

# Sturges, Stanley Gordon (1929–2019)

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## BRUCE N. ANDERSON

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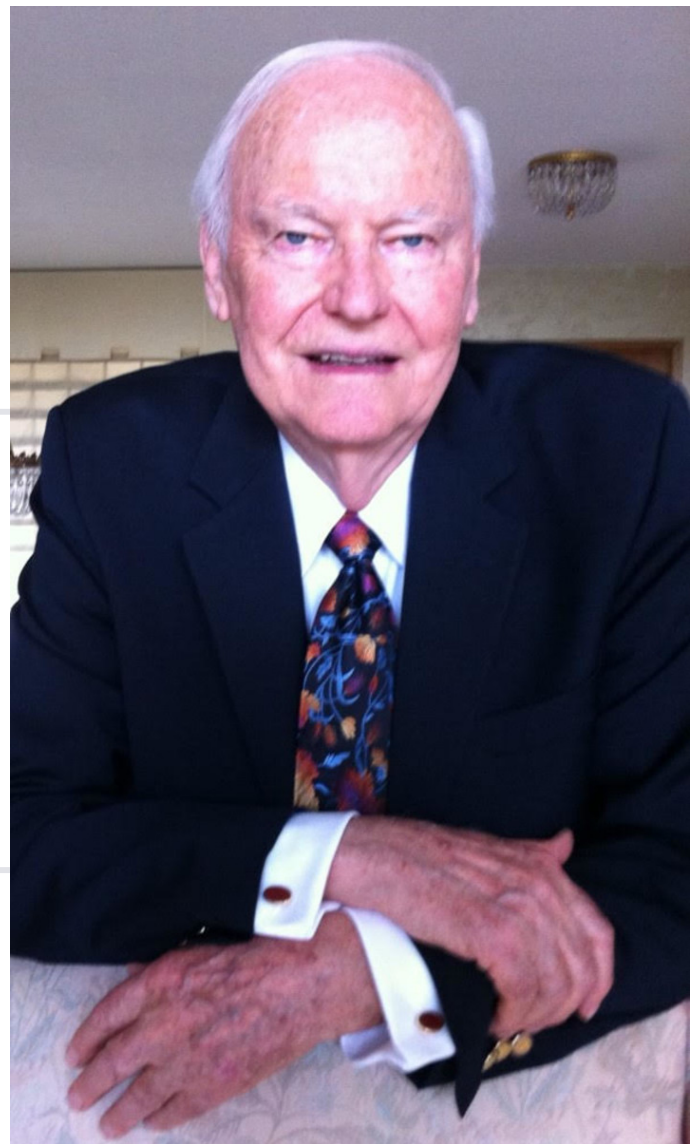
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Dr. Stanley G. Sturges achieved national recognition as an athlete and as a pioneering physician in Nepal.

Born in the Belgian Congo, Africa, October 14, 1929, to Dr. J. Hubert and Violet Sturges, Stanley Sturges' leadership and involvement in public medical service came naturally. Serving as Adventist missionaries was a tradition in the Sturges family. Stanley's parents served as medical missionaries in the Belgian Congo. His older brother Dr. Hubert F.

Sturges, his sister Elizabeth Taylor, his younger brother Dr. Keith Sturges (who followed him in Nepal), and his brother-in-law Dr. Leslie Smart all served as medical missionaries.<sup>1</sup>

After graduating from Pacific Union College (PUC) in 1951, Stanley entered medical school at the College of Medical Evangelists (now Loma Linda University School of Medicine) in Loma Linda, California. There his colleagues let off steam and frustration on the volleyball court. By their senior year, his group of medical school classmates had developed an extremely competitive volleyball team. Despite having no support from the medical school at which no formal sports programs existed, the "Evangelists" achieved remarkable successes. In 1955 they advanced to the National Collegiate volleyball championship finals before losing to Florida State. Their



Stanley G. Sturges, M.D.

Photo courtesy of Bruce N. Anderson.

achievements included the nomination of two members, including Stanley, as All-American athletes<sup>2</sup>

While in medical school, Stan married Raylene Duncan, a nurse whom he met while they were both students at PUC and who shared his desire for overseas medical missionary service. In 1957, after Stanley completed his internship, he and Raylene, with their three small children—Cheri, Charlene, and Stan – headed first to India for six months of language study and then to their assignment in Nepal.<sup>3</sup> Raylene gave birth to their fourth child, James, in the car when circumstances prevented them from reaching the hospital in Kathmandu.<sup>4</sup> Another son, Mark, would be born after their return from mission service.

Dr. Sturges' most widely-recognized achievement came in a land that, until the early 1950s, had been closed to Christian mission.<sup>5</sup> With Raylene's assistance, Sturges brought into being the Scheer Memorial Hospital in Banepa, Nepal. Funds for construction came through a gift by Clifford Scheer, a construction consultant from New Jersey, in memory of his parents, Carolyn and Charles Scheer.<sup>6</sup>

Sturges envisioned, designed, and, in large measure, built the hospital. His participation included selection and acquisition of the site, achieving government and local political support, contracting with local craftsmen, and overseeing the workers while speaking in Nepali, the local language. Stanley's parents had insisted that he work during the summers between school terms, and he now used the skills he had learned in various trades to advantage, supervising every aspect of construction. He recruited local artisan masons and carpenters as a means to support the local community financially, but did the plumbing himself.<sup>7</sup> Today a 120-bed medical center stands as a testament to the passionate mission of Dr. and Mrs. Sturges, and includes a college of nursing offering master's programs in a variety of specialties.<sup>8</sup>

Unexpected recognition came swiftly when the U.S. Junior Chamber of Commerce selected Sturges in 1961 as one of the Ten Outstanding Young Men of America. He met vice-president Richard M. Nixon (later United States president, 1969-1974), and he appeared on the Ed Sullivan show.<sup>9</sup> *Life* magazine named him one of the 100 leaders of the "Take-over generation" in 1962.<sup>10</sup>

In 1965, the Review and Herald Publishing Association published Stanley's book, *In the Valley of Seven Cities*. It is a fascinating chronicle of the contributions of Stan and Raylene Sturges to the health of 500,000 residents of the valley whom they touched with compassionate and modern medical care. When Pacific Union College honored the couple in 2016, Raylene expressed her and her husband's philosophy: "Don't forget the unbathed person in front of you may become your best friend."<sup>11</sup>

Upon his return from mission service, Stanley completed a psychiatric residency at the Mayo and Menninger clinics. He initiated a successful psychiatric program at the Kettering Medical Center in Ohio. Later he later led psychiatric programs in Portland and Astoria, Oregon.

In retirement Dr. Sturges pursued an interest in parliamentary procedure and acted as parliamentarian for the Oregon State Medical Society. Becoming a knowledgeable amateur geologist, he collected beautiful rocks that

he polished and often gave to friends. He was a trombone and tuba musician with the Sunnyside Brass group. After the death of Raylene in 2018, Stanley lived in a Portland retirement facility where he developed new friends, and continued to nourish relationships with his five children.<sup>12</sup>

In Nepal, Sturges insisted that all patients should receive equal respect, regardless of the prevalent caste system. One of their devoted helpers was Kanchha, a member of the vaidya caste, whom Dr. Sturges treated for tuberculosis. Kanchha was very loyal to Stan and Raylene, despite some criticisms from his peers. He once expressed to Stan his hope that when he died his fellow villagers would say of him, "There died an honest man, devoted to duty." The statement impressed Stan to reflect that he could only hope that his own sense of destiny was as strong as that of Kanchha.<sup>13</sup>

On July 12, 2019, Stanley G. Sturges, M.D., died an honest man, devoted to duty, to his family, and to his God.

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## NOTES

1. Stanley G. Sturges, *In the Valley of the Seven Cities* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1965), 3.

2. Bob Dellinger, "Volleyball Tournament Opens Play Today," *Daily Oklahoman*, May 11, 1955, 42; "Volleyball Title Won By F-State," *Miami Herald*, May 13, 1955, 48; Quinton Hamilton, "Loma Linda University NAIA Division II Men's Volleyball Team Loses to Florida State in Finals," Loma Linda University Drayson Center News, February 1, 2019, accessed April 9, 2020, <https://drayson.llu.edu/about/drayson-news/loma-linda-university-naia-division-ii-mens-volleyball-team-loses-florida-state-finals>.
3. Raymond S. Moore, "Medical Missionary Given High Honor," *ARH*, January 11, 1962, 15.
4. Ruth Wheeler, "American Doctor Sahib," *Youth's Instructor*, April 24, 1962, 16.
5. Stanley G. Sturges, M.D., "Witnessing for Christ in Nepal," *Signs of the Times*, October 1962, 14.
6. Sturges, *In the Valley of Seven Cities*, 79.
7. *Ibid.*, 84.
8. Scheer Memorial Adventist Hospital, accessed April 9, 2020, <http://www.scheermemhosp.org/>.
9. Sturges, *In the Valley of Seven Cities*, 191; Moore, "Medical Missionary Given High Honor," 15.
10. "A Red-Hot Hundred," *Life*, September 14, 1962, 5, accessed April 9, 2020, books.google.com. Among those pictured on the same page as Sturges were future New York City mayor John Lindsay, conductor Andre Previn, Metropolitan Opera soprano Leontyne Price, Broadway producer Harold Prince, presidential speechwriter and advisor Theodore Sorensen, civil rights leader and social activist Leon Sullivan, and novelist John Updike.
11. Video interview, Walter Utt Center, Pacific Union College, April 15, 2016.
12. Stanley G. Sturges Life sketch, Memorial program, August 4, 2019.
13. Sturges, *In the Valley of Seven Cities*, 45.

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