



Dr. Ellsworth E. Wareham.

Credit: Loma Linda University News.

Wareham, Ellsworth Edwin (1914–2018)

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Richard A. Schaefer, B.A. (La Sierra College). Director of Community Relations, Loma Linda University Medical Center, 1976-2000. Historian, Loma Linda University Health, 2000 to the present. President, Loma Linda Chamber of Commerce, 2008-2010. Commissioner, City of Loma Linda Historical Commission, 2008-2020. Schaefer's numerous books include *LEGACY* (heritage of Loma University Medical Center), *Service is Our Calling* (50th anniversary of Loma University School of Dentistry), *A Century of Caring* (history of Loma Linda University School of Nursing), *Glory of the Vision* (history of Loma Linda University School of Medicine), and *Protons: A Beam of Hope*, *CREATION: "Behold It Was Very Good"*. Schaefer is a prolific author, public relations professional, and public speaker who has presented and represented Loma Linda University history for over 50 years.

Ellsworth E. Wareham, pioneering cardiothoracic surgeon and co-founder of the Loma Linda University Overseas Heart Surgery Team, also became widely known during the final 15 years of his life for the vigorous health that made him an exemplar of the Loma Linda, California, region in "The Blue Zones" longevity study!¹

Early Years

Ellsworth Edwin was born October 3, 1914, to Dayton Benjamin Wareham (1892-1972) and Daisy Leah Baldwin Wareham (1898-1974) at Avinger, Texas, a tiny town near the state's border with Louisiana. Ellsworth was the second of the couple's six children. They were raised in Daisy Baldwin's devoutly-held Seventh-day Adventist faith. When Ellsworth was six years old, the family moved to Alberta, Canada.²

The family faced severe hardship farming in Canada during the Great Depression, but financial help from his grandmother enabled Ellsworth to enroll at Canadian Junior College (now Burman University) in Alberta in 1931. During the summer of 1932, he earned a scholarship canvassing Adventist books door-to-door to help finance a second year of studies.

Financial straits prevented Ellsworth from continuing his studies after completing his two years of junior college, but during the subsequent two years, while he was out of school, he developed a deep hunger to study medicine and determined to overcome any obstacles. He took additional pre-medical courses and then worked for another year as an orderly at Huntington Memorial Hospital in Pasadena, California (1936-1937), before enrolling in the College of Medical Evangelists at Loma Linda (CME) in 1937. After graduating with his medical degree in 1942, Dr. Wareham took a one-year internship in Seattle, Washington.³

The Making of a Heart Surgeon

Following a stint as a physician on a destroyer in the United States Navy during World War II, Wareham pursued advanced training as a surgery resident at White Memorial Hospital in Los Angeles. While there he met Barbara Nell Nix (b. 1929), a student nurse at the Glendale Sanitarium and Hospital. They were married in Glendale in 1950, and would have five children.⁴

Right after their marriage the Warehams moved to New York City where Ellsworth took a residency in chest (thoracic) surgery at Bellevue Hospital. Near the end of his residency in 1953, Dr. Wareham became attracted to the newly-emerging specialty of cardiac surgery. Again, a strong inner conviction developed: "I knew I should be a cardiac surgeon," he recalled.⁵ Even though the head of his program counseled otherwise, Wareham extended his residency at Bellevue another 18 months to study the new field of open heart surgery.

Dr. John Gibbon had performed the first open-heart surgery using a heart-lung machine in Philadelphia in May 1953.⁶ However, Wareham had no access to a heart-lung machine when he started performing open-heart surgery in New York. By cooling the surface of the patient's body he could operate on the heart for only six or seven minutes.

In 1955, Wareham joined the faculty of the CME School of Medicine and in 1958, with the benefits of a heart-lung machine, started the open-heart surgery program on the White Memorial Hospital campus in Los Angeles. He brought the program to the Loma Linda campus in 1964.⁷

The LLU Overseas Heart Surgery Team

While they were still based in Los Angeles, Wareham's surgery group started operating once a week at the Los Angeles County General Hospital a mile away from White Memorial. They used his station wagon to transport all the equipment and supplies needed to perform open-heart surgery. The packing and unpacking was laborious, but mastering the process of moving the equipment one mile prepared them for conceiving how to move it anywhere it might be needed.⁸

In 1963, Dr. Wareham and his colleague, Dr. Joan Coggin, organized the Loma Linda University Overseas Heart Surgery Team in response to a request from the office of Lyndon B. Johnson, then vice president of the United States. As a result of the vice president's visit to Pakistan, a Pakistani girl had been transported to the White Memorial Hospital for successful corrective surgery performed by Wareham's team. The prohibitive cost of bringing patients with similar needs from overseas to Los Angeles, led to the idea of transporting the six-person Loma Linda medical team and the ton of equipment needed for open-heart surgery overseas. Agreeing to devote their vacations to the project, the Heart Surgery Team, with funding from the Department of State's Agency for International Development (USAID), arrived in Karachi, Pakistan, on May 2, 1963.⁹

That month the team, based in Karachi Adventist Hospital, performed 44 heart surgeries and saw 300 patients in clinic. In addition to operating on needy patients, the team made the surgeries a teaching experience for Pakistani physicians observing via closed circuit TV. Consequently, these visiting physicians founded the Pakistan Heart Institute.¹⁰

Over the subsequent decades the Heart Surgery Team would travel to nations around the world where open-heart surgery was not being performed or was just starting. Hundreds of Loma Linda doctors, medical students, technicians, and nurses have served overseas in this endeavor and medical personnel from the countries visited have come to Loma Linda for further training.¹¹ As Richard Hart, president of Loma Linda University, pointed out in 2019, Dr. Wareham ensured that the team's visits made an impact that lasted beyond the relatively short time of their presence: "Wareham led the heart team to 16 different countries, always with one proviso—they were not going to come until there was a heart team there, ready to be taught heart surgery and all its necessary support functions."¹²

Legacy

Dr. Wareham performed more than 12,000 operations during his lengthy career and continued to assist with heart surgeries into his mid-90s. He died in Loma Linda on December 15, 2018, at the age of 104, survived by his wife of 68 years, Barbara, and four of their children.

Shortly after Dr. Wareham's death, author Dan Buettner, who included Loma Linda, California, in his study of the "blue zones"—locales where people enjoy exceptional longevity and quality of life, commented:

I met Ellsworth 14 years ago on assignment for National Geographic. I was looking for an individual who represented the lifestyle of Seventh Day Adventists, America's longest-lived subculture. I featured him in a cover story for continuing to perform open-heart surgery well into his 90's. He thrived beyond 100 because he stayed active, had strong faith, a big supportive family, ate only two meals a day (at 10am + 4pm) and lived a powerfully purpose-driven life. Ellsworth was a pioneering heart surgeon who became vegan after he noticed that meat-eater's plaque-filled arteries were crunchy to the touch, and that plant-eater's arteries were supple!¹³

As he looked back near the end of his life, Dr. Wareham cited a biblical promise that sustained him when circumstances seemed dark and uncertain: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct your paths" (Proverbs 3:5-6). "I did not completely fulfill my part of the bargain to acknowledge God in all my ways," he said, "but God fulfilled His part of the promise anyway."¹⁴

SOURCES

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NOTES

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2. "Dr Ellsworth Edwin Wareham," *Find a Grave*, Memorial ID 195416788, December 17, 2018, accessed July 6, 2022, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/195416788/ellsworth-edwin-wareham>; Mark A. Kellner, "In Memoriam: Ellsworth Wareham, 104, was 'Blue Zone' Pioneer and Cardiothoracic Surgeon," *Loma Linda University Health News*, December 17, 2018, accessed July 6, 2022, <https://news.llu.edu/patient-care/memoriam-ellsworth-wareham-104-was-blue-zone-pioneer-and-cardiothoracic-surgeon>; "Ellsworth E. Wareham, '42," *Alumni Journal* 90, No. 1 (Spring 2019): 27, accessed July 6, 2022, <https://scholarsrepository.llu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1026&context=sm-alumni-journal>.
3. "Ellsworth E. Wareham, '42."
4. Kellner, "In Memoriam: Ellsworth Wareham, 104."
5. Ellsworth E. Wareham, interview by author, November 22, 2002.
6. Rohinton J. Morris, "The History of Cardiopulmonary Bypass: Medical Advances," *American College of Cardiology*, June 19, 2019, accessed July 6, 2022, <https://www.acc.org/latest-in-cardiology/articles/2019/06/19/06/46/the-history-of-cardiopulmonary-bypass>.
7. "Ellsworth E. Wareham, '42."
8. Ellsworth E. Wareham, interview by author, November 22, 2002; C. Joan Coggin (as told to Penny Estes Wheeler), "An Open Heart for the Impossible, A retro look at the first globetrotting open-heart surgery team," *Women of Spirit*, March/April 2001, 19-21.
9. Ellsworth E. Wareham, interview by author, November 22, 2002.
10. For more on the LLU Overseas Heart Surgery Team, see Richard A. Schaefer, "Coggin, Charlotte Joan (1928–2018)," *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists*, August 28, 2021, accessed June 30, 2022, <https://encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=GHSD>.
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12. Richard H. Hart, "President's Notes," *Loma Linda University Health*, January 2019.
13. "In Memoriam: Dr. Ellsworth Wareham, Pioneering Blue Zones Heart Surgeon," *Blue Zones*, accessed July 6, 2022, <https://www.bluezones.com/2018/12/in-memoriam-dr-ellsworth-wareham-pioneering-blue-zones-heart-surgeon/>.
14. "Ellsworth E. Wareham, '42."

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