

**FINAL
Annual Meeting 2024
June 11, 2024**

**Bruce Scott, MD
Inaugural Address**

My Life was Changed by a Doctor

Good evening and thank you so much for that kind introduction, Dr. Underwood.

Thank you to my esteemed colleagues seated behind me ... the exceptional men and women who have held the office of AMA president with honor and distinction ... physician leaders from every state...my personal guests who have joined me on stage, each of you has played an indispensable role in my life ...and to all of you... it is a privilege to speak to you tonight.

As you heard, I have attended 72 consecutive House of Delegates meetings, that's 36 inaugurations - I have to say, "This one is my favorite!"

I've witnessed amazing physician leaders, over the years, stand at this podium and take that oath.

What a rare and precious honor it is for me to stand among the remarkable leaders who've preceded me, many of whom are on this stage with me tonight.

At my first AMA meeting, Stormy Johnson was the Speaker – he became my role model and my friend. Years later, I was lucky enough to share a podium with two amazing women, Sue Bailey, and Lisa Egbert. You each helped make me a better leader...thank you.

One of those who is not on this stage tonight is Donald Palmisano. You might have noticed a chair left empty for him in the row of former presidents. Donald was my mentor when I was the young physician on the Board - he probably wondered what he did to deserve that punishment. We actually became close friends.

He called me the "Young Grasshopper"... taken from the movie, Karate Kid. I know he is here with me tonight in spirit, as he always promised he would be at my inauguration. Donald always believed,

frankly even more than me...that someday I would take that oath.

He learned from his father, a beat cop in New Orleans, the advice that he shared with me and so many others, "Do your homework, have courage, never give up" ...I was listening, Donald.

I also want to recognize his widow, Robin, for honoring me with her presence here tonight. Thank you, Robin.

Thank you also to my family and dear friends who have traveled to be here this evening – it means so much to share this special moment with you.

Pat, thank you for asking for God's blessing to watch over me and be with me as I embark on this journey.

I would not be here tonight without the support of the Kentucky Medical Association. I am sure it was Greg Cooper's nominating speeches that pushed me over the finish line to become the vice speaker, speaker, and now, president of the "whole dang AMA", as Greg would say.

Thank you to the Southeastern delegation, the otolaryngology section council, the Texas Medical Association, and of course the ghost caucus – you may be ghosts to some, but you will always be great friends to me.

Thank you also to my partners, past and present. I was fortunate to join two outstanding surgeons at Kentuckiana Ear, Nose & Throat after my fellowship. I am still with that practice today. I've gone from being the new guy with all the ideas to being the senior partner, a nice way of saying "the old dude."

One of my original partners, Dr. Silk, and three of my current partners, Drs. Severtson, Higgins and Miller, are here tonight. Thank you for always supporting what I do...and taking on the extra work to make it possible.

I know that I only stand here tonight because of the love and support from so many people, many gathered here, and others...here in spirit.

I am humbled, and grateful.

And...I....AM...READY.

As I look out at the faces of so many fellow physicians, I am reminded of the enormity of the decision we made when we chose this profession, and our ability to change lives.

I am **reminded** of the passion we share for this...joy...called...medicine.

I am in **awe** of the trust our patients place in us...to help them ... to heal them.

And I am eternally grateful for the way my life was changed by a doctor.

My brother John and I enjoyed building and flying model airplanes as kids. One Saturday afternoon when I was about 12 years old, we were working on one of those planes in the garage of our family home. We needed something from up high in the rafters, so I climbed a ladder and was reaching above my head when the ladder slipped, and I fell. I grabbed for something, anything that would stop my fall ... and sure enough, what I caught was a large metal hook that held various tools.

It went straight through my hand.

There I was – in pain and in shock, bleeding down my arm. My mom heard my brother's screams and came running. Later she told me she almost fainted when she saw the hook through my hand. My parents got me to the nearest ER, hook-in-hand, with the spark plug wrench and other tools still hanging on it.

After an examination by a general surgeon, the doctor pulled my parents to the other side of the curtain separating the exam bays. You all know the curtain I'm talking about.

The doctor told my parents that I would need surgery and that I was unlikely to ever regain normal use of my hand, and I would probably lose at least two fingers.

Let me tell you, those curtains are not as soundproof as we doctors sometimes think. I heard every ...single...word.

My parents were horrified...but they were not deterred.

They believed in the power of physicians to heal ... and they were determined to find a doctor who could help me. They took me to Jewish Hospital, home to one of the premier hand surgery fellowship programs in the country. One of their lead surgeons, Dr. Joseph Kutz, operated on my hand that same day. He removed the hook...tools and all.

Dr. Kutz saved my hand and spared my fingers ... forever changing the course of my life... and although I didn't know it at the time, putting me on the path that led to tonight. To this stage ... to this incredible moment.

I am a surgeon...using this very hand...because of a doctor.

Growing up in a small house in Louisville with my parents, three sisters and two brothers...there were, shall we say, a few challenges. Not the least of which was the one bathroom we all shared.

While neither of my parents had the opportunity to go to college, they both believed that education was the pathway to success. They worked hard and sacrificed so that my siblings and I could go to the best schools, always pushing us to excel. It's in large part because of them that all of us are successful.

Thank you to each of my brothers and sisters, all here tonight, for the positive example that you set for me.

As the youngest boy in a large Catholic family – I knew there were only two professions that would make my mom most proud – doctor or priest – and I think Mom realized early on that the priest thing was not happening.

My mom is a remarkable woman - faith and family have always been at the center of her life. She hates it when I tell people her age, but at 96...she should be bragging. Still as sharp as a tack. I'll admit when I can't remember something, I call her, and she fills in all the details.

She is sitting in the front row here with us this evening.

Mom, it means the world to me that you are here tonight...thank you.

My father, even at home, was always working. He might have been repairing something around the house, tinkering in the garage, or doing yard work. And as soon as we were old enough, he involved us in his projects. He taught me that every job is important, every role has an impact - not only because of the task performed, but the standard you set while performing it.

My dad, who passed away in 2011, was our example that work didn't stop until a task was done – and done right.

In his own way my father made a medicinal product – of course, I mean bourbon. He worked his entire life at a distillery - and yet, he never drank.

So much for, like father, like son.

But I know he's looking down and smiling tonight.

Thank you, Dad, for everything you did for our family and the values you instilled in me.

I know it's hard to believe, but I was not the most athletically inclined kid.

When teams were chosen, I was often the last one remaining. I would frequently hear, "You can have Bruce."

But I found a different way to excel - rhetoric and debate.

My trophies had little people standing behind podiums instead of holding a baseball bat or basketball.

It was said that I had the gift of gab.

My brother, John, reminded me the other day that my attempts at “rhetoric” with the neighborhood bullies often resulted in him getting in fights to protect me.

But that gift of gab earned me a debate scholarship to Vanderbilt University where I honed my power of persuasion.

The best and most life changing thing I took away from Vanderbilt was not my degree, but the love of my life – Christy. We met as freshmen. We dated all through college and I finally convinced her to marry me after my second year of medical school – see that power of persuasion paid off!

Many of you know Christy...she is definitely my better half, my sounding board, my editor and critic, travel agent and fashion adviser.

She is my partner in everything, and my best friend. A wonderful mother to our children – Preston, Stephanie and Ian, “Mimi” to our two beautiful granddaughters. And the best spouse anyone could ever wish for.

We celebrated our 39th anniversary last week in Nashville where we met. It sounds romantic, but I was actually there for an AMA assignment ... and I convinced her to accompany me.

Thank you, Christy, for your love. I am so thankful for you...and for us.

Preston, Stephanie and Ian - you are each so unique and wonderful in your own ways; your mom and I still sometimes wonder HOW you all came from the same gene pool. You all are intelligent, hardworking, driven, and most importantly, great human beings.

As parents, we hope that our children find life partners who share their values, who love them, and

make them happy. Kathryn, Kyle and Paige – the three of you are beyond what we could have hoped for. We are so blessed to have you in our family.

By the way, some of you may know that Christy grew up in Louisiana. So, I've made arrangements for a nod to her past at the end of this ceremony to get our celebration started.

So...that's how I got here. Now, let me tell you why I'm here.

I am passionate about practicing medicine. I am proud of our profession.

What physicians do every day has the incredible power to change lives for the better. I'm proof of that. But as a practicing physician, I can only impact one person at a time.

The AMA does for physicians and our patients what we as individual physicians cannot do.

At my first AMA meeting, I saw the power that physicians could have when we come together as a unified body. All these years later, I still believe the AMA can and does make a difference for our patients and our profession.

We are committed to protecting the patient-physician relationship.

Standing up for science and the ethical practice of medicine.

Pushing back against reckless scope expansions.

Fighting for fair payment that supports thriving practices.

Pressing for relief from administrative burdens --- so that physicians can focus our attention on what matters most - our patients.

The AMA is the physicians' powerful ally in Congress, in state capitals, in the court room, the board room and the exam room.

And the policy issues we discuss and debate here....are my working reality.

I became a physician to care for patients, and we all know that's getting tougher every day.

Our health care system should help physicians provide good care, not get in the way.

Physicians are struggling with two decades of spiraling Medicare payment cuts and ever-increasing administrative burdens.

These concerns are no longer theoretical.

Almost two-thirds of physicians show signs of burnout. One-third plan to reduce their hours. One in five physicians are hoping to stop practicing or retire in the next two years. Physicians are literally closing their doors.

We can't afford to lose even one more doctor!

As a physician in an independent practice, I live these issues every day.

I see my colleagues struggling. I feel the urgency of the moment.

I will bring that urgency to my presidency.

You better believe I'm ready to fight.

Fight for you.

Fight for us.

Fight for our profession and our patients.

More than at any time I can remember, the AMA matters.

But when the battles are difficult, and victory feels out of reach, it's important to remember our why.

It's important to remember what brought us here...why we fight.

Not long ago, I was in the daily “grind” of my clinical practice, seeing patients and dealing with the typical hassles we all face. On the schedule, I saw the name of a patient I had operated on years before. I remembered Rayman distinctly - I had performed a relatively rare voice-sparing laryngeal cancer surgery on him.

Rayman was a young man when he was diagnosed, and his cute little girl would come with him to his appointments. She always looked forward to the lollipops at the front desk. He had done well after his surgery and had been cancer free for five years of follow-up appointments. So, when I SAW his name on my schedule, I feared the worst...a late recurrence ...or a new cancer.

Far from it.

Rayman greeted me with a big smile and a clear voice. He said, “I had to come to see you doc. I wanted you to know that I walked my daughter down the aisle last Saturday and I gave the toast...for all to hear...my daughter remembers you...and I will never forget you.”

“You saved my life.

You saved my voice!”

Needless to say, that was a special moment, my spirits were lifted, and the “grind” of daily practice was no more. My passion for medicine was renewed.

I have been blessed to receive many kind notes from patients and words of appreciation over the years. And as much as my patients say that I have helped them, it is *their* words, and *their* gratitude, that are my greatest rewards.

This is why we fight.

They are why we fight.

When I remember the look on the face of the man, and his spouse, when I told them that the tumor was benign and we were able to save his facial nerve, anticipating a full recovery...

I am reminded of our power to heal.

When I recall the smile of the teenage boy who looked in the mirror as I removed the splint from his previously twisted nose - and he was able to breathe through it for the first time in years ...

I am reminded of our power to restore.

When a woman told me that the repair of her facial fractures and scars gave her the confidence to leave an abusive relationship,...restoring not only her beauty but more importantly her dignity ...

I am reminded of our power to change lives.

But most remarkable was the woman for whom I had little to offer who said, "Thank you for listening. Bless you and all the doctors for what you do."

I am reminded, in each of these moments, of our power for caring and compassion.

And...I extend my patient's gratitude to every physician here.

Years after my hand surgery, I returned to Jewish Hospital, not as a patient, but as an otolaryngologist. One day, I saw my surgeon, Dr. Kutz, in the physicians' lounge. I showed him my hand and I thanked him. He said he remembered the young boy with the hook and all the tools still attached.

After thousands of hand surgeries, I suspect he was just being nice...but it didn't matter.

He was my doctor. He changed my life.

In so many ways...he made this night possible.

Each of us is shaped by experiences in our past. But on this night – inauguration night – we look forward to the possibilities of tomorrow.

Our future...is not the one we wish for...but the one we FIGHT for – together...

We are not defined by what divides us...but what unites us.

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We are bound together by our profession, and we must stand together as physicians...

I am honored to be your president . . . and to lead us into that future.

Now, let's get to work!

Thank you.