

My mentor

Growing under a watchful eye:

John W. C. Entwistle III, MD

by *Angela Mouhlas, MD*

Until my third year of surgical residency, I didn't grasp the concept of a true surgical mentor. My "mentor" was the person that I had to have two scheduled conversations with a year. The conversation always led to reading more and figuring out my destiny, preferably sooner than later. As the end of my third year was approaching, the haze of my unknown future was lifted. I had fallen in love with cardiothoracic surgery. This epiphany was the product of one of the finest surgeons and teachers, John W. C. Entwistle III, MD.

It didn't start off blissful; I remember reading my evaluation from him, stating that I needed to learn to play well with others. I was crushed. I couldn't even remember the positive comments and I never would. I could only recall that last statement—and recall how the senior fellow had antagonized me. In the weeks to come, we would talk, and in the end, I would grow into a more confident, determined surgery resident. In hindsight, it's the constructive criticism and avenue of communication that is the foundation for a mentor-mentee relationship.

On paper, the rotation length was a few months, but my operative experience under his watchful eye has continued for more than a year. There is no greater smile on my face, or twinkle in my eye, than when I get the call from him saying that he has cases, if I am interested. There are few instances in my mind that stand out in my surgical career, but all are with him. I remember being post-call on my birthday, but found myself in the operating room, opening the chest for a heart transplant. The amount of time he took for me to understand the anatomy and the patience he showed for me to learn proper surgical technique was truly an experience I never forgot. I soon learned it just wasn't that case—it quickly became all cases.

Fellowship is all about finding the right fit. For me, it was finding the next-best fit. If there was any way to stay and be his fellow, I wouldn't have blinked an eye. I found myself on interviews looking for someone like him—someone who would



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challenge me maximally, who I had to work for, who would never give me an inch on my own, and, lastly, someone whom I could ask for advice when I couldn't find my way. I believe my first word to him on match day was the invitation to come with me, so he could orchestrate my transformation into a thoracic surgeon.

This essay is a dedication to my mentor: for his gift of time, teaching, and patience that has allowed me the space to grow and achieve. I've learned that even though I will leave in a year, he will still be the person who taught me the fundamentals, the core of who I will become. He showed me what it means to be a true mentor and I thank him from the bottom of my heart. Ω

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