

# John Babb, MD '80

Following His Sister's Heart

**When John Babb was 8 years old, his parents left their beloved home in the picturesque island nation of Barbados. They packed up a precious few items and headed north to the unfamiliar city of Philadelphia with their two young children.**

What inspired this sudden departure from the life they had built in the Caribbean? Babb's older sister had developed complications related to congenital pulmonary stenosis, and adequate care was hard to find.

"She was going to die," he recalls. "The heart-lung machine at Jefferson was her only hope."

Developed by surgery professor John H. Gibbon, Jr., MD '27, the heart-lung machine was first used successfully in 1953. Babb's sister's procedure five years later was also a success; she made a full recovery, eventually going on to earn her doctorate and becoming a faculty member at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

Babb's earliest memories of Jefferson involve standing outside on the sidewalk, waving up to his sister as she looked out her hospital room window because at the time, children were not allowed inside to visit. More than a decade later, he was able to develop many more memorable experiences on campus; after earning a bachelor's degree at Columbia University, he enrolled in medical school at Jefferson.

"I was curious about the school that trained the man who created the machine that saved my sister's life," he says.

Babb's mother, a surgical eye nurse, used to tell him all about her work; her stories piqued an interest in ophthalmology. After graduating with his MD, he did an internship in internal medicine and later pursued an ophthalmology residency at SUNY Downstate Medical Center, where he went on to become a clinical professor. He also established a private practice in Brooklyn Heights, N.Y., where he continues to work today.

A retired U.S. Army Major who spent 12 years as a physician in the Reserves, Babb enjoys spending time with his wife, Lareen, and their two daughters, 18-year-old Lauren (now a student at Columbia University) and 10-year-old Rebecca. He also nurtures a passion for tropical fish, particularly living corals. He has tanks both at home and in his office and boasts corals from all over the world, including Fiji, Tonga, Bora Bora and Australia.

"I take care of all of them myself—it's a more time-consuming hobby than you'd think," he says. "To me, the only thing more beautiful than my family and my hobby is successfully restoring someone's vision." 🐠

—KAREN L. BROOKS

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