



All in the Family by Theresa Cassidy

Beth Denman remembers the game.

As children, she and her siblings would join their father on rounds, then sit in the doctor's lounge exploring medical books and journals.

"Amy and I loved to pull the books off the shelves and have contests to find the most disgusting pictures," she said.

Medicine has been a family affair for John J. Cannella Jr., M.D., who practices internal medicine in Grand Island, and his wife, Rose Ann. Of four children, the three oldest are physicians. Three sons-in-law also are physicians; a

daughter-in-law is a physical therapist. Their youngest daughter, whom the family refers to as the "black sheep," is a lawyer serving in a volunteer position for the Opportunity Fund for Developing Countries (OFDC), an organization dedicated to securing micro-credit loans for women in third world countries.

The three who chose their father's profession – Beth Denman, Amy Cannella and J. (John J. Cannella III) – are all physicians who live and practice in Omaha (two are at UNMC).

"All of us have a profound respect for our father," said

A. John Cannella Jr., 60. UNMC MD 1972, UNMC Internal Medicine 1975

B. Rose Ann Cannella, 60

C. Daughter: Elizabeth Denman, 37. UNMC MD 1996, UNMC Internal Medicine 1999

D. Husband: David Denman. UNMC MPT 1996, UNMC MD 2000, UNMC ENT 2006

E. Grandchild: Anna, 6

F. Grandchild: Kate, 3, who insists on being called "Princess Aurora"

G. Daughter: Amy Cannella, 36. UNMC MD 1997, UNMC Internal Medicine 2000, University of Utah Rheumatology 2003

H. Husband: Anthony Griess. UNMC MD 1995, UNMC Internal Medicine 1998, University of Missouri Dermatology 2001

I. Grandchild: Gus, born Dec. 1, 2006

J. Son: John "J." Cannella III, 32. Creighton University MD 2003, UNMC Internal Medicine 2006, UNMC Gastroenterology & Hepatology 2009

K. Wife: Michelle Cannella. UNMC MPT 2000

L. Grandchild: Lauren, 3

M. Daughter: Mary Cannella, 27. Creighton University JD 2006

N. Husband: Lincoln Wong. Creighton University MD 2006

Amy, a rheumatologist at UNMC. "He loves science and truly loves helping people. Medicine was a natural fit."

While the Cannella children's passion for medicine is a legacy from their father, they credit much of their success to the unwavering support of their mother, who insisted they get an education and be self-reliant. "She is our rock, and the most selfless person I know," Amy said.

"We talk to our parents or each other four or five times a day. We're always into each other's business, but that's OK, because it makes us tow the line."

They also credit the influence one UNMC professor had on their family. LeeRoy Meyer, M.D. '61, who died in 2005 after teaching at UNMC for more than 30 years, meant so much to the Cannella family that their childhood Labrador retriever was named "LeeRoy Mooney" – after Dr. Meyer and their dad's first plane.

On weekends, John, who learned to fly during his family practice rotation in Lynch, Neb., would fly Dr. Meyer to his parents' home in Sidney. In flight, the two would discuss family, faith and the future of medicine, including the case-based method (now problem-based learning) pioneered by Dr. Meyer.

The Cannella family continues to honor the legacy of their friend and mentor with contributions to the LeeRoy Meyer Fund of Excellence in Internal Medicine.

Similar to Dr. Meyer's commitment to education, academic expectations were high in the Cannella family. "Our parents told us, 'your job is to get good grades and we'll do the rest,' " Amy said, noting that, beyond scholarships, her parents covered each sibling's college and medical school expenses.

No one was pressured to go into medicine. "We were told to pursue whatever we wanted in life and to do it to the best of our ability," said J., a fellow in gastroenterology at UNMC.

Medicine connects the Cannella family, but it is faith, service and love that unite them. "We all live within a mile of each other, except for our parents," J. said. "We talk to our parents or each other four or five times a day. We're always into each other's business, but that's OK, because it makes us tow the line."

Although the giggles and whispers from behind picture books in the doctor's lounge have faded, the family contests live on.

Now, they're simply played at the dinner table.

"We all talk medicine at home," Beth said. "We get into one-upmanship to see who has the most interesting case or we try to stump each other about the diagnoses."

Said John: "It makes for an interesting dinner table." ☺☺

EDITOR'S NOTE: For more information on the LeeRoy Meyer Fund of Excellence in Internal Medicine visit www.unmc.edu/leeroy. For more information on the OFDC, visit www.ofdc.org.