

Sample from *Mentor's Way*

INTRODUCTION

*"The journey of humanity is the journey from ignorance to enlightenment.
It's like an endless march of souls through eternity.
If you are standing in an infinitely long line of souls,
how can you say that your position is superior to others?
When there is no head and no end to the line, it doesn't matter what place you hold."*

Deng Ming Dao

Noticing What I've Always Noticed Most

The alarm went off at 04:00.

The importance of the day had my subconscious sitting straight up within milliseconds. I felt a tightness in my gut, but wasn't yet awake enough to discern what this day was for. Why had I set my alarm so early? And why so loud?

Did I have to cram for a chem exam? Was I going skiing?

My conscious mind caught up a few seconds later. My eyes widened. This was the day I was going to go watch an open-heart surgery.

In the final year of my science degree, a mentor of mine named Ray Nelson had orchestrated this opportunity. He knew I aspired to get into medical school, and that having an experience like this might give me something to write about in my application essay or mention in an interview.

I arrived at the hospital and was directed to make my way down to the operating theaters. My knowledge of how this would go down was rock solid: I'd watched every episode of *St.*

Elsewhere and *E.R.*

Multiple times.

From all the surgical scenes in these shows, I was expecting to be sitting quietly above the operating theater in a glassed-in observation area. Me and the med students. Maybe a few members of the patient's family.

To my surprise, no such observation areas existed. I was gowned and booted and scrubbed up next to the surgical team. Moments later, I found myself standing inches from the patient's head, a man in his mid-60s.

Ray had set me up to have the best seat in the house.

The procedure itself was a quadruple bypass, where a large blood vessel taken from the patient's leg is reconfigured to replace key arteries serving the chambers of the heart. That's really all I can tell you. Because surprisingly, my focus wasn't drawn to the mind-bending science of what I was witnessing. Not the pH of the ice being sloshed into an open chest cavity. Nor the blood-spurting steps of the procedure.

All *I* noticed—for the nearly four hours I stood there—was an exquisite dynamic between remarkable people. The calm, methodical communication in the monitor-rich corner between the seasoned anesthesiologist and her student. The careful movements between nurses to supply the senior surgical nurse with the instruments he needed to pass to the surgeon. The care and attention from the veteran surgeon watching the younger surgeon as the latter narrated his thought process and identified what his next actions would be.

All I could see was the complete investment of time and focus people were giving each other.

In retrospect, the writing on the wall was clear: I was not destined to be a doctor. Instead, I would spend the rest of my life experiencing, noticing and trying to understand human potential—and the relational dynamics that set it free.