



FIGURE 1



FIGURE 2



FIGURE 3

Figure captions: 1 and 2. Dr. Lindstrom playing tennis; 3. Dr. Lindstrom skiing with family; 4. Dr. Lindstrom fishing; 5. Dr. Lindstrom's Ferrari California, a gift from his wife, Jackie.



FIGURE 4

# A 'TRUE GENTLEMAN' IN WORK, FAMILY, AND FUN



A credo learned in college informs a full and rewarding life.

BY RICHARD L. LINDSTROM, MD

**W**hen I was considering what topics to speak about during my Sheets-Martin Award Lecture at the 2020 Caribbean Eye Meeting (see “Caribbean Eye Sheets-Martin Award”), I decided to take the approach that audience members would be most interested in learning things they don’t already know about me—many of which involve my life away from the practice of ophthalmology. Here, I overview part of my lecture, which included some of the less public aspects of my life that have led me to where and who I am today.

## SOMETIMES LIFE CHOOSES YOU

As a kid, I had always planned to join my family’s construction business. My father’s heart was broken—in fact, he even disowned me for a period of time—when I made my decision to

attend medical school. That decision, however, was in no way planned. My advisor, H. Meade Cavert, MD, at the University of Minnesota, the school I transferred to after my first year of college at Gustavus Adolphus, was an associate dean of the medical school, and he kind of led me into medical school. It took him about a year to convince me not to go into the family business. When people ask me, “Did you always want to be a doctor?” my answer is an honest, “No.” Life just led me to the people who influenced me to become one.

I thought I wanted to either be a heart or orthopedic surgeon. But in my second year of medical school, Dr. Cavert introduced me to Donald J. Doughman, MD, who had just finished a 2-year fellowship in cornea at Harvard and was conducting research at the

University of Minnesota on corneal preservation. He needed a young medical student to work in his lab and assist in his research, and the dean suggested me. So, as did medical school, ophthalmology—through Dr. Doughman—chose me.

## MY MANTRA

While at the University of Minnesota, I joined a fraternity, Sigma Alpha Epsilon. Of the 50,000 students at the University of Minnesota, about 4,000 were involved with Greek life. The Greek system almost created a small college in the middle of a big college, and I had the opportunity to lead in that small college environment. That experience helped me to develop some of the leadership skills that I would later apply to my career in ophthalmology.

Greek life also introduced me to something called The True Gentleman. This saying is used at the Naval Academy as well.

I carry a copy of it with me in my wallet. It reads:

“The True Gentleman is the man whose conduct proceeds from good will and an acute sense of propriety, in who self-control is equal to all emergencies; who does not make the poor man conscious of his poverty, the obscure man of his obscurity, or any man of his inferiority or deformity; who is himself humble if necessity compels him to humble another; who does not flatter wealth, cringe before power, or boast of his own possessions of achievements; who speaks with frankness but always with sincerity and sympathy; whose deed follows his word; who thinks of the rights and feelings of others rather than his own; who appears well in any company; a man with whom honor is sacred and virtue safe.”

I pull my copy of The True Gentleman out about once a week. When I’m struggling with something, I pull it out and read it through, and sometimes it guides me to a good solution.



FIGURE 5.

## CARIBBEAN EYE SHEETS-MARTIN AWARD

Each year, The Caribbean Eye Meeting selects one leader in ophthalmology to celebrate with the Sheets-Martin Lecture and accompanying Sheets-Martin Award, named for John Sheets, MD, and Robert Gale Martin, MD. Drs. Sheets and Martin were founders of the American College of Eye Surgeons, the American Board of Eye Surgery, and the Society for Excellence in Eyecare. Over the years, this prestigious award lecture has transformed into a largely personal presentation in which recipients share their passions and personal journeys in life and ophthalmology. Other recent recipients of this award include Vance Thompson, MD, FACS (2015); Andy Corley (2016); Iqbal Ike K. Ahmed, MD, FRCSC (2017); Steven J. Dell, MD (2018); and Eric D. Donnenfeld, MD (2019).

### WHAT I’M MOST PROUD OF

When people ask me, “What are you most proud of?” my answer is always this: I’m most proud of the fellows I’ve trained over my years in practice. Daniel Nelson, MD, who was the lead in the Dry Eye Workshop Study and was the Chief of Surgery at Regions Hospital in Minnesota; Gregory Smith, MD, whose son I also participated in the training of; Edward J. Holland, MD; and Steven S. Lane, MD, are just a few of the well-known names I had the opportunity to help train.

I organize a retreat with my fellows every 3 to 4 years, and I stay in touch as best as possible. To be honest, I’m much prouder of the things that they’ve done than I am of the things that I’ve done.

### WHAT I’M UP TO NOW

**In the office.** This year, 2020, marks 51 years for me in medicine and 46 years in ophthalmology. I’m still active in office-based practice; I see patients and do office-based surgeries including LASIK, PRK, and CXL. I no longer operate in the main OR, however. I continue to spend a lot of time consulting, and I’ve become a venture capitalist.

I still give lectures and serve on the Executive Committee and Foundation Board for the ASCRS and the Governing Board for the International Society of Refractive Surgery. I’m also still training

fellows; I am not ready to give that up just yet.

**Outside the office.** I still love playing tennis (Figures 1 and 2), although I’m not quite as dexterous as I used to be, and I still love skiing, but I am starting to approach and potentially have already passed the safe side, age-wise. I can’t stop, though. Both of my kids are great skiers and fully certified instructors, and I now have five grandchildren who are also in love with skiing (Figure 3). I also like to go hunting and fishing with friends and family (Figure 4).

I think it’s important to indulge a little bit, if you can afford it, so I have toys now. I have had a motorcycle since the age of 16, and now I have a Ferrari California that my wife gave to me for our 25th wedding anniversary (Figure 5).

### LESSONS LEARNED

My life in and out of ophthalmology has guided me in so many ways toward valuable lessons, including the following.

**Have a mantra.** Have something like The True Gentleman or The Golden Rule to turn to when you need guidance.

**Embrace hard work.** Work hard, and work smart. Remember that there is no elevator to success, so you have to take the stairs. Further, challenges and change are what make life interesting, so embrace them.

**Choose wisely.** Choose your spouse, your partners, your friends, your business associates, and your advisors carefully. If you are unhappy, respect yourself enough to walk away or to make changes. Change the changeable, accept the unchangeable, and remove yourself from the unacceptable.

**Plan.** Incorporate family, career, and spiritual endeavors equally into your life. Don't be too busy making a living that you forget to make a life.

So many people desire to take a little more time off but assume they can't. I am living proof that you can: My wife Jackie and I recently purchased a home in Hawaii, and we spend 12 weeks there every winter. I'd work 1 month in Minnesota and then spend 1 month in Hawaii. You can take time off, too. Strong friendships and families are created through shared experiences, so always seek to live a balanced life.

**Be positive.** Say yes to opportunity, and always be positive. My wife says I'm a delusional optimist, and I take it as a high compliment. In my opinion, delusional optimists are the most joyful people.

**Do it with love.** Finally, as my mother taught me, do it with love—love for yourself and love for others. ■

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**RICHARD L. LINDSTROM, MD**

- Founder, Minnesota Eye Consultants, Minneapolis
- Member of the Board of Directors, Unifeyed Vision Partners, Minnesota
- Adjunct Clinical Professor Emeritus, Department of Ophthalmology, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis
- Visiting Professor, Gavin Herbert Eye Institute, University of California, Irvine
- [rlindstrom@mneye.com](mailto:rlindstrom@mneye.com)
- Financial disclosure: Minnesota Eye Consultants, Unifeyed Vision Partners