

THE LIVING ORTHOPAEDIC TREE



The specialty of Orthopaedic Surgery originated with the correction of childhood deformities. The word “orthopaedia” was coined by Nicholas Andry in 1741 when he published his book, titled *Orthopaedia: or, The Art of Correcting and Preventing Deformities in Children*. Therein, he states, “As to the title, I have formed it of two Greek words viz ὄρθος, straight and Παιίδον, a child. Out of the two words I have compounded that of Orthopaedia to express in one term the design I propose which is to teach the different methods of preventing and correcting the deformities of children.” This analogy of the crooked tree tied to a strong post reflects the basis of Orthopaedic Surgery—to correct deformities.

While this living artwork represents the historical symbol of the Tree of Andry, the process of its creation reflects the educational process. The initial training of this tree required four years, which is about the same time it takes to train an Orthopaedic resident. However, as living art, the training process is lifelong. With ever-increasing medical knowledge, every Orthopaedic surgeon must engage in a lifelong pursuit of learning.

History of The Living Orthopaedic Tree

I was first exposed to Orthopaedic Surgery during my third medical school year, and I chose to spend additional elective time during my fourth year. During that rotation, I worked with a Pediatric Orthopaedic Surgeon, Dr. William Bunnell. He demonstrated compassion for his patients, listening to their stories with genuine concern and correcting their deformities with precision surgery. I recognized that I could make a practical difference in people’s lives, and I decided to pursue a career in Orthopaedic Surgery.

Shortly after beginning my Orthopaedic Surgery residency in 1997, I had the idea of recreating the Orthopaedic Tree of Andry in living form. As a medical student rotating on the Orthopaedics Service with Dr. Bunnell, I had been introduced to the tree as a symbol of the specialty. I found a Chinese elm tree (*Ulmus parvifolia*) in a local nursery that I thought would make a suitable specimen. Being a bonsai enthusiast, I had several years of experience in the training of miniature trees. The training of this particular tree began around the same time I commenced my Orthopaedic training. I set the goal of finishing the tree by graduation, so that its training would parallel my course in residency. In time, the tree gradually took shape. There were some difficulties, such as a broken trunk that had to be splinted straight, causing a year’s setback. By graduation, the tree had taken a semblance to the Tree of Andry. After keeping the project a secret for four years, my graduating class presented the tree to our mentor and former Chairman, Dr. Bunnell.

— Montri D. Wongworawat



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