

Life Lessons Worth Paying Forward

JULIANE H. LEE, MD '94, MS



The late Kiuck Lee, PhD (left), and the late OkSoon Lee, MD



Juliane Lee, MD '94, MS

by Masarah Van Eyck

Some forms of support reveal themselves only years later. That's a fact that pediatric anesthesiologist Juliane H. Lee, MD '94, MS, learned firsthand.

"I remember hearing that 30 percent of my class would switch their fields at some point in their careers," Lee recalls about her medical training at the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health (SMPH).

"At the time, I thought, 'That will never be me!'" she laughs. "But, sure enough, I switched!"

The insight proved particularly reassuring when—after completing two categorical

years of her surgery residency at University of Toledo Medical Center and a research fellowship at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York—Lee decided to change the course of her career. Going on to earn a master's degree in physiology, biophysics and molecular medicine from Weill Graduate School of Medical Sciences at Cornell University in New York, she then completed a residency in anesthesiology followed by a fellowship in pediatric anesthesiology at the University of Illinois-Chicago Medical Center.

Today, as an assistant professor of anesthesiology at the Medical College of Wisconsin, Lee provides anesthesia at the

Children's Hospital of Wisconsin and pain management services at the Jane B. Pettit Pain Management and Headache Center in Milwaukee. She continues to pursue new avenues with the goal of providing exceptional care for her patients. For example, in addition to western therapies such as medications and cognitive behavioral therapy, she offers medical acupuncture, a therapy that "can provide a tremendous benefit to pediatric patients and is particularly attractive in the midst of the opioid crisis," she says.

The take-away lesson from those wise words heard many years ago?

"You realize it's OK to switch tracks and to pursue less traditional training, even later in life, if it will allow you to contribute in the best way that you are able," says the Wisconsin native who recently accepted an invitation to join the Wisconsin Medical Alumni Association Board of Directors.

"My parents taught me that we all have to help each other in the ways we are able, and to the best of our abilities."

She credits her decision to establish an endowed scholarship for SMPH students to that same drive to help others. Named in memory of her parents, Kiuck Lee, PhD, and OkSoon Lee, MD, and in honor of Stuart Knechtle, MD, a liver transplant surgeon and former member of the SMPH faculty, Lee says the scholarship is simply her way of "paying it forward."

"I have worked very long and very hard, but I also have been very fortunate," she shares.

To that end, Lee points first to her parents, whose value of education and service to others proved foundational to her and her four sisters, all of whom became physicians.

"Clearly we did emulate her," Lee says of her mother, a pediatrician who cared for underserved children through Milwaukee's Department of Health and, later, worked with developmentally delayed adults. "My father also participated in our care tremendously when we were growing up."

She notes that, in addition to her father's 40-year career as a physics professor at Marquette University in Milwaukee, "He also was very much 'Mr. Mom' at home."

With just seven years between the eldest and youngest daughters, that included lots of midnight feedings and changings.

Reflecting on her medical school activities and exams, Lee laughs as she recalls, "My parents were so supportive and loving during my time at Madison that my classmates used to ask if they'd adopt them!"

Another key element on her list of good fortune, Lee says—and for reasons which would not entirely reveal themselves until years later—is the support of Knechtle,

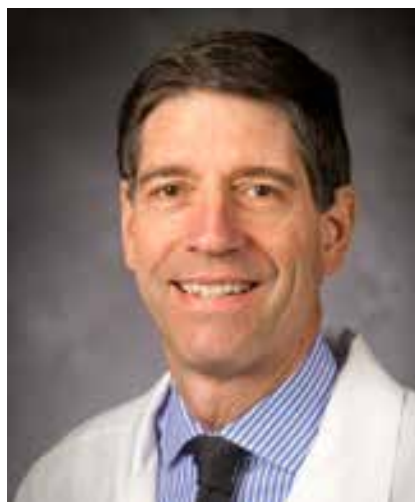
whom she first encountered while a student on her surgery rotation. Then a transplant surgeon at UW Hospital, Knechtle served on the SMPH faculty for nearly two decades before he moved his career to Duke University School of Medicine.

"He went above and beyond for everyone," Lee remembers of Knechtle, who was a key part of the team that performed UW Hospital's first live liver transplant. "He treated all of his patients as VIPs."

And 10 years after Lee graduated from medical school, her family experienced Knechtle's extraordinary care firsthand—first when Lee approached him to perform a transplant for her mother and, later, having gained the family's immense trust, to perform general surgery for her father. To this day, Lee is filled with gratitude when she remembers the ways he helped her parents navigate their medical issues toward the end of their lives.

"Finding someone you trust to take care of your own mother or father, like we trusted Dr. Knechtle, is something I don't take for granted. I remember this each time parents entrust their child's care to me. He is superior on so many different levels, as a person and as a surgeon. He personifies everything that my mom and dad believed in."

In fact, that gratitude for her own good fortune is at the heart of Lee's recent philanthropic gesture.



Stuart Knechtle, MD



Three of the five sisters in the Lee family (left to right): Grace Lee, MD, Julianee Lee, MD '94, MS, and Catherine Lee, MD; all five became physicians.

"To be able to create a scholarship and honor these three people and what they stood for, both collectively and individually, is really something special," she notes.

Of that choice, she adds, "My classmates and I hopefully contribute to our communities every day by helping people survive longer and live better. At a certain stage in my life, however, I wanted to create a professional and personal legacy beyond the sum of all the anesthesia cases I have provided."

Lee continues, "I really want to pay it forward by leaving something that lives on—not just dollars, but something to perpetuate the sentiment behind it."

That sentiment is two-fold for Lee, who says, "I hope this helps students realize there are people—unknown to them—who want to help them reach their goals; and I hope students will in turn be moved to help others in ways they are best equipped."

She concludes, "These are important qualities that have been passed on to me from my parents and role models like Dr. Knechtle. It's really a cycle that is an honor and privilege to perpetuate."