

John L. Myers '74
Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters

Presented May 14, 2017

John L. Myers, it must feel very good to stand on this stage today — for the first time at a Wabash Commencement ceremony. While you were one of the top students in the Class of 1974, you never received your Wabash sheepskin because you left for medical school at Indiana University a year early. Today we are honored to provide you the degree you earned more than four decades ago.

A native of Wabash, Indiana, you seemed destined to achieve your dreams of becoming a world-class physician when you enrolled at Wabash in 1970. Your father, Donald, who died when you were young, was a veterinarian, and your mother, Shirley, a medical technologist. You would even marry a registered nurse, Jo Ellen, with whom you have been wed for nearly 40 years. You were an academically gifted biology major and member of Sigma Chi, but the tragic death of your father, tough financial circumstances, and the need to help your mother raise your younger siblings caused you to leave the College early. You paved the way and made sacrifices so that your brother, Bill, now a dentist, could attend Wabash.

You graduated from the IU School of Medicine in 1977. A surgical residency and fellowship in cardiothoracic surgery at the Hersey Medical Center and Penn State University College of Medicine followed. You would also serve fellowships in pediatric heart surgery at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia and at the Hospital for Sick Children at Great Ormond Street in London. The latter fellowship foreshadowed your inspiring career of helping the sickest of the sick children of our world — at home in Philadelphia and across the globe.

By 1993 you had become a Full Professor of Surgery and Pediatrics, and Chief of Pediatric and Congenital Heart Surgery at Penn State's Hershey Children's Hospital. Five years before becoming a full professor, you began taking yearly mission trips to perform pediatric heart surgery in Columbia and Venezuela. When political conditions changed, you and a colleague developed an award-winning surgical program in Guayaquil, Ecuador. For the last 20 years, you have led a team of 40 health care professionals on two-week missions, during which you teach local surgeons life-saving techniques, while performing, on average, 30 open-heart surgeries on sick children. Today, a team of three surgeons you helped to train, perform more than 200 surgeries per year. Yet you continue to travel there, free of charge, for two weeks each November to consult and provide assistance for the most vexing cardiologic problems.

Younger brothers are often short on praise for older siblings, yet your brother, Bill, is your biggest fan. He said, "Jack fights for the lives of children with congenital heart defects so they have a chance to live full and productive lives. He has distinguished himself in his chosen profession, and is a loyal son of Wabash."

In winning the Sir James Carreras Award, you said, “When you operate on these children, you are doing something that would not have been done if you had not been there.” That would be a significant understatement! Indeed, you have demonstrated that the committed actions of a few dedicated people can save the lives of thousands of children.

In addition to your admirable international service, you are among the very finest of surgeons. One of just 350 world-wide members of the Congenital Heart Surgeons Society, you are also a member of the American Association for Thoracic Surgery and the Society of Thoracic Surgeons. Your more than 5,000 heart surgeries in newborns and children at one of the top-ranked programs in the country earn our deepest respect and profound congratulations.

Jack, you exemplify everything good and noble about a Wabash College graduate. You are only lacking a degree you would easily have obtained but for circumstances beyond your control. For genuinely living out all that it means to think critically, act responsibly, lead effectively, and — especially — live humanely, I am honored to present you with the degree you so richly deserve.

Therefore, by the authority vested in me by the Board of Trustees of Wabash College and delegated to that Board by the State of Indiana, I do hereby confer upon you the degree of Doctor of Humane Letters, *honoris causa*, with all the rights, privileges, and responsibilities thereunto appertaining, of which this citation shall be a permanent witness.

Gregory D. Hess
President