



EY2012 Awards Life Story Challenge

National Finalist

EU First Place

Country: Estonia

Title: Bruno

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Original submission sent in English

Summary:

Bruno Põder was born on April 18, 1929. At the age of 80, he was still working as a surgeon in the hospital of the town where he was born. He retired a couple of weeks before turning 81, having worked in his hometown hospital for 25 years. Bruno's childhood was the same as that of many of his generation: not an easy one, as his family was not well off. He earned some money and food by herding cows on a farm near his hometown. But he also did things boys of his age used to do. In his youth, Bruno was a footballer and a gymnast, and he also did high diving. Being active and sporting is still a way of life for him and he has passed that on to his children. At the age of 60, he started to go to the gym, inspired by his daughter, who was a competitive bodybuilder at the time. Football is still his passion – he watches every football match on local TV channels and Eurosport, and together with his son and grandson who has stepped in his grandfather's footsteps as a football player, he drives 160 km to Tallinn to attend the Estonian national team's matches. Bruno did not quite excel at high school but had no difficulty entering the medical faculty at the University of Tartu. Parallel to his medical studies in Tartu he took a three-year distance learning course at the then Leningrad (St. Petersburg) Institute of Physical Education, while also working to finance his studies. He escaped the 1949 mass deportations, as he and a fellow student did not stay at home during the nights when the Soviet soldiers fetched people from homes, but took refuge in a shelter they built in the nearby ruins. His mother Lydia was not so lucky - her only fault being her German origin. In the fear of being taken to Siberia, she jumped out of the window and broke her back. Even though Bruno's supervisor at the university, Professor Linkberg had wanted him to start his surgeon's career at the Tartu University Hospital, Bruno was banned from doing so by the Soviet security agency KGB. As a young doctor, Bruno performed his first operations in a small country hospital.



Five years after his graduation, he worked as a surgeon and as Chief Doctor in the regional hospital and fifteen years later he received his Doctoral Degree. He invented an innovative method of treatment of varicosis of the lower extremities and has helped thousands of patients, and saved many lives. Besides scientific publications, he has written articles for local papers, giving medical advice to a wider audience, and continues to do so.

During his long career, Bruno worked in several hospitals, in several towns. He finally got to work at the hospital he had dreamed of working at as a student – the Tartu University Hospital, where in addition to his work as a surgeon he supervised young doctors. One of them, cardiothoracic surgeon Dr. Margus Alver, MD, says, “I learned a lot from him, both as a professional and a person. He is a role model.” Looking at Bruno, one would never guess his age – walking a couple of kilometres at a brisk pace from his home to the library, or to meet his friends, or to look after his former patients, he keeps his back straight even though he occasionally suffers backache. He is known to take his daily swims in the lake at the time of the year when for most people not only the water, but also the air is too cold – from April to October. His friends and former patients still turn to him with their health problems and he never refuses to advise and help them. Two years ago, he got a phone call from a neighbour who had fainted and injured her head. Bruno rushed to help, stopped bleeding with a towel and then drove the lady to the hospital. Half an hour later would have been too late...

His sense of humour has lifted the spirits of his patients, family and friends – he appreciates optimism and a good joke. And no one makes better tasting salted salmon than Bruno! But he also likes to be treated to dinner by family and friends. Besides his profession and sport, Bruno is fond of travelling. During the Soviet times, he was not allowed to travel outside the Eastern Bloc. He has been catching up since Estonia regained independence in 1991, and has travelled as much as he can – most of Europe, North America, North Africa, Thailand and Cuba. Needless to say, Bruno felt uneasy after retirement – he had been working hard most of his life, and suddenly he had a lot of time on his hands. Now things have settled: Bruno spends time reading books. His favourites are the ones about World War II and the Cold War. He likes to visit community events, especially those about healthy living - Heart Days, local food fairs, etc. And of course football matches. Once a year, he meets his fellow medical students to reminisce about the university times. Sadly, many of them are gone and some are too ill to attend.

Bruno is a founder member of the Estonian Senior Surgeons’ Society, which was created with the aim of studying the history of surgery in Estonia, and to collect biographies of Estonian surgeons, as well as photos, memoirs and surveys of the work of Estonian surgeons. Bruno also is a member of the “80+ Club” and the Grandfathers’ Club in his hometown of Viljandi.

Bruno has taught his children and grandchildren, “What you do, do well” – this is what he has been doing all his life. His plans for the future? To stay in as good health as possible, to enjoy all the good things in life, and to be happy about his children and grandchildren.



Maybe to take another trip to a warm country soon. The best way to stay full of life is to live one's life to the full. He does not make long-term plans, just does everything he can to stay as healthy and active as possible.