Carolyn Elaine Reed, 48th President of The Society of Thoracic Surgeons, was an accomplished surgeon, an outstanding educator, a dedicated investigator, a role model for both women and men in surgery, and a national leader in our specialty of cardiothoracic surgery. She filled all of these roles extremely well, but most important to her was her role as a physician who truly cared about her patients, friends, and colleagues as was apparent in her 2007 Southern Thoracic Surgical Association Presidential Address, “Patient Versus Customer, Technology Versus Touch: Where Has Humanism Gone?” (Ann Thorac Surg 2013;96:1517–9) © 2013 by The Society of Thoracic Surgeons

Carolyn Elaine Reed (Fig 1) was born in Farmington, Maine, in 1950 where her father was a Professor of Education at the University of Maine and her mother was a school nurse. She originally planned to become a nurse but was strongly encouraged by her mother to become a physician after the early death of her father. She died on November 16, 2012, 2 months after undergoing a Whipple procedure for carcinoma of the pancreas.

Dr Reed graduated with highest honors from the University of Maine in 1972 as a member of Phi Beta Kappa. She subsequently received her MD degree (with Honors and Distinction in Research) from the University of Rochester in 1977 where she was a member of Alpha Omega Alpha Honor Medical Society. She then moved to New York where she received her general and cardiothoracic surgery training at the New York Hospital–Cornell Medical Center. During this time, she spent 1 year (1982–1983) as a fellow in surgical oncology at the Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center. Upon completion of her surgical training she was recruited to the Medical University of South Carolina in 1985 as an assistant professor in the Division of Cardiothoracic Surgery to succeed Edward F. Parker, the father of thoracic surgery in the state of South Carolina. She was the first woman faculty member in the Department of Surgery at Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC). Her academic progress was rapid, and she was promoted to associate professor in 1989 and to full professor with tenure in 1997. She served as chief of thoracic surgery at the Ralph H. Johnson Veterans Administration Hospital (1985–1998) and as chief of the section of general thoracic surgery at MUSC (2004–2012). At the time of her death she held the Alice Ruth Reeves Folk Endowed Chair of Clinical Oncology.

Dr Reed was a widely renowned surgical educator. She was completely committed to medical student and resident teaching. She was an outspoken proponent for the role of women in surgery and specifically in thoracic surgery. She served as the mentor and advisor for numerous medical students, residents, and women faculty members not only at MUSC but also throughout the United States. In this regard she served as treasurer of Women in Thoracic Surgery (1995–1997). In 1987 she received the Student Teaching Award at MUSC and was...
subsequently nominated for the Golden Apple Award for teaching on four additional occasions. Carolyn especially loved the cardiothoracic residents and their families. They eagerly looked forward to the annual Christmas feast, which she prepared for them at her lovely home each year. She was a wonderful and patient teacher in the operating room, but woe be unto the resident who showed up unprepared or who had not reviewed the CT scan. In addition to serving as a role model for the residents, she also served as an advisor and confidante in both their professional and personal lives. It was rare for a week to go by without her receiving at least one phone call from a former resident asking her advice about a “tough” case. At the January 2013 meeting of The Society of Thoracic Surgeons (STS), she was posthumously awarded the Socrates Award by the Thoracic Surgery Residents Association in recognition of her many contributions to thoracic surgery education.

Dr Reed played numerous important roles in the development of the Hollings Cancer Center at MUSC, serving as Associate Director for Clinical Affairs (1998–2000), Director of the Hollings Cancer Center (2000–2004), and Deputy Director of Clinical Affairs (2004–2012). She achieved a national and international reputation as a thoracic surgeon and oncologist with specific expertise in lung and esophageal cancer. Beginning in 1996 she was recognized each year on one or more “Top Doctors” lists. She became the “go-to” thoracic surgeon in the state of South Carolina not only for patients but also for physicians around the state. She had an incredible passion for the care of patients with cancer, and her patients and families demonstrated their love and respect for her in many ways. It was rare for a week to go by that gifts from patients or families—fresh flowers, home-made delicacies, wine, or her favorite M&M candy—did not appear on her desk.

In her Presidential Address to the Southern Thoracic Surgical Association [1], she stated the following: “I believe too often we hide our emotion. I have promised myself that the day I no longer walk out of the hospital with tears in my eyes after the loss of a patient will be the day I quit medicine. I would suggest that the residents and young surgeons in the audience build a ‘shoebox’ as I have done. Over the years, I have added notes sent to me by patients and families to this box. At times of discouragement or fatigue, I only have to open the box, reach for some notes, and quickly discover that I have touched lives in a way no other profession can.”

As an example, one note stated the following: “Your gentle and comforting ways in dealing with my mother has eased the pain she must deal with seeing Dad in the condition he is in. You’ve made us feel as though we have a friend as my father’s doctor, not a stranger. You are a person who looks at what they do, as more than what the job description entails. In addition to comforting patients, it is equally important to lend comfort to the family. This you do so very well.”

Throughout her career, Dr Reed was a strong advocate for research as the path for finding more successful treatments for cancer. To this end, she held several important research grants from the National Institute of Health as well as other funding organizations. She was an investigator in numerous cancer-related clinical trials. During her career she was the author of more than 100 peer-reviewed publications in highly respected journals as well as 20 book chapters. She was an editor of the text, General Thoracic Surgery (seventh edition). She made more than 120 scientific presentations at national and international thoracic surgical meetings and was sought after as a visiting professor at many of the most prestigious medical institutions in the United States.

At MUSC, she served on the Faculty Senate (president), the Promotion and Tenure Committee, and numerous search committees as well as virtually every other...
committee of any significance. She was active statewide, especially in cancer-related organizations. She served on the Editorial Boards of the American Cancer Society’s journal and Surgical Laparoscopy and Endoscopy, and The Annals of Thoracic Surgery.

She served the American College of Surgeons as governor (2008–2011), as a member of the Advisory Council for Thoracic Surgery, and as vice chair of the Thoracic Oncology Group. She was chairman of the Program Committee for the American Surgical Association (2006–2009). She served on the Boards of the Thoracic Surgery Foundation for Research and Education and the Joint Council of Thoracic Surgery Education. She was the chair-elect of the Thoracic Surgery Residency Review Committee at the time of her death. She was a member of the American Association for Thoracic Surgery and served on its council (2000–2004). In the Southern Thoracic Surgical Association, she served in many roles including council member and secretary-treasurer. Subsequently, she was elected president of the Southern Thoracic Surgical Association in 2006–2007, thus becoming the first woman to head a major thoracic surgical organization. She served on the American Board of Thoracic Surgery (1997–2007) and again became the first woman to be a director of the board as well as to become its chairman (2005–2007).

She served STS in numerous roles after her election to membership, including the Education and Research Committee, Program Committee, and Workforce on Clinical Education. However, it was after election as treasurer-elect (2005) and subsequently as treasurer (2006–2011) that she really directed her boundless energies to this organization. She actually relished the long after-hours conference calls and was impossible to reach during these times. Her last real ambition was to become president of STS. She learned that this might occur just before symptoms developed that ultimately led to the diagnosis of pancreatic cancer. Throughout her illness, her primary motivation was to get well so that this could happen. Unfortunately it did not occur, but appropriately, she was elected president (posthumously) at the STS Annual Meeting in January 2013. Had she served, she would have again been the first woman to do so. I, for one, would have loved to have heard her presidential address. At the same meeting, she received the STS Distinguished Service Award.

Carolyn loved her home state of Maine and looked forward to recharging her batteries each year during her annual vacation there in the summer. Unknown to many, she was an accomplished musician. She had a great sense of humor and loved a good laugh, good food, good wine, good books, and a good time—all of which she particularly enjoyed sharing with her many friends. At MUSC, she put together an incredibly close-knit, loyal, and devoted team including her secretary of 28 years, Lavonna Newsome, her nurse practitioner, Maggie Ramsden, and Hollings Cancer Center thoracic nurse coordinator, Claudia Miller. She loved her many friends, colleagues, and patients, but she especially loved her family. She is survived by her mother, her twin sister, Joyce, her niece, Lisa, and two grand nieces, Anna and Emily (Fig 2). It is truly ironic that she succumbed to cancer, a disease that she spent her entire life trying to cure. It was my privilege to recruit her to the Medical University of South Carolina in 1985 and to serve as her department chairman, mentor, and most importantly, as a close friend for her entire professional career. Unknown to her colleagues, her last gift was to endow a chair in thoracic surgery at MUSC. She is missed by her students, residents, patients, friends, and colleagues.

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