Dr. Maureen Rogers, the first Australian pediatric dermatologist

“Not everybody can be famous but everybody can be great, because greatness is determined by service.”
[Martin Luther King Jr.]

Such a quote is apt for Maureen Rogers (nee McGhee), the first Australian pediatric dermatologist. Fame and accolades have never inspired her. For Maureen, commitment to the well-being of her patients, her students, and her family, and thus her commitment to service to all, has been her driving motivation.

Maureen was born in Scotland in 1942, an only child to nonmedical parents. From ages 7 to 11, she lived in Australia, a relaxed sunny fragment of her childhood. Returning to the United Kingdom and to a strict English boarding school was a shock, but one that instilled a work ethic that served her well throughout her career. During a particularly dreary sermon in a local seventh-century church, she suddenly decided that medicine was to be her career path, and she did not veer from this decision.

Her family then relocated back to Australia, and Maureen entered the faculty of medicine at the University of Sydney, graduating in 1966. Maureen had planned to pursue a career in anesthetics, but during her first residency year, she met a widowed ophthalmologist, Peter Rogers (Fig. 1). Falling in love and marrying a widower with five children gave Maureen, at age 25, an instant family with the resultant weighty responsibilities. She did not have children of her own. Always a pragmatist, she put her anesthetic dreams on hold and assisted Peter with his ophthalmology cases. Life eventually settled into a manageable routine and, yearning for mental stimulation, Maureen decided to recommence her studies. Again, the pragmatist in Maureen prevailed. She chose dermatology, the only specialty that could, at that stage, be pursued without a full-time hospital position. After fulfilling an apprenticeship system, and attending 500 unpaid clinics, Maureen completed her final exams successfully, and in 1974, she became a fellow of the Australasian College of Dermatologists.

She commenced consultant appointments at various hospitals including St Vincent’s Hospital Sydney, Mater Misericordiae North Sydney, and the Royal Alexandra Hospital for Children (later The Children’s Hospital at Westmead when the hospital relocated, Fig. 2). She also established a busy private practice and soon was treating mostly skin cancers in adults due to Australia’s sunny climate.

However, Maureen was never completely comfortable with a scalpel in her hand and had always been more interested in pediatric patients. In 1982, at age 40, she traveled to the other side of the world to attend her first American Society of Pediatric Dermatology meeting in Aspen, Colorado. This was an inspiration, meeting some of the early greats of pediatric dermatology, including William Weston, Samuel Weinberg, Alvin Jacobs, Sidney Hurwitz, Jim Rasmussen, Nancy Esterly, and Bernice Krafchik. It was during the meeting that she decided to devote herself entirely to pediatric dermatology. She flew home and immediately left her adult hospital appointments and started to divest herself of her adult patients. She became the first dedicated pediatric dermatologist in Australia, pioneering this new field in our country.

During the 23 years that followed, her unwavering passion for the health of children and dermatology led her to become one of the exceptional leaders in this field. She was head of the Department of Dermatology at Royal Alexandra Hospital for Children/The Children’s Hospital at Westmead from 1984–2005 and was also a consultant dermatologist at Royal North Shore Hospital (neonatal department) and an associate pediatrician at King George V Hospital (neonatal department).

The Society for Pediatric Dermatology remained a vital part of her life, and she missed only one annual meeting in the years from that first meeting in 1982 until her retirement in 2005. Many other pediatric dermatologists became colleagues and friends, including some of the great women practitioners such as Julie Prendiville, Ilona Frieden, Amy Paller, Susi Bayliss, Patricia Treadwell, and Odile Enjolras.

She was on the editorial board of the journal Pediatric Dermatology for many years and a longtime editor of the Photo Quiz section of this journal (Fig. 3). She has been an associate editor of several editions of the textbook, Pediatric Dermatology, edited by Schachner and Hansen.

She was the first woman to give the prestigious Hurwitz Lecture at the Society of Pediatric Dermatology Annual Meeting, in Snowmass, Colorado, in 1993. She was proud to receive the Alvin Jacobs Award, which is given in recognition of an outstanding contribution to the field of pediatric dermatology, from the American Academy of Pediatrics in 2011.

She was on the Council of the Australasian College of Dermatologists for 3 years and a member of the Board of Censors of the College (the education, examination, and accreditation body) for 6 years. She was a regular examiner in the final examinations for Fellowship of the College for over a decade. In 2005, Maureen was the recipient of
the Australasian College of Dermatologists Silver Medal, given for outstanding lifetime service by a member of the College. On behalf of the College, she made several visits to indigenous communities in Arnhem Land in the far north of Australia, conducting screening programs for infections in children (Fig. 4).

She served for 3 years as secretary of the Australian Dermatopathology Society and was an active participant and frequent lecturer at their meetings for many years. Maureen has added a great body of knowledge to our medical literature, publishing over 100 peer-reviewed articles in dermatology, pediatric, ophthalmology, medical, immunology, rheumatology, genetic, infectious disease, microbiology, and psychiatry journals. She authored or coauthored 21 chapters in major pediatric dermatology and general dermatology textbooks. Areas of particular interest were epidermal nevi, vascular birthmarks, hair shaft disorders, the use of ultrasound as a diagnostic tool for dermatology, and artifactual skin disease.

She very much loved being part of a team and reveled in the camaraderie among different specialists at her Children’s Hospital. The collegiality of working with other pediatric specialists in multidisciplinary clinics, most of which she initiated herself, was a highlight for her—with immunologists in the severe eczema clinic, geneticists in the genetic dermatology clinic, rheumatologists in the scleroderma clinic, psychiatrists and psychologists in the psychodermatology service, and, in the vascular birthmarks clinic, pediatric and plastic surgeons, immunologists, vascular physicians, general pediatricians, diagnostic and interventional medical imaging specialists, and nuclear medicine physicians as well as other dermatologists. She was coordinator of this clinic from the time she founded it in 1994 until her retirement in 2005.
She loved to teach and was a mentor and a role model to many, including myself. In addition to regular medical students, pediatric and dermatology trainee lectures, and bedside teaching, many a resident in another department would quietly receive a journal article in their pigeonhole relating to the consultation asked of her. She was frequently consulted by pediatricians in rural and remote areas of the country. Maureen would regularly travel the interstate in Australia lecturing to general practitioners, pediatricians, and dermatologists. She was a guest speaker at numerous overseas conferences, including in North America, South America, South East Asia, and New Zealand. After her retirement, she traveled to the Angkor Children’s Hospital in Siem Reap, Cambodia, and consulted and lectured to pediatricians there.

How anyone so committed to her work could have possibly found time for any interests and hobbies beggars belief. Yet, Maureen loves her regular bushwalks and escapes into nature (Fig. 5). She has particularly enjoyed long hikes over several days, including the Milford Track, the Routeburn Track, and the Tongariro Crossing in New Zealand, and the Overland Track in Tasmania. Since retiring in 2005, she has finally been able to dedicate more time to her hobbies, and photography has become a passion. However, a dabble in a post-retirement pastime was, of course, not sufficient. With the same passion and dedication she approaches everything, Maureen has taken part in several photography exhibitions and has had photographs accepted in national and international competitions (Fig. 6). No doubt influenced by dermatology, she is drawn to shapes, patterns, and
detail and has a particular interest in macro and close-up photography. In recent years, she has been inspired by Zen artistic philosophy, which stresses simplicity, allusiveness, and restraint, aiming to give her work a meditative quality. This has been expressed in monochrome still life studies and abstract depictions of elements of nature. She recently edited a book of biographies and photographs of the 307 members of her university graduating class for their 50th anniversary of graduation.

On the home front, the Rogers family, a wonderful, huge, and loving dynasty, contains, at last count, 22 grandchildren and 21 great-grandchildren (Fig. 7). Unanimously, Maureen is considered as the family “glue.” Christmases and birthdays in the Rogers’ household are huge affairs, rarely with fewer than 40 guests. The house is always open to family visitors for short or long stays. Several grandchildren have stayed with Maureen and Peter for months at a time and one for several years. There are no plans to downsize!

Maureen taught a whole generation of Australian dermatologists about truly caring for children and their families, to be exacting in clinical management yet always compassionate. No child was ever spoken at, but rather to. No question asked by an anxious parent, however minor, was considered silly or trivial, but always answered with due consideration. We learned more from watching her interact with patients in her unassuming, warm, and empathetic way than any textbook possibly could teach us. She is a leader, a mentor, a teacher, a colleague, a friend, and an inspiration (Fig. 8). (See Figs. 9 and 10.)

Li-Chuen Wong, M.D.
Department of Dermatology, The Children’s Hospital at Westmead, Sydney, Australia
E-mail address: mikeandlich@gmail.com
Corresponding author

19 April 2016
Fig. 7. Some members of the Rogers clan.

Fig. 8. With friends and colleagues.
Fig. 9. Maureen Rogers receiving the Silver Medal, Australasian College of Dermatologists.

Fig. 10. Maureen Rogers and Li-Chuen Wong.