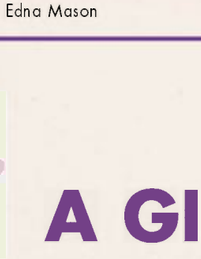
A GIFT MORE THAN FOUR DECADES IN THE MAKING

A mother is finally able to honor the surgeon who treated her daughter's bone disorder.

By Jeff Weinstock

"Saul," Cassandra Scipio says. "S-A-U-L. And his middle name was Maurice." She wants to be sure you have the right name of the doctor who fixed her hips and knees.



The late orthopedic surgeon Saul Bernstein, MD

Saul Maurice Bernstein, onetime Chief of Orthopedic Surgery at Children's Hospital Los Angeles, passed away in 2010, but his impact on Scipio's life carries on. More than 40 years after Dr. Bernstein operated on Scipio when she was a young child, her mother, Edna Mason, made a donation to the hospital through a planned gift called a charitable gift annuity, fulfilling a long-held wish to honor and thank him.

Scipio says that she and her mother first discussed donating some 20 years ago. "Time passes and life gets in the way," she says, "but it was always something I talked to her about—how grateful I am and how far I've come."

Now 52, Scipio was born with a disorder called achondroplasia that stunts bone growth, a hereditary condition that she believes goes back several generations on her mother's side. It is more commonly known as dwarfism.

"My mom is 4 feet tall and I'm 4 foot 6," Scipio says. She credits Dr. Bernstein's care for that half-foot boost. "Otherwise, I probably would have been her size."

Each surgery Dr. Bernstein performed on Scipio between the ages of 8 and 11, repositioning her hips and limbs to relieve the awful pain she was experiencing, triggered growth spurts. But the surgeries were difficult—including rods inserted into her legs and pins in her hips—and the recovery was no easier. Scipio recalls spending whole summers in a full body cast after several of the procedures.

"I think my mom thought of the idea of donating because I would tell her how proud I am of the strength it took to endure all of what I went through."

A gift that gives back

A retired educator with the Los Angeles Unified School District, Mason says she always wanted to pay her gratitude to Dr. Bernstein forward with a donation to Children's Hospital Los Angeles, but it was only recently that her circumstances changed to make the gift possible.

Mason spoke with the hospital's Gift Planning team within the Foundation Department and decided that a charitable gift annuity made the most sense for her. Under the terms of the gift, Mason made a lump-sum contribution to CHLA that the hospital has invested, and she will receive fixed quarterly payments, independent of the success of the investments, until the time of her passing. The payments will be partially tax-free, in addition to other tax benefits.

"I did not want to put all of my wishes in my will," Mason says. "I wanted to do some things while I'm around."

Mason and Scipio thought of Dr. Bernstein often over the years and regret not trying to contact him sooner. By the time they made the attempt, he had passed away. "We were a week too late," Scipio says.

Even so, they keep his memory close. "He was so kind," Mason says, "and that kept Cassandra from fearing what he had to do, because it was major. We remember him fondly not just for his work and his skill, but also for the gentleman that he was."





▲ Sitting side by side, Cassandra and her mother, Edna, appear to be the same height. When standing together, Cassandra's half-foot height advantage, gained through years of orthopedic surgeries at CHLA, is apparent.

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—Cassandra Scipio





'I've always stood tall'

Scipio says Dr. Bernstein offered her another operation in which he could attempt to stretch her limbs further, but she declined it. "If I had that procedure done, I may have been 4-11, or 5 feet, but I didn't want it," she says. "I like who I am. I like my uniqueness."

She doesn't recall at what age she began showing signs of dwarfism—not because her memory fails her, but because her sense of herself has never accounted for her height.

"I don't see myself like that, like others see me," Scipio says. "I only see it in photographs with other people, and that's when the reality brings me back to, 'Oh yeah, you're 4 foot 6.' I've never let it affect me. I've always stood tall."

An illustrator and graphic designer—with a side business as a custom cake maker—Scipio says her hips and knees have been virtually pain-free as an adult. "I never had any more issues with my bones because I feel like I had the greatest surgeon in the world."

When you comment on her relentlessly happy spirit, bearing up through long periods of extreme physical pain, her response doesn't stray from the orthopedic surgeon who got her through them.

"Thank you," she says, her voice brightening. "That's what Dr. Bernstein used to tell me."

For more information on making a planned gift to Children's Hospital Los Angeles, contact Steve Adamian, JD, Associate Senior Vice President of Gift Planning, at 323-361-1749 or visit GiftPlanningCHLA.org.