Careers in Anesthesiology—The Joy of Volunteering—Volume XI

Donald Caton, Kathryn E. McGoldrick. Park Ridge, IL: Wood Library-Museum of Anesthesiology, 2008, \$95 US; ISBN: 1-889595-17-9

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This is presumed to be the last in a series of books presenting the autobiographical accounts of a select group of anesthesiologists, namely, Dr. Kathryn McGoldrick, New York; Dr. Victor Baum, Virginia; Dr. Elliott Miller, Massachusetts; Dr. William Rosenlatt, Connecticut; Dr. Charles Tandy, Dallas; Dr. Lydia Conlay, Houston; Dr. Rafael Ortega, Boston; and Dr. George Bause, Cleveland. The first volume in this series was released in 1997, and all subsequent volumes have been assembled and published by the distinguished Wood Library-Museum of Anesthesiology, based in the headquarters of the American Society of Anesthesiologists, Illinois.

I have generally had little patience for such autobiographies in the past, fearing insights into strangers' lives would have little meaning without pre-existing knowledge of the individuals themselves. I embarked on this book, however, with a little more enthusiasm, thinking I might learn some tricks of the trade that my own training in the United Kingdom may have neglected. I soon realized that this little text was educational in a far more eclectic way. "The Joy of Volunteering" is a collection of eight personal accounts of the experiences, good and bad, work-related and not, encountered by these unconnected individuals. The two factors linking these men and women are anesthesiology and their devotion to helping others without financial reward.

Each of the eight narratives takes the reader on a journey through the life of the author. The stories offer tantalizing insights into the authors' childhood aspirations, their

formative years, and memories of patients and colleges from decades ago and often from distant lands. Unsurprisingly, the majority of these volunteering tales are health-related. As an example, while one author was a medical student volunteering in Thailand, he recalls giving his first intramuscular injection of penicillin to a fellow traveller to treat an acquired "social disease", and he recalls how he prayed to the deities of various religions that the recipient wouldn't develop anaphylaxis. Other tales are less humorous and involve death or depict barbaric treatments, such as observing rigid bronchoscopy for an inhaled foreign body in an unanesthetized but fully restrained small child.

The stories that are shared in this tome have been gathered from all over the world—Africa, Asia, Europe, and South America—though some are from much closer to home, such as the description of the carnage left by Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans in 2005. The tales recalled will truly leave readers wondering if perhaps there's room for a *little* more adventure in their own lives. While all of the authors are accomplished and respected clinicians, it's refreshing that they don't all have international prominence, and although their individual stories wildly differ, they are united by the compassion and humility each displays.

This is a truly humbling text, and the first I have read in a long while that caused me to reflect on my own life. I feel privileged to have been allowed to hear their stories, and having done so, I have warmed to these authors. This is a fascinating read for anyone, whether involved in health care or not.

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