



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

2022 Oriens Fellow Winning Essay
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Do All The Good You Can

Intern year. I remember it. I feel it like its yesterday. Yet somehow it also feels like a lifetime ago. It's my third day as a "doctor" on night float. I'm feeling anxious, enthusiastic, and filled with pure excitement of being on call with the Chief of Trauma Surgery and the Chief Surgical Resident. I felt invincible. I was very naive.

"TRAUMA ALERT, ETA 5 MINUTUES". A young female following a motorcycle collision. She was a 17-year-old on the back of her boyfriend's motorcycle when he lost control and crashed. Primary and secondary survey were negative for injuries. She complained of "a little abdominal pain," but her vitals were within normal limits and the FAST exam was negative. I vividly remember her on the way to the CT scanner feeling anxious and a little scared. The trauma nurses made her smile by complimenting her Kylie Jenner Lipstick. I remember being proud of our nurses for making her feel safe and disappointed with myself for being too scared to even say anything.

Imaging revealed a liver and inferior vena cava injury with active bleeding. I carried the pagers and "held down the fort" while my mentors rushed her to the operating room. After a short period, I was paged to the OR. I thought to myself: "This is it, my time to save the day has come! The Chief of Trauma Surgery and Chief Resident need **MY** help." I was three days out of medical school. Did I mention I was naive?

Exploratory laparotomy, packing, pringle maneuver, extended right subcostal incision. This young girl had a retrohepatic IVC injury with a ruptured hematoma. Actively bleeding would be an understatement. I watched in awe as they meticulously took down the liver attachments and obtained RHIVC exposure. My Chiefs needed extra hands to suction out the blood filling her belly. Despite the devastating injury, staring me in the face, I had the optimistic feeling that everything was going to work-out just fine. Like in the movies we would save the day — with my help, of course.

I couldn't have been more wrong.

By the time we gained control she developed hypovolemic cardiac arrest. I pushed through the cramping pain in my hands from the prolonged open cardiac massage. I was in such disbelief when I heard, "time of death..."

Her passing taught me an invaluable lesson in humility and loss. I took for granted we would bring her back from catastrophe simply because it fit into a cliché of picture-perfect trauma surgery. I recognized how much I needed to learn and prepare for the next opportunity to save a life. When my chiefs delivered the news to the patient's father, a local firefighter, I felt the enormous weight of responsibility that falls on a trauma surgeon's shoulders. This experience inspired an unrelenting passion for trauma surgery and gave me a new, humbling perspective.

Throughout residency my enthusiasm for trauma and surgical critical care has only grown stronger. I've been a part of many lifesaving situations and have heard those dreadful words, "time of death" too many times to count. I've learned to understand and appreciate the difficult, unpredictable, and not-so-glamorous life that comes with being a trauma surgeon.

Yet through it all, there is nothing more worthy to pursue in life than to be the last stand against traumatic death. To strive to save life. To aid a fellow human being in desperate need of help regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, or socioeconomic status. Being born to immigrant parents I know firsthand that the worth of a life should never be at the mercy to any demographic.

One of the most rewarding and truly special accounts of my fellowship interview trail was the fact that every single trauma surgeon across the United States connected with my personal account of loss and shared similar situations. The trauma community is a group of true heroes. We want to save everyone. We save some. We lose some. We suffer devastating loss that we wish ended differently. But it doesn't deter us. It only makes us stronger. It makes us work harder. It motivates us to keep fighting. To keep striving. We learn from our mishaps and utilize the lessons learned to propel us further to that next potential life to save. We never forget yet we keep moving forward.

To me trauma surgery is the embodiment of my favorite quote by John Wesley: "do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as you ever can."