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# Hermes C. Grillo



Hermes C. Grillo, M.D., world renowned Thoracic Surgeon at the Massachusetts General Hospital, died Saturday, October 14, 2006 near Ravenna, Italy in an automobile accident. He and his wife, Sue, were traveling in their beloved Italy visiting family and planned to attend the Italian Association for Thoracic Surgery, at which he was to be an honored speaker. Sue recovered from her injuries.

Born in Boston in 1923, Dr. Grillo was widely recognized as the father of modern-day tracheal surgery. He published over 350 scientific articles on a wide array of topics in thoracic surgery, but the majority advanced the practice of surgery of the tracheobronchial tree. He is credited with developing several original operations to address disorders which were considered to be uncorrectable prior to his pioneering efforts in this field. His textbook, "Surgery of the Trachea and Bronchi", published in 2004, is viewed worldwide as the definitive text on airway surgery.

Dr. Grillo was an Emeritus Professor of Surgery at the Harvard Medical School, Visiting Surgeon at the Massachusetts General Hospital, and Emeritus Chief of General Thoracic Surgery. The endowed Hermes C. Grillo Chair of Surgery was established at the Harvard Medical School in 2002 in recognition of his many accomplishments in the field.

Raised in Providence, Rhode Island, Dr. Grillo attended Providence Classical High School. He was quite proud of his "classical" education and especially fond of his four years of Latin education. This held him in good stead throughout his lifetime, as he often quoted a favorite Latin phrase to make a point. Graduating from Brown University in 1943 and Harvard Medical School in 1947, Dr. Grillo joined the surgical house staff at Massachusetts General Hospital in 1947. He was a child of the Depression, and those lessons also

stayed with him. Accepted to both Harvard and Yale Medical School, he chose Harvard because tuition was \$400 per year compared to \$450 at Yale. “Harvard was a perfectly good school, and I could save a little money.” He completed his Chief Residency in Surgery in 1955 and joined the staff. He retired from active clinical practice of surgery in 2000, but he remained active in teaching and writing until the time of his death. Dr. Grillo was the epitome of a true Professor. He embodied excellence in research, teaching and surgical technique. His gifts in these areas were an example to all and an inspiration to many.

Dr. Grillo was unparalleled as a teacher. He always made time for the eager and inquisitive student. He spent countless hours listening, advising, guiding and teaching. Ever a gentleman, his style was to challenge, question and probe, but never in a condescending or demeaning way. Even after he retired, he remained active as a teacher—and as a student. He was a regular attendant at Surgical Grand Rounds, freely offering insightful comments about innovations and ideas.

In the laboratory, he was a model investigator. As a young surgeon, he took a clinical problem presented at a conference of a rare tracheal tumor and turned it into a career. He challenged the assumptions of the day about what was feasible, asked the proper questions, and in meticulous detail set about to conduct the necessary experiments to determine how much of the trachea could be safely resected and reconstructed. Once satisfied with the solutions, they were then carried to the operating room in the same precise, meticulous approach.

As a young student, Dr. Grillo considered a career as an architect, but ultimately chose surgery. The artistic and creative aspects that must have drawn him to consider architecture were equally applied to surgery. Whether in his operations or in his intricate drawings (Grillograms) to illustrate his operations, he was a true artist. His creative and fertile mind allowed him to find solutions to problems that seemed unsolvable. He combined his creativity and technical skill with a persistence and uncompromising approach to each patient’s problem. He was often heard to say, “It must be done right”. A colleague in the MGH Alumni News summed up Hermes best: “who can forget his unremitting stream of new ideas, his technical excellence and his dogged persistence until things came right?”

As a surgeon he believed in collaboration with others. Whether it was with Dr. Jerome Gross in the laboratory evaluating the problems of wound repair, with Dr. Hendrick Bendixen to solve the intricacies of anesthesia for airway reconstruction, or with Dr. William Montgomery and Griff Pearson to devise surgical solutions for the clinical problems they faced, open and free exchange of ideas was the order of the day.

The model that Dr. Grillo provided in all aspects of his professional life served as an inspiration to many young investigators and surgeons. Because of his example, many choose to follow the path to a career in Thoracic Surgery.

He was the recipient of numerous awards and honors during his career. Most notable among these were the Chadwick Medal from the Massachusetts Thoracic Society, The William Rogers award from Brown University, Earl Bakken Scientific Achievement award from the Society of Thoracic Surgeons, and the

Henry F. Bigelow Medal from the Boston Surgical Society. Dr. Grillo was a Visiting Professor at 40 institutions in the United States and around the world in addition to numerous invited lectureships. He was on the Editorial Boards of nine surgical journals. He was the President of the Society of Thoracic Surgeons (1987-88), President of the Thoracic Surgery Directors Association (1983-1985) and President of the Boston Surgical Society (1997).

One of his proudest accomplishments was in the service to his country. He served as a Lt. (j.g.) MC, USNR, as a combat surgeon, 1st Marine Division, Fleet Marine Force Korea in 1951-52. He earned a commendation ribbon with combat "V", and the Korean campaign ribbon with 3 battle stars. In 1983 he was awarded the Order of Civil Merit, Moran Medal by the Republic of Korea for his contributions during the Korean War.

He and his wife loved to travel throughout the world. In the "Class Notes" section of the July/August 2006 Brown University Alumni Magazine, Hermes reported that he was "still writing, teaching and puttering" at the MGH. He went on to explain how he spent "New Year's Eve again in Tuscany, then to India via Zurich, on to Cremona, Toscana and Assisi in the fall, and perhaps to Paris and wine roads in the spring (Champagne, Burgundy, Rhone). Best to keep moving while we can!" he wrote.

Dr. Grillo was the proud father of four children. He taught them to take in the world around them, ask questions, love their work and always wonder whether there was a better way to look at a problem. Through him they were taught a way of life in which integrity, creativity, intellect, personal passion and concern for the well being of others could be successfully and productively joined.

The Thoracic community has lost a true pioneer, a preeminent physician who built and shaped a surgical field, saved or improved countless lives, and inspired several generations of surgeons – a man who truly kept moving until the very end.

Dr. Grillo leaves behind thousands of grateful patients and generations of surgeons to whom he provided mentorship and an exemplary role model. He is survived by his wife Sue (Robinson), his son H. Conrad Grillo, Jr., daughters Andrea Massar, Paula Shalan and Amy Grillo Angell, and nine grandchildren.

A memorial service was held in Cambridge at the Memorial Church at Harvard University. Family, friends and colleagues from the United States and around the world were in attendance.

W. Gerald Austen, MD

John F. Burke, MD

Douglas J. Mathisen, MD

Paul S. Russell, MD

Earle Wayne Wilkins, Jr., MD