life of this 7-year-old with an emergency tracheotomy, but the accident left him breathing through a hole in his neck. Normal speech was impossible. For the next two years, he was out of school and at constant risk of infection.

Yellon and colleagues used the boy's rib cartilage to widen and repair his airway. The boy is now able to breathe normally and has begun to recover his speech. He returned to Nicaragua within a few months.

The doctor finds his work enormously rewarding. But ask him to describe his specialty, and he says that he is simply "a whittler of ribs." *—MM and CS*

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THE WAY WE ARE
CLASS OF '58

Years ago, while at his family's vacation home in Nemacolin, Pa., **Lawrence Ellis** (MD '58) visited Great Meadows, the site of one of the first battles between the French and the British during the French and Indian War. The historic battleground—site of George Washington's only surrender—inspired Ellis to learn more about the general. He now has an entire library of Washington biographies, including some written just five years after Washington's death. He's writing his own biography of Washington with his son. Ellis, a Pitt professor of medicine, says "golf and George Washington are my two hobbies."


Ellis


Beering


Copeland


Granowitz

In between flying from Indiana to D.C. two to three times a week as the chair of the National Science Board, **Steven Beering** (MD '58) occasionally fits in a round, too. He once teed off with Arnold Palmer at Palmer's Bay Hill course in Florida. On the 18th hole, nicknamed the Devil's Bathtub, Beering placed a dirty ball on his tee. He figured he'd lose at least one ball because a lake surrounds the green. Palmer walked over to Beering's tee, snatched the ball from its resting place, and tossed it into the water. He placed a gleaming white ball in its place.

"He told me to forget what I was looking at and swing like I did on 16, and I would get it close to the pin and birdie the hole," says Beering. "And what do you know? I put the ball a few feet from the hole and birdied it!"

Beering, formerly the dean of medicine at Indiana University and, later, the president of Purdue University, is a University of Pittsburgh trustee.

To make ends meet while he was a junior med student, **Sam Granowitz** (MD '58) moonlighted in various hospitals that lacked house officers.

"You did things back then you could never do today," says Granowitz. "I covered the entire ER."

He later interned at what is now UPMC Montefiore under Herbert Frankenstein, the same doctor who delivered him as a baby. Granowitz says he stayed on staff at Montefiore because it was one of the only hospitals in the area that welcomed Jewish doctors into practice. He is the coauthor of *L'Chaim, A History of Montefiore Hospital of Pittsburgh*.

Charles Copeland (MD '58) remembers making extra cash—$75 a month—during his junior year by collecting urine samples for an experiment professor of medicine Abraham Isaac Brody was conducting. Copeland was selected for the job after Jack Myers recommended him to Brody. He says being handpicked by Myers and Brody was "very important to me in med school." Copeland is now director of general surgery at Mercy Hospital in Pittsburgh.

— Matt Minczeski

— Portraits by Frank Harris

IN MEMORIAM

'40s

MORTON L. ARONSON
MD '42
JULY 4, 2007

WILLIAM S. KECK
MD '43B
JUNE 11, 2007

RICHARD C. LYONS
MD '44
JUNE 15, 2007

GEORGE V. HUGHES
MD '45
SEPT. 6, 2007

REX H. NEWTON JR.
MD '45
AUG. 13, 2007

DWIGHT C. "PETE" HANNA
MD '46
SEPT. 10, 2007

LEONARD B. MYERS
MD '48
JULY 8, 2007

'50s

ROBERT HOLMES
MD '52
JUNE 27, 2007

JOHN WOODSIDE
MD '57
APRIL 21, 2007

'70s

CARY L. HAMLIN
MD '75
SEPT. 2, 2007

GEORGE BERNIER

JUNE 29, 1934–SEPT. 17, 2007


Bernier

As a young man and budding political cartoonist, George Bernier turned down a scholarship from the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, in order to enroll in Harvard Medical School.

"He felt that being a cartoonist was too often about celebrating the failure of others, whereas being a doctor was the complete opposite," says his daughter, Elizabeth Lamont.

After training in hematology and oncology, Bernier joined the medical faculty of Case Western Reserve University. He later chaired Dartmouth Medical School's Department of Medicine. In 1986 he became dean of the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine.

Some say Bernier even "looked like a dean."

"He had a certain dignity," says Thomas Detre, Emeritus Distinguished Senior Vice Chancellor for Health Sciences. "He radiated warmth."

Under Bernier's leadership, Pitt's curriculum began to introduce patient care earlier, linking the first two years of science education with clinical care. One of his major contributions in Pittsburgh, says Detre, was "the realization that most everybody learns better by being in smaller groups."

Bernier left Pittsburgh in 1995 to become the dean and vice president of academic affairs in the University of Texas Medical School. *–Chuck Staresinic*

C.H. WILLIAM RUHE

DECEMBER 1, 1915–APRIL 30, 2007


Ruhe

Living in Arizona for the past 22 years could not knock the Pittsburgh out of Bill Ruhe (MD '40). Ruhe's wife has a photo of him from last year that makes her chuckle; she snapped it when a Panthers football game was on TV and her husband emerged from his room wearing vintage Pitt gear.

Ruhe was recruited to teach in the University of Pittsburgh's medical school in 1941, and he remained here until 1960. At various times he was in charge of admissions, student affairs, and the curriculum committee. He retired as associate dean and said he knew every student by name.

Ruhe left Pitt for a position with the American Medical Association, where he was crucial to the accreditation of continuing medical education. At the AMA, he eventually became director of its medical education division, and retired in 1982 as senior vice president for medical education and scientific affairs. *–CS*

BENNET OMALU ON HIS INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN FOOTBALL

BY CHUCK STARESINIC

COURTESY OMALU

In the brains of deceased athletes, Omalu discovered injuries invisible to the naked eye.

Mike Webster was dead.

Bennet Omalu didn't even know who Webster was when he made a pot of coffee that Saturday morning in 2002 and turned on the television, but the newscasters explained.

Webster was the kind of football player who made Pittsburghers proud. An offensive lineman, he played one of the sport's most punishing positions for 15 years. Strong, silent, and stubborn, he didn't draw attention to himself. He just did his job, which mostly consisted of snapping the football into the hands of quarterback Terry Bradshaw then slamming into defensive players hell-bent on tackling the ball carrier. The Steelers won an unprecedented four Super Bowls with Webster. Now he was dead at age 50.

In a matter of hours after hearing this news, Omalu reported to work as usual at the Allegheny County Coroner's Office, where he was the attending forensic pathologist and neuropathologist. There on the autopsy table was Webster.

An MD educated in Nigeria, Omalu (Fel '02) had completed a pathology residency at Columbia University, then come to the University of Pittsburgh for two successive fellowships, one in forensic pathology and another in neuropathology. He also received a master's degree in epidemiology from Pitt.

All morning, the way people talked about Webster on the news had bothered him. Webster's doctors had attributed some of his health problems to recurrent head trauma he suffered as a football player, yet people described him as an athlete who couldn't handle life after football. (Webster suffered from depression and dementia, rambled incoherently in his Hall of Fame acceptance speech, made bad investments, became homeless for a time, and hocked his Super Bowl rings.)

Omalu looked at Webster's brain, which appeared normal. In a typical autopsy, this naked-eye view would be the extent of the brain examination. Omalu went further. He fixed the brain in formalin and took it to labs of his Pitt mentors Steven DeKosky, professor of neurology, and Ronald Hamilton, professor of pathology.

"I subjected it to highly sophisticated immunohistochemical staining," says Omalu. "A large battery of stains."

Omalu found large accumulations of an abnormal toxic protein called Tau in the intracellular spaces of Webster's brain. This is a sign of chronic traumatic encephalopathy—long known to afflict boxers and sometimes referred to as *dementia pugilistica*.

Since studying Webster's brain, Omalu, who is now the chief medical examiner of San Joaquin County, Calif., has examined the brains of other professional football players who came to tragic ends. Two committed suicide. Another died in a violent and fiery car crash as he fled police after apparently suffering a nervous breakdown. The brains of all of these men showed similar injuries.

Omalu's work has attracted critics, who say that he hasn't examined enough brains to draw conclusions about whether blows to the head suffered in sports created the injuries. He is attempting to examine more brains, but that has proven difficult.

An epidemiological study this year from the University of North Carolina found that a history of recurrent, sports-related concussions in retired football players was linked to increased risk of clinical depression.

In the summer of 2007, a professional wrestler named Chris Benoit apparently murdered his son and his wife, then hanged himself. A few days later, Omalu, having obtained permission from the wrestler's father, Mike Benoit, flew to Atlanta to retrieve his brain. He fixed the brain in formalin and—because he didn't want to declare to airline officials what he was transporting—drove 13 hours to Pittsburgh.

Benoit's brain showed a large amount of protein tangles in the regions of the brain responsible for controlling emotions. Parts charged with sheparding neurotransmitters like serotonin, noroadrenalin, and acetylcholine were all damaged, helping to explain Benoit's major depression and psychotic episodes, says Omalu. Because of the family's privacy concerns, Omalu did not release his results to the press until September 2007.

"This is not about football," says Omalu, though his work has brought a great deal of attention to this aspect of the sport. "This is about concussive brain injury in contact sports. All types of sports."

This year, the National Football League (NFL) instituted baseline neuropsychological testing of all players. (The ImPact test, used by 30 of 32 NFL teams, was developed by Pitt physicians.)

Omalu would like to see the league support research toward a pathognomonic test—one that indicates tissue damage directly and unambiguously. A good example of the sort of test he envisions is Rachel Berger's. That Pitt assistant professor of pediatrics has developed blood tests that detect tiny amounts of certain proteins in the blood that may indicate head trauma in infants.

Before the beginning of the 2007 season, the NFL started a fund for retired players suffering from dementia. At its inception, a handful of former players applied for disability payments. In a few months, more than 100 had applied, with more than 50 approved. ■