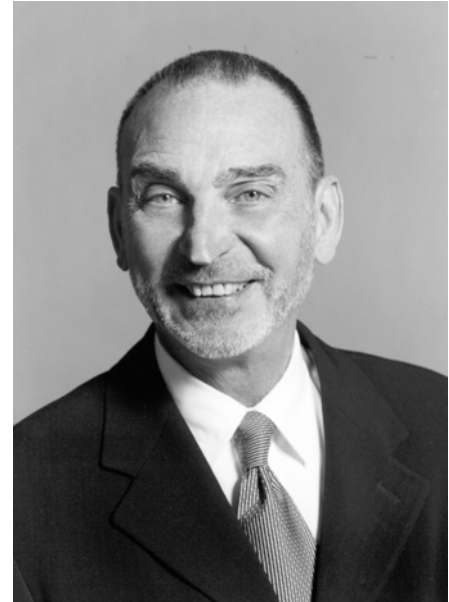




American Association of Neurological Surgeons

Stan Pelofsky, MD AANS President 2001-2002



The year I served as President of the American Association of Neurological Surgeons was a year that no one will forget. My term began in April 2001—in September the World Trade Center fell. The world rocked. America was changed. In the months that followed the calamity, everything seemed uncertain: Was this the beginning of war? When would we be attacked again? How would neurosurgeons respond to this and future attacks? Each of us worried about the future of our country, our professions, and quite frankly, ourselves.

It was evident immediately after the attacks that organized neurosurgery had no response plan for a national catastrophe. I sent an e-blast to our membership around the world and asked them to add their names and contact information to a volunteer list, so we would have easy access to volunteers during times of crisis. Over five hundred neurosurgeons asked to be included. The list was also used in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, and I am hopeful that the AANS will continue to update the list and be at the ready for future emergencies of any kind or size.

As we all know, life goes on, and the life of the AANS went on before, during, and after the September 11th disaster. The issues at play when I assumed the presidency were complex and potentially destructive to our professional unity and centered greatly around a contentious relationship between the leadership of the AANS and the Congress of Neurological Surgeons (CNS). Both groups competed with one another and, it was argued, possibly hurt the other, so I favored a movement to combine the two organizations. Prior to my assuming the presidency, the movement had begun to gain momentum. The sitting CNS President was Dr. Assam Awad, and in an effort to calm the organizational waters, I attended the CNS Board of Director's summer meeting in Bermuda, where Dr. Awad and I attempted to negotiate a better relationship between our two constituencies, as well as to discuss the pros and cons of a merger. I regret to say that, although the waters became less turbulent, an organizational merger never occurred.

The tense relationship between the AANS and the CNS was not all; I also had growing concern regarding a lack of cooperation and communication among all the major neurosurgical organizations in this country. Each organization seemed to be operating in a vacuum, of sorts,

which meant that we were duplicating, not coordinating, our efforts on multiple fronts. By the time I began my presidency, I had already been working for several years with Drs. Ed Laws, Marty Weiss, and Russell Travis in order to correct the problem. We conceived the idea of holding a neurosurgical “summit” whereby the AANS, the CNS, the American Board of Neurological Surgeons, the Council of State Neurosurgical Societies, and the Senior Society would meet during the annual AANS scientific conference in order to discuss critical neurosurgical issues of the day. We held the first such summit at the April 2001 annual meeting, and I believe that this summit was the beginning of an improved communication effort that continues to this day.

Organizational divides and the events of September 11th percolated in the background of my entire presidency, but many other important matters of business simmered. I will confess that the business of running the AANS was daunting, especially when the headquarters was located 1500 miles from my home. I felt fortunate when I took office, however, that the AANS had recently hired a new executive director, Mr. Tom Marshall. We worked well together and were able to energize the Membership Division of the AANS, as well as to revise the existing accounting principles that corrected years of outdated business practices. We also initiated a five-year contractual relationship for the Executive Director’s position, which replaced a one-year contract, to better ensure stability and growth for the organization.

Tom Marshall’s excellent direction and leadership at our headquarters allowed me the freedom to focus on several projects that I felt were important to our mission and vision, and that I feel defined my presidency. One such effort was the “Angel Program,” whereby corporations were asked to financially support educational, scientific, and professional aspects of the AANS. Two corporations, the Gliadel Wafer Company and Six Flags Over Texas, made generous contributions toward this vision. This association continued when Six Flags contracted with the AANS partner company, Neuro-Knowledge, to perform an outcome analysis study of the relationship between roller-coaster rides and intracranial injury, which proved to be an invaluable resource for the United States Congress in determining whether or not to ban certain kinds of amusement park rides.

It certainly would not be ethical to ask for financial help from outside corporations if we, ourselves, did not contribute to the effort. The Angel Program, therefore, went hand-in-hand with another program of my presidency I called the “Buying Immortality Program.” This program allowed an individual neurosurgeon, or a group of neurosurgeons, to endow or sponsor a major AANS program, project, clinical course, lectureship, workshop, or annual meeting event, thereby honoring the individual donor while supporting our educational and scientific mission. I am pleased to say that numerous lectureships and annual program events are now sponsored by individual members of the AANS, and I hope that this noble effort continues.

Individual members truly make up the whole of organized neurosurgery, but I knew that our ranks were not as diverse as they could be. I attempted to address this issue during my year as

president by broadening the dialogue between the AANS and Women in Neurosurgery (WINS), and by initiating a program during our annual meeting that allowed neurosurgeons from around the world to participate more actively. At the forefront of this effort was Dr. Gail Rousseau, who worked tirelessly to organize the first Francophile Conference held at our annual meeting in Chicago, and that was attended by more than 100 French-speaking neurosurgeons. I hoped that this would be the first of many such conferences held during the annual scientific meeting, each featuring a different country, so that neurosurgeons from a specific country could be supported and celebrated. The Francophile Conference was followed by a Japanese conference held the next year, followed by a South American conference. This effort continues to bring a more diverse voice to our organization.

Summarizing the professional side of my year as president is challenging enough, but expressing the more personal aspects of the is even more difficult. Simply put, the year was a highlight of my professional and personal life, a life experience shared by my wife, my colleagues, and my friends, that challenged me intellectually, physically, and emotionally. The year culminated in Chicago at the annual AANS scientific meeting, which took place at the end of my year as president. I wanted every moment of that meeting to be planned, thought about, created, and developed not only to provide the highest quality professional and scientific program, but also to make our humanity as important as science. I believed that my best chance to convey this message was during my presidential address, but I knew that this was easier said than done.

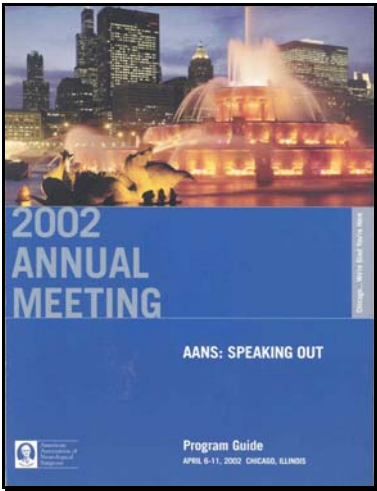
It seems funny now, but when I was notified that I had been elected president, my first thought was not about the AANS itself. All I could think was, “Oh my God—I’ll have to give a speech!” The thought was intimidating, because speech-writing was not my talent. Then it occurred to me that my wife, Raina, was a good writer. Maybe she and I could work on the speech together. I had already decided that I wanted Raina to introduce me at the meeting, which I knew broke the tradition of having our vice president do the honors, because I wanted the meeting to be centered around our human connections and professional camaraderie. Raina eventually created a videotape about my life that she used as my introduction, and I felt that it perfectly complimented the existential speech that she and I produced together. The purpose of the speech, entitled “The Voice of Art, and the Art of Medicine,” was to reunite neurosurgeons with their humanity, and to allow all the conference attendees to understand the art, not just the science, of their profession. The speech itself was set off by presenting important aspects of Vincent Van Gogh’s life and art, and by illustrating our human struggles through several film clips of Woody Allen’s movie *Hannah and Her Sisters*. The audience response to the speech was overwhelming! Many people wrote us heartfelt letters of appreciation, and in fact, Raina and I still receive requests for transcripts.

Raina and I did not know that our speech would so closely relate to the speech given by our Cushing Orator, Benazir Bhutto who, ironically, was not our first choice for a speaker. Initially we selected Garrison Keillor, in keeping with our humanistic theme, but he was unfortunately scheduled for coronary by-pass surgery days before the meeting. Just prior to September 11th,

we booked Rudy Giuliani, then mayor of New York City, but of course the events of 9/11 disrupted this plan. As it turned out, those very events made Ms. Bhutto's presence at the meeting all the more timely, when she presented the perspective of the only woman ever to lead an Islamic country, and when she echoed the need for authentic human connections. She was a vision in white on the stage, mesmerizing the audience and offering inspiration, insight, and knowledge at a time when we were all searching for a deeper understanding of the recent and devastating events that had befallen our country.

Ms. Bhutto's presentation was equaled, however, by our Schneider lecturer, Dr. Pat Kelly, a Vietnam veteran, who served with me in 1968-1969, and who delivered an electrifying and moving speech and video about his life-altering experiences during that war. Dr. Kelly's dramatic and passionate performance brought the house down. I dare say that it will go down in AANS history as the most powerful presentation ever given, and I am especially proud that it was given during my final week as president.

September 2006

Vital Statistics		
	2001-2002 Officer:	Stan Pelofsky, President Roberto Heros, President Elect Volker Sonntag, Vice President Robert Ratcheson, Secretary Arthur Day, Treasurer
	Annual Meeting Location:	Chicago, IL
	Presidential Address:	The voice of art and the art of medicine. JNeurosurg 97:1261-1268, 2002.
	Cushing Orator:	Benazir Bhutto, former Prime Minister of Pakistan. The Need for Leadership in a Dangerous World. [Not Published]
	Awards:	Cushing Medal - Edward R. Laws, Jr. Distinguished Service - John A. Jane, Sr. Humanitarian - Edgar M. Housepian
	Lectures:	Hunt-Wilson – Edward R. Laws, Jr. Rhoton Family – Richard G. Fessler Schneider – Patrick J. Kelly
	Membership:	6339