

TRIUMPH
OVER
TRAGEDY

THE ODYSSEY OF AN
ACADEMIC PHYSICIAN

TRIUMPH OVER TRAGEDY

THE ODYSSEY OF AN ACADEMIC PHYSICIAN

WILLIAM H. FRISHMAN, M.D., M.A.C.P.

CHAIRMAN AND PROFESSOR OF MEDICINE

NEW YORK MEDICAL COLLEGE OF Touro COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY

DIRECTOR OF MEDICINE

WESTCHESTER MEDICAL CENTER HEALTH NETWORK

VALHALLA, NEW YORK

VISITING PROFESSOR OF MEDICINE

ALBERT EINSTEIN COLLEGE OF MEDICINE

BRONX, NEW YORK



Science International • New York

Publisher: Science International Corporation
Developmental Editor: Shireen Dunwoody
Production/Design: Dunwoody Consulting
Cover Design: Renee Horner
Cover Illustration: Mila Karavai

Copyright © 2016 by Science International Corporation

All rights reserved. Reproduction of the material herein in any form requires written permission from the publisher.

The publisher has made every effort to obtain permission for use of borrowed material. If any material has inadvertently been overlooked, the necessary arrangements will be made at the first opportunity.

Printed in the United States of America
Printing/binding by The Sheridan Group

Science International Corporation
70 Forest Street, Suite 5S
Stamford, Connecticut 06901
203-329-0842
www.scienceinternational.org

FIRST EDITION

ISBN 978-0-692-66509-1

To my beloved wife, Esther, and our children and grandchildren, who
inspire me every day by their personal examples.

And in memory of my father,
Aaron H. Frishman, the inspiration for my life's work.

FOREWORD

“Let me tell you the secret that has led to my goal. My strength lies solely in my tenacity.”

- Louis Pasteur

How little we often know about others with whom we interact.

I have known Bill Frishman for more than 40 years, meeting him initially as a first year cardiology fellow in the New York Hospital-Cornell Program. He not only did very well clinically, but authored important papers during his fellowship. These accomplishments required considerable extra effort, and his tenacity was early in evidence.

A true story. When Bill completed the propranolol study he brought a draft of the proposed paper to me and we conferred. The red pencil was much in evidence with resultant major changes in the draft. When Bill left he appeared discouraged, but the next morning he returned with a completely new version. Again the red pencil. Again Bill looking dismayed. Over the next couple of weeks this cycle repeated itself several times. The result: a finished manuscript that was submitted and accepted for publication with only minor changes.

As his career developed we became friends and professional colleagues. We meet only occasionally, but often call or email to exchange comments, request assistance and interact professionally. As a long-time transplanted New Yorker, I thought I understood a bit about Bill's background, not atypical for growing up and being educated in the public schools of New York City. This memoir, however, quickly convinced me otherwise.

How little we know about the origins, backgrounds, triumphs, barriers encountered, personal losses and tragedies of our friends and acquaintances, including those with whom we have spent many hours. Our life stories generally are known only to a few, mostly family. Fortunately, Bill has chosen to share his with us. The singular mix of family dynamics, ethnic background, faith, education, unexpected adversities and successes challenge our character and make us who we are. Bill's widespread family, their immigration from Eastern Europe and assimilation into the American scene within one or two generations is not unusual. (Note he is a baseball addict and a Yankee fan!) He takes justified pride in this heritage, and I do not doubt that it has supported him through many adventures.

And then there is his well-described encounter with education, much in the news these days. In typically American fashion we discuss (perhaps argue would be a better word) the issues of local versus state versus national control and the fundamental challenge of how we measure performance for both student and teacher. Often forgotten in the argument about local control, a tradition passed directly from the founding fathers, is that the current system has produced a highly variable primary and secondary education nationwide which is failing a significant portion of our population. There are good teachers and bad teachers, even in medical school, yet a solution to the need for sharply increasing the number of good teachers is not readily available. The key question that can be asked of Bill, as for many other outstanding graduates of our public school system, “How did you turn out so well?” The answer for Bill, and for other fortunate students in the New York City public school system, is, in part, the magnet school he attended, the Bronx High School of Science. Bill made it through with skill, perseverance, character and dedication. No doubt a little bit of luck should be thrown in the mix also. He was not going to be turned down (see Louis Pasteur quote). Whether the selection process

for these special schools is the best it could be is a question being asked currently as society increasingly focuses on the need to distribute our educational resources more equitably and widely. For Bill, it worked.

Dr. Frishman fairly, in my opinion, describes the problems inherent in the structure of his training more than four decades ago as a house officer in internal medicine. Chiefs not paying attention to the workload, as well as the hours of servitude and the variability, were at times punitive of the medical trainees. Opinions, not evidence, set the standards for care. Would any of us who endured this rite of passage want to return to the “good old days?” Not me, nor Dr. Frishman I suspect. Although problems of coverage and transfer of responsibility persist, the house staff years are better now following relatively recent reforms. Of course, there are always new challenges. For example, the computer-generated record with its “cut and paste” errors transferred forward as gospel can create issues that have yet to be resolved. Dr. Frishman is an experienced, highly competent chief. These new problems will be resolved by his team and others.

Another important aspect that Dr. Frishman narrates is the wild ride during the last four to five decades that those of us in academic cardiology have been privileged to enjoy as clinical science, technology and pharmacology have surged forward with new knowledge. Additionally, the results of carefully managed randomized clinical trials now applied in the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of cardiovascular disease have become the standard of care revolutionizing the practice of medicine based on evidence.

Although cardiovascular diseases are the leading cause of death in adults worldwide, the mortality rate of the major killer, coronary artery disease, has been falling despite the inevitable growth of our aging population. Professor Frishman’s role in academic cardiology has been outstanding. From the beginning he recognized the value of the clinical trial, and was involved in early randomized studies of the then new beta-blocker propranolol. He has taken an active, expansive role in studying the clinical pharmacology of newly developed, effective cardiovascular drugs. His participation in randomized trials has continued apace with important and significant results. In addition, he has had an important role in studies of aging individuals in a select population in the Bronx, illustrating the value of long term population registries. Such trials are of great importance from a public health point of view since they objectively describe what happens over time, documenting numerous medical and social factors which demand attention.

Professor Frishman has also been an active participant in the medical school educational process for years. The department of medicine is a critically important clinical department in a medical school. For medical students and young house officers it focuses on the key aspects involved in the care of the patient: careful history taking, evaluation of the emotional state, skilled physical examination, selection of appropriate laboratory tests and ultimately integrating these acquired data into a work plan for diagnosis and treatment. It takes good organization and strong leadership to teach this part of the job well.

Departments of medicine are large, with many specialty divisions competing for space, time and money. Being a successful chair requires administrative and diplomatic skills. Additionally, it is especially important to be a good clinician as a role model for the entire department as well as to critically understand what clinical investigation is all about. Ultimately, there is only one boss and you can’t keep

everybody happy. It's a tough job. Professor Frishman's outstanding success in this role is evident.

My congratulations to Professor William Frishman for this fascinating memoir describing his adventures and point of view in fashioning a useful and productive career. It is a good read. I am proud to have known him from the beginning of his introduction to the study and care of cardiovascular disease and the practice of clinical science.

Thomas Killip, M.D.
Professor of Cardiology
Mt. Sinai School of Medicine
New York, New York

IF

by Rudyard Kipling

If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too;
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or being hated, don't give way to hating,
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise:

If you can dream—and not make dreams your master;
If you can think—and not make thoughts your aim;
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
And treat those two impostors just the same;
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,
And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools:

If you can make one heap of all your winnings
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
And lose, and start again at your beginnings
And never breathe a word about your loss;
If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
To serve your turn long after they are gone,
And so hold on when there is nothing in you
Except the Will which says to them: 'Hold on!'

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with Kings—nor lose the common touch,
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,
If all men count with you, but none too much;
If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And—which is more—you'll be a Man, my son!

CONTENTS

PROLOGUE	
THE MESSENGER	1
CHAPTER 1	
ORIGINS	5
CHAPTER 2	
GREAT EXPECTATIONS	15
CHAPTER 3	
PARADISE	25
CHAPTER 4	
COURAGE	31
CHAPTER 5	
TRADITIONS	37
CHAPTER 6	
SUMMERS	45
CHAPTER 7	
DESTINY	55
CHAPTER 8	
ALL IN	63

CHAPTER 9	
MATTERS OF THE HEART	77
CHAPTER 10	
GUARDIANS	89
CHAPTER 11	
PRACTICE	95
CHAPTER 12	
PROGRESS	105
CHAPTER 13	
HOME	119
CHAPTER 14	
LEADERSHIP	127
EPILOGUE	
OPPORTUNITY	153
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	157
APPENDICES	161