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## CLOSE ESCAPES

### He's got the whole world in his hands

By LINDA OWEN



President Dwight D. Eisenhower broke all his knuckles while playing football at West Point. President Gerald Ford chews his nails. Part of astronaut Donald Slayton's left ring finger is missing, the result of a farm accident when he was growing up. Former quarterback Roger Staubach has a misshapen pinkie, caused from multiple dislocations during Dallas Cowboys games.

The hands of these and other well-known figures form a curious (if not exactly gripping) permanent exhibition in the lobby of Truett Hospital at Baylor University Medical Center in Dallas.

The 100 bronze minisculptures, each complemented by an autographed photo of the "hand donor," rest in 22 lighted trophy cases. They are the work of hand surgeon Adrian E. Flatt of Baylor University Medical Center, who spent nearly 40 years chasing down celebrities -- not just to shake their hands but to take them home in bronze.

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"It's hard to pass up the famous paws of Harry Truman and Louis Armstrong,"

says Bart Stout, a visitor who discovered the exhibit while visiting the business office on the same floor. Now he regularly brings friends to see the exhibit.

Flatt, 78, a former consultant in hand surgery for NASA and retired chairman of orthopedic surgery at the Dallas center, originally took up his hobby to prove there are no typical "surgeon's hands." After casting 24 of his colleagues' hands, he was struck by "how expressive and revealing a person's hands can be" and set his sights on the hands of public figures.

Since 1960, when he caught up with Eisenhower on a train, Flatt has pursued celebrities onto movie sets and into stadium locker rooms and concert halls.

While he was a young professor of hand surgery at the University of Iowa, he cornered former President Truman before a speaking engagement at Grinnell College.

At NASA, Flatt had the opportunity to mold the hands of 10 astronauts, including John Glenn and Scott Carpenter. At BUMC, Flatt met Corazon Aquino, who later became president of the Philippines. She agreed to add her hands to the collection while her husband was having cancer treatments at the medical center.

Hands in the collection, donated to BUMC after Flatt's retirement, include those of actors, artists, entertainers, astronauts, athletes, journalists, musicians, Olympic gold medalists and international leaders -- all of whom stuck their hands into Flatt's molding box for 20 minutes.

So quick and easy is the molding process that Flatt has been able to make the molds while on the run. He cast trumpeter Louis Armstrong's hands between concert sets and Walt Disney's hands while the cartoonist worked on a movie set in Hollywood.

To view the exhibit, start at the left end of the display, where an informational video explains Flatt's casting technique. Yet another former Dallas quarterback -- Troy Aikman -- appears in the video to plunge his hands into an oatmeal-looking mixture of seaweed derivative and water.

Flatt makes a mold of the hands with a substance similar to that used in dental impressions. Then he makes positive casts with plaster of Paris. The final product, which is antique-bronzed by an artist in Delaware, shows fine details of a person's hand, even fingerprints, hairs and pores.

There's no shortage of well-known contributors here, from baseball great Joe DiMaggio and actress Ethel Merman to jockey Willie Shoemaker (whose thumb is swollen because he had been thrown off a horse the day before the cast was made).

**Shoemaker's hands appear small and boyish. The hands of Andre the Giant are as large as cinderblocks. Margaret Thatcher's have petite yet strong fingers -- Paul Newman's hands look about the same size. Cartoonist Charles Schulz, creator of the comic strip *Peanuts*, holds a drawing pencil in his right hand.**

**Among others, there are the hands of former British Prime Minister Sir Winston Churchill; former President George Bush, actors Larry Hagman and Katharine Hepburn, Harlem Globetrotter Meadowlark Lemon, illusionist David Copperfield, ice skater Peggy Fleming, cosmetics mogul Mary Kay Ash, violinist Isaac Stern, baseball legend Mickey Mantle, tennis player Martina Navratilova, artist Norman Rockwell, guitarist Andres Segovia and pianist Van Cliburn.**

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**HOW TO GET THERE: Baylor University Medical Center in Dallas is at 3500 Gaston about five minutes east of downtown. Coming from Houston on Interstate 45, exit onto Interstate 30 East. Take the Peak Street exit. Go left on Peak to Gaston and turn left.**

**The medical is center is open daily around the clock. The exhibit is free. An entrance for the handicapped is available at Barnett-Wadley Tower on Junius.**

**For more information, phone the medical center at 800-422-9567.**

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