

July 31, 2014

ONCB
Dottie Roberts

I would like the honoree to know why I am doing this. I was married at age 17 and had 2 children by the time I was 20. My husband (of 43 years) was always supportive of me. I grew up in Oakland, CA, one of 6 kids to a single mom who worked as a secretary. My teachers always encouraged me to do well and told me I was smart, but we never had the money to further any education.

We relocated to Los Angeles in 1979. I went to work at Centinela Hospital in Inglewood in central supply washing instruments, packing surgical trays and sterilizing them. I was trained on the job. I was noticed by an ortho tech who said they had an opening and thought I would be good at that job because I worked hard and learned quickly. He handed me a book of bones and muscles to study. I was overwhelmed and thought I could never learn it, but there I was 6 weeks later applying for the job.

These were the days when ortho patients were casted and hung in traction. My interview was with Ann Jones, our CNO, and Dr. Frank Jobe, Chief of Orthopedics and founder of Kerlan-Jobe Institute. At first they said NO, the job was too "heavy" for a woman, but I pleaded for a chance to prove myself. Dr. Jobe was my savior! He said I could have a three month trial in the position. I not only caught on right away, but the other doctors and patients were so happy with my work. I stayed in the position for 4 years, and during that time the nurses on the ortho ward encouraged me to go for my RN.

My boys were young, but I was able to balance being a mom, working and going to school. I went right into orthopedic nursing (another plus because I could cast and hang traction).

I spent my whole career in orthopedics, except one 3 year stint in the ER (again, how great to have a nurse that could throw on a splint!) I decided to get my ONC, and studied hard for my test. For many years I was the only ONC in the hospitals that I worked. I was always encouraging others to get his designation, and now there are several on our team with those wonderful initials behind their name. In 1983 I met Dr. Lawrence Dorr. He was the doctor that came to Kerlan-Jobe to handle joint patients. I was assigned to create an educational program for him. He was gruff, but it did not take long for me to know that he wanted the best for his patients. We got along well, and when I transferred to the ER in 1989, he asked me to come to the clinic a day or two a week to do post op checks on his patients and be his research nurse. So he taught me how to read hip and knee films, fill out case report forms and sit through audits.

When Dr. Dorr was recruited to the new USC University Hospital in 1991, he asked me to go with him and help set up a program.

Dr. Dorr gave me a lot of autonomy. We set up a practice that was team focused. Many doctors from across the country came out with their staff to see how we developed such efficiency. We have established a "same day" program for our joint patients that has been very successful.

We also started Operation Walk in 1996 after Dr. Dorr returned from a trip to Russia. He knew there were people in developing countries that could not afford joint replacement, and countries that did not have the resources to provide them. So he decided to develop Operation Walk. He said "Jeri, get everything it takes to take care of a patient, and enough to operate 50 people". So I set to work getting donations and raising money. Our first trip was to Cuba. We have been to China, Nepal, Philippines, Tanzania, El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Panama and Vietnam.

We were able to get a grant several years ago and then spent time helping other doctors develop Operation Walk teams, so they too could help operate the huge volume of those in need. We also helped to develop the Operation Walk USA chapter. We operated our own local poor since 2004, realizing that there were as many needy people here in the USA as there were abroad. I have donated my time to Operation Walk for 18 years. Our overseas missions involve packing and shipping over 9000 pounds of cargo, getting 50 people together and getting them to work with others they may not know. It has been a wonderful experience.

Now I am at a time in my life where my boys are grown. My oldest retired from the Army after 23 years. The youngest is a Professor at UCSD.

My husband has lost most of his vision, and I am looking forward to retirement to spend more time with him. But how can I leave this profession that I love? I can't leave until Dr. Dorr retires (after 30 + years he would be lost without me). I have the most understanding husband and I have been able to do my work and give lots of time to him. I can juggle and everyone is happy.

I want this scholarship to remind a nurse that the possibilities are endless. Be fearless. I have landed in many foreign counties, not speaking the language, met with Health Ministry's, Diplomats, and Presidents. By others putting their trust in me, I have moved forward to achieve great things. You can do it too.

Being an orthopedic nurse is the thing I have been most proud of in my life. I am happy to help someone else find their path. Jeri

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jeri". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.