

Jack Gunter, M.D: A Man of Passion and a True Friend—with Some of His Own Words

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Dr. Jack Gunter was truly a one-and-only type of person. He was remarkable in so many ways, as a friend, a father, a plastic surgeon, a rhinoplasty expert, a husband, a teacher, and a superb life role model. He lived his life the way he wanted to and he always lived life to the fullest. He was also a tough guy who demanded a lot of himself and all those close to him, from his true friends to his family. He did not suffer fools well at all. I guess that is why we became such close friends almost immediately when we met at the University of Michigan. He was indeed a very close friend and role model for over 30 years. He truly changed my life and thousands of others, both in and out of plastic surgery (Figs. 1 through 3).

I met Jack Gunter at the University of Michigan in 1979 as a plastic surgery intern and he happened to be the chief resident on the plastic surgery service. Little did I know at the time, when I rotated on his service at Mott's Children's Hospital, that we would become great lifelong friends. Jack was the primary reason I was drawn to Dallas after I completed my training and fellowships. From the moment I met him, I knew someone very special had entered my life, and Jack certainly was. He always focused on bringing the open approach to rhinoplasty into plastic surgery in a new way with what was then called the external approach to rhinoplasty. This had been somewhat popular in facial plastic surgery but was not well appreciated, nor was it done well in plastic surgery before Jack Gunter provided the focus, expertise, and willingness and dedication to teach this approach to all of us in plastic surgery. He came back to Dallas and, as he had promised, he started teaching rhinoplasty to the young plastic surgeons in the United States beginning with the first Dallas Rhinoplasty Course in 1984 with one of his professors and close friend, Dr. Robert Oneal. He was joined in Dallas by Drs. Steve Byrd, John Tebbetts, and



Fig. 1. A rare moment of relaxation in Provence during a cycling trip.

Robert Sheffield for the first few years. I joined them when I came to Dallas in 1986. This eventually became the world-renowned Dallas Rhinoplasty Symposium, all because of Jack Gunter's intense focus and dedication to excellence in teaching rhinoplasty. He was always intense and not infrequently he was mistaken for being overzealous or even hard on the participants, as he certainly was on all of us as his faculty. I recall a time when Dr. Jack Sheen wanted to leave the Dallas Rhinoplasty Symposium after the first day—but it all worked out and of course Jack Gunter and Jack Sheen became lifelong close friends.

His focus on the external approach rhinoplasty was not popular initially in plastic surgery with most of the rhinoplasty leaders at that time,

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Fig. 2. The 2016 Dallas Rhinoplasty Symposium dinner with Drs. Sherrell Aston, Dean Toriumi, and Rod Rohrich. Our “captain” is in the hat.



Fig. 3. Golfing at an outing when receiving the Alumni Achievement Award at Westminster College.

and it was difficult for him to get on programs, and especially to be published in *Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery*. The first such article was published in 1987 on the external approach to secondary rhinoplasty, which was a harbinger of things to come in rhinoplasty. Jack was not only focused, he was stubborn to his own fault, but he never wavered from his focus, just as he never wavered from his dedication to his specialty, his family, his wife, and most importantly, his children.

I had the opportunity to spend a lot of time with Jack when I first came to Dallas, as I lived with him and his three young daughters. He truly was an

incredible father to his daughters and later to his wife's two daughters when Jack and Deborah married 25 years ago. This is the Jack Gunter many people did not know. Those who did not know this Jack knew him only as a rough-and-tumble challenger to Dr. Jack Sheen when they had incredible debates on open rhinoplasty versus closed rhinoplasty. I remember an occasion when there was one of these incredible dueling efforts between Jack Sheen and Jack Gunter when they got into such an argument in the prepanel discussion that the panel almost did not happen. But that certainly was Jack. Jack was all heart, all focus, and always open and honest to speak his mind. He would always tell you to your face what and how he felt about you. Sometimes it was hurtful, especially when he tried to make you better. He certainly did that for me in my long path to becoming a rhinoplasty expert. He was my mentor, my teacher, my friend, someone who was always there if I needed him. That is a rare occurrence today.

If you look up “giants in plastic surgery,” he certainly is in the top tier. He was a thought leader, he was a pioneer, and he always taught us to do the best we can in the operating room, preoperatively and postoperatively, and never leave the operating room until the nose appears as good as it can. I will always hear that as a whisper in my right ear at the end of every case. I certainly have tried to stay true to this vow, and so have thousands of others who have learned from this truly devoted master and expert in rhinoplasty. He will be missed by all, but his legacy lives on in all of us as we teach the next generation of rhinoplasty surgeons at the Dallas Rhinoplasty Symposium and other rhinoplasty meetings. He is directly accountable for having taught over 10,000 plastic and facial plastic surgeons the art and science of rhinoplasty; for this, there is outstanding gratitude.

This is really meant to be not an obituary but a farewell and a tribute to a great friend and colleague whom I miss every day. Finally, Jack was always about control—controlling events in his life, which he was remarkably good at. So much so that at his memorial, his longtime friend and attorney read a special letter that Jack had written to all of us entitled “A Final Word.” It was truly vintage Jack Gunter, and his wonderful wife, Deborah, has allowed us to print the letter in the *Journal*, as there is no better way than Jack in his own words.

A FINAL WORD

Dear loved ones, family and friends,
Don't worry. This will be brief.

I want to thank you for coming and apologize to those who are here and wish they could be doing other things. I think you know who you are so I won't mention any names. Some of you are probably saddened but some of you, especially my golf group, are saying, "It's about time." But please don't make this a sad event. Put a smile on your face. I was on this Earth long enough and have lived a full, exciting and rewarding life. I have done most of the things I wanted to do and have seen all of the things I wanted to see. All in all, it has been a great life.

I believe in God and feel He controls all things, although at times He confuses me and I don't always understand the reasoning for some of His decisions. I have hit a few bumps in the road during my life, but was able to survive them in fairly good shape. The most traumatic thing that ever happened to me was when my first marriage ended in divorce and I was separated from my children, Ashley, Page and C. B. The second thing is I will not be able to see all my seven grandchildren grow into adulthood and see what kind of citizens they are going to be and what they contribute. So far, I am pretty optimistic about what I have seen. Their parents are raising them well and they should do just fine. The only one I am a little concerned about is the youngest one, Gunter, but I feel certain his mother and father will get him bridled before he gets too far out of line. They have heard this before but I am going to say it one more time. My father told me there are three important things that will keep you in good stead in Life: (1) Be prompt. (2) Keep your word. (3) Pay your debts. To that I would add two more: (1) Be devoted to God and your family. (2) Be honest with yourself and others. Lastly, I encourage you to be participant in the game of Life. You can't accomplish much sitting in the stands watching.

This is getting a little too serious, so I will move on to more pleasant things. First, I want to thank the speakers' courage for trying to find something nice to say about me. I asked Deborah to tell them to be brief and am certain they said they would have to be because they did not have much material to work with. I hope they do a good job. However, I would like to mention a few of you who were considered to speak today but did not make "the cut":

1. Sam Hamra, my roommate for 3 years in medical school. Sam taught me a lot; unfortunately, it was not about medicine.
2. Bill Hayner, my trial lawyer. Thankfully I never had to use him but I always wondered

if a 90% contingency fee wasn't a little high for a friend.

3. Terry Worrell, my financial advisor and technology consultant. His advice was worth exactly what I paid for it!
4. Jim Wikert—my wine guy. He and Alinda taught me many of the elements of "the good life". Plus they introduced me to Deborah. I couldn't let him talk because the two of them know too much about me!
5. Buford Berry—I know he felt it would cost him too much to leave his gin game for a couple of hours.

The best thing that ever happened to me besides the birth of my three daughters happened 29 years ago when Deborah Jane Dawson came into my life with her two daughters, Taylor and Mary Reading. As hardworking individuals who always give their best, the girls have made their mother and me very proud; and more importantly, they should be proud of themselves. Our marriage and home-life have been a wonderful part of my life for which I feel blessed.

Another blessing was that I grew up in a family with a mother and father who were very devoted to their children—my brother Jerry, my sister Vicki and myself. Vicki is now the only survivor. I want to thank her for her love and support and tell her I love her very much and will miss her.

Practicing medicine has been a very important and rewarding part of my life. My medical colleagues have been great company through the years and we have learned a lot from each other. My office and surgery staff has been outstanding through the years. At the time of my retirement, five had been with me for more than 20 years. I deeply appreciate their support and loyalty. I especially want to thank my rhinoplasty colleagues who openly shared their thoughts and knowledge with each other and hopefully raised the bar a little higher in our specialty.

To all my friends, thank you for putting up with me over the years.

And to my entire family, I love you so very much.

Well, that's it. As I look over the audience, I see several of you who probably aren't going to make it, but I hope to meet most of you on the other side.

Goodbye and good luck. God bless.

Jack

I am adding the six ethics of life (see below, adopted from William Arthur Ward) as they are also reflective of Jack Gunter:

Before you pray—believe.
Before you speak—listen.
Before you spend—earn.
Before you write—think.
Before you quit—try.
Before you die—live.

These epitomize Jack Gunter so well. I also had many of those lectures from him that he told his family, be prompt, keep your word, pay your debts. Be honest to yourself and others and be devoted to your family and to God. I especially remember the promptness because not infrequently if I was even just 1 minute late for a meeting he would lecture me on the importance of being prompt and how it affected a relationship. Most importantly, it

was to set a positive tone when meeting somebody. He was and still is so right. Jack, we all continue to admire you and live through you. Each day of my life and at the end of each rhinoplasty, I always tell my residents and fellow “Thank God for plastic surgery,” but in my heart I always say, “Thank God for Jack Gunter,” who taught me the art, the passion, and focus of excellence in becoming a rhinoplasty surgeon. God Bless You Jack Gunter!

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