



Eastern Association for the Surgery of Trauma
Advancing Science, Fostering Relationships, and Building Careers

2017 Oriens Fellow Winning Essay
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An elderly woman sits at the corner table at one of our town's most popular restaurants. She is with two middle aged women, a generation her junior. She has an air of distinction and elegance about her. Even through the window from the street, it is obvious she is happy. As she places her coffee mug on the table in front of her, she says something to the woman on her right. It is clear she is lovingly teasing this woman.

Even my trained eye does not notice the healed tracheostomy scar. Her midline abdominal incision is hidden deep beneath her perfectly coordinated clothing. No one passing by knows about her broken ribs, her missing spleen and portion of small bowel, or the weeks she spent struggling for her life in the intensive care unit. All those things are behind her now, remote from her thoughts, as she enjoys brunch on this brisk fall morning.

One of the women with her notices me, as I stroll past the restaurant. A few moments later, I hear the door of the restaurant open and I hear her inquiringly ask "Doctor?"

I turn around and recognize her immediately, "Yes."

"Doctor Danielle, is that you? You look so different in normal clothes."

"Hello, good to see you! How are you?" As we begin to talk, the memories flood back.

I knew this woman well. Her mother had been very sick after a horrifying motor vehicle collision the previous winter. I remember looking through her mother's chart over and over, so afraid that I was missing something or that there was something we could be doing better. I remember staying late when I had been too concerned about the status of her mother's health to sign out her care to the over-burdened call team. I remember waking up in the middle of the night repeatedly after nightmares that things had gone horribly wrong while I was away.

"I'm doing well. How are you? How is your mother?"

She turns towards the window. "She is doing great! She's right here."

She points to the woman who had caught my eye earlier. Despite spending months looking after this woman, I hadn't recognized her. Without the hospital gown and countless tubes, she was someone else entirely. It seemed nearly impossible that the woman I had known could have transformed so beautifully into this lively, vibrant woman in front of me. I feel the corners of my eyes start to water and a choking feeling in my throat. "No way."

There is no job more incredible than this. There is no force more motivating than the chance to give someone their life back after disaster strikes. A career in Trauma and Acute Care Surgery is physically and emotionally demanding. The hours are not convenient. The patient population is often less reasonable and grateful than others. It can take days, weeks, or months to see a patient through their illness. But none of that matters when you save a patient from impending catastrophe. The fruits of this labor make every late night, every call shift, every hard patient, every moment of missed sleep worth it. I am so lucky to be a part of it.