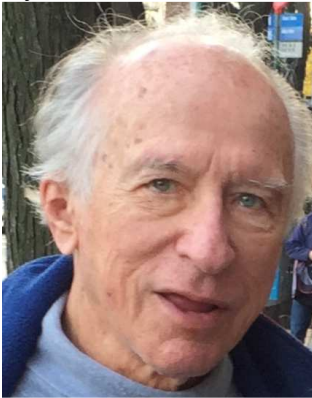


Dr. Thomas Z. Lajos, 86, renowned heart surgeon

By [Dale Anderson](#) | Published 8:24 a.m. March 27, 2018



Oct. 10, 1931 – March 19, 2018

Dr. Thomas Zoltan Lajos, who helped pioneer the open heart surgery program at Buffalo General Hospital in the 1960s, died March 19 in his home in Longboat Key, Fla., after a long battle with complications from amyloidosis. He was 86.

Working with renowned cardiac surgeon Dr. George Schimert, who headed the program, he performed the first coronary artery bypass procedure in 1968. Fifteen years later, he teamed with Dr. Joginder Bhayana for the first heart transplant in Buffalo. His technique of using ice slush to preserve the heart during bypass surgery and his work with warm cardioplegia, deliberately stopping the heart during surgery, continue to be widely employed.

He succeeded Dr. Schimert as chief of the Division of Cardiac Surgery from 1982 to 1985 and served again in the post from 1991 to 1994.

Born in Pecs, Hungary, he was the eldest of three children of Dr. Laszlo Lajos, professor and head of the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology at the University of Pecs. He graduated at the head of his class at the University of Pecs Medical School in 1956.

Dr. Lajos worked as a house surgeon in Budapest until the Soviet crackdown on the Hungarian Revolution in October 1956. He escaped to Austria, then went to England and Canada.

He trained in surgery at the University of Toronto from 1959 to 1964 and was chief surgical resident at Wellesley Hospital, where he met Charlotte Ann Scott, a registered nurse. They were married in 1964.

He went on to complete his training in cardiac surgery at St. Louis University and in thoracic surgery at Ohio State University, then joined the medical faculty at Queens University in Kingston, Ont., and practiced at Kingston General Hospital. He came to Buffalo in 1967 to establish his practice at Buffalo General.

He also joined the UB Medical School as an assistant professor of surgery, becoming an associate professor in 1974. He trained scores of surgeons, many of whom have become prominent, before he retired from the classroom in 2004.

He helped establish the annual Dr. George Schimert Lectureship at the UB Medical School, attracting leading cardiothoracic surgeons. He joined the New York State Cardiac Advisory Council in 1988 and helped introduce the reporting of heart surgery outcomes by hospital and doctor.

A former resident of Snyder and Grand Island, he moved in 2004 to Greenwood, S.C., He continued to perform cardiac surgery there until 2009, when he retired and moved to Florida.

He authored and co-authored numerous articles for medical journals and chapters for books. He lectured at conferences, symposiums and universities worldwide.

He was a fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons in Canada, the American College of Surgeons and the American College of Chest Physicians. He also was a member of American Association for Thoracic Surgery, the Cardiothoracic Surgery Network, the European Association for Cardio-Thoracic Surgery and the Society of Thoracic Surgeons.

In retirement, he wrote three books, two of which have been translated into Hungarian. “Fallen to Tyranny: From Mauthausen to Gulag,” published in 2012, follows his uncle, Dr. Ivan Lajos, from his imprisonment by the Nazis in the Mauthausen concentration camp to his disappearance as a political prisoner in the Soviet Union.

His 2015 memoir, “An Incredible Journey,” recounts his childhood, his escape from Hungary and his arrival in North America. A second memoir in 2017, “From the Heart,” details his professional career and his life in Buffalo. He enjoyed traveling, photography and skiing and was an avid sailboat racer.

Sailing out of Youngstown Yacht Club and the Royal Canadian Yacht Club in Toronto, he cruised and raced his Swan 411 Undine on Lake Ontario and his International Dragon Class boats on the Great Lakes and internationally around Europe and in Hong Kong. He frequently competed against Olympic and America’s Cup sailors and members of European royal families.

He was a crew member aboard the Abino Robin, which won first in class overall in the 1977 Southern Ocean Racing Circuit Series.

His wife, who served as a trustee at Calisanctius School and the Buffalo Seminary, died in 2013.

Survivors include a son, Dr. Paul; two daughters, Cheryl and Laura; and a sister, Judit Kerekes.

A Mass of Christian Burial will be offered at 11 a.m. April 4 in St. Mary Star of the Sea Catholic Church, Longboat Key.