

## Arab American Heritage Month: Farouk S. Idriss, MD

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### Farouk S. Idriss, MD, 1928-1992

*By Emma Florio, Special Collections Library Assistant*

Farouk Salim Idriss was born on January 10, 1928, in Beirut, Lebanon. He was exposed to the medical profession from an early age: his father was an internist whose office was in their family home. In 1949 he received his BA in Medicine from the American University of Beirut. After earning his MD from the same institution in 1953, he came to the United States to intern at Wesley Memorial Hospital in Chicago. He then completed a series of residencies in the city: first in surgery at Wesley, then in plastic surgery at Cook County Hospital, then a second surgical residency at Wesley, which ended in 1958. That year he also married Lorraine Martwick, who worked as a nurse at Wesley. He finished his training the next year with a residency in pediatric surgery at Children's Memorial Hospital (now Lurie Children's Hospital), where he would spend most of his career.

While at Children's, Idriss worked under Willis J. Potts, MD, a renowned pediatric heart surgeon who established one of the country's first pediatric cardiac surgery programs at the hospital; Potts was also a Professor of Surgery at Northwestern University Medical School. After this residency finished in 1959, Idriss and his family, which now included twin sons, relocated to Beirut where Idriss hoped to set up a medical practice. Upon finding that there were no facilities available and no openings for pediatric or cardiac surgeons, they returned to Illinois. He was initially equally unlucky in establishing a surgical practice in Chicago, but through his connections to Willis Potts he secured a position as a Fellow in the Surgical Animal Research Laboratory at Children's, where he eventually became director. In his years there he researched congenital heart disease, transplantations of living bone grafts and kidneys, and organ preservation. In 1961 he developed a revolutionary new technique for correcting the transposition of the aorta and pulmonary artery, a rare but serious congenital heart defect that is usually corrected soon after birth.

Idriss then became a surgeon at Children's and in 1963 he was naturalized as an American citizen. Four years later he became the first division head of Cardiothoracic Surgery at Children's, the same year that the first human-to-human heart transplant was performed in South Africa. Along with his appointment as division head came an endowed faculty position at Northwestern University Medical School: A. C. Buehler Professor of Cardiovascular Thoracic Surgery. From this time on Idriss began to solely focus on heart disease in children.

Over the next twenty years Idriss established himself as a leader in the field of pediatric heart surgery. A 1982 [Chicago Tribune profile](#), which dubbed him the "King of Hearts," followed him through his experience with a patient on whom he



*Portrait of Idriss, circa 1992, from [Pediatric Cardiology](#).*

performed open-heart surgery at age one and again at age seven. He again made the news after performing the first pediatric heart transplant in Illinois with Carl L. Backer, MD in 1988. Idriss retired from hands-on surgery in 1990 but continued working on research, as well as drafting the textbook *Surgical Anatomy of Congenital Heart Disease*, which remained unfinished when he died.

In retirement Idriss enjoyed the hobbies that he had used as an escape throughout his career, including photography, sailing, and farming. He died on his farm in Sturgis, Michigan, in 1992, at age 64. Shortly after his death, the Cardiac Registry at Children's, which Idriss had started in 1962 as a place to store cardiac specimens for research and study, was named in his honor. The Hospital also created the Farouk S. Idriss, MD, Visiting Professorship in Pediatric Cardiovascular-Thoracic Surgery. In 1999 his wife Lorraine established an endowed scholarship in his honor at the American University of Beirut, his alma mater, to benefit Lebanese medical students, as Idriss had been 50 years earlier.

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## Selected References

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