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Review of surviving surgery, photographs from a life - By Bernard Gardner, MD

Dr. Bernard Gardner and I have been close friends for a lifetime and there are many components of this review that are biased by that personal friendship. That having been said, this is a marvelous softback, short book of 188 pages that describes an era in surgery that is worthy of recalling. Unfortunately, many pieces of it have been superseded by superficial improvements. I also need to recall that Dr. Gardner was a participant in military service, which was near mandatory and was fortunate to spend part of his time at the Travis Air Force Base in California.

It is hard to imagine an era without a residency and intern match. Dr. Gardner is one of the survivors of the days when it was done by telephone or telegraph, all on a single day with all young surgeons trying to find a job. That is one of the many examples – the Match-how the educational and surgical residency programs have markedly improved. After his initial time in Bellevue Hospital in New York City, and at Mt. Sinai, Dr. Gardner and his wife, Joan, entered the Air Force and ultimately were assigned to Travis, which was the Strategic Air Command base at that point in time. Dr. Gardner's description of his residency subsequently, and after the Air Force, always at San Francisco General Hospital and the University of California San Francisco with Leon Goldman, MD became a remarkable influence on his life. He was succeeded in Dr. Gardner's senior year by Dr. J. E. Dunphy, who had been one of my teachers in medical school and was a marvelously humorous and insightful Irishman from South Boston.

As was always the case with his combination of kindness to patients, pure intelligence, and technical skill, Dr. Gardner was very successful in his residency and was sought by a numbers of institutions for what would have been then been a Junior Faculty position. Fortunately, for him, he chose to go to the Downstate Medical School in Brooklyn as a branch of the newly evolving State University of New York System. Dr. Clarence Dennis, who had been one of the original Wengensten trainees in Minnesota, was his Chief.

In a personal sense, it is a good time to remind readers that Dr. Gardner and his wife Joan were married throughout all of these experiences and she has that experience from cradle to near grave with him in professional growth and development, accomplishment, and even disappointment.

Dr. Gardner's career at Downstate is described in some detail associated with a rapid rise through the ranks where he received one of the then prestigious Markle Scholarship Awards. This is in essence a career development award that was remarkably effective and funded by heirs to the A & P Food store chain. Under Dr. Dennis there were a remarkably productive group of faculty dealing with everything that one could see at King's County Hospital in Brooklyn and some private obligations in addition. Joan and Bernie had a daughter of their own, which coincided almost remarkably with

their previous adoption of a daughter and subsequently adopted a son. All three children have had wonderful careers and reminds this reviewer that I have often been told that infertility among young doctors arises from the clavicles upward and not from any site below that.

Dr. Gardner balanced the many deeds of a huge patient population at King County and an academic career with growing emphasis on oncology and created one of the first pure surgical oncology services at a university hospital in the United States.

The best part of this book is the thirty-five pages devoted towards life as a professor and technical chief of surgery in a pathologically competitive private hospital in northern New Jersey. Dr. Gardner had been seduced from his Downstate appointment by Dr. Ben Rush, who also had a notable influence on physicians, including my colleague David Richardson who is past president of the American College of Surgeons. He had convinced Dr. Gardner to accept this appointment and join the UMDNJ faculty. It is hard to imagine the backstabbing competition among private surgeons for each other and anyone who might wear a white coat, suggesting a university appointment and/or academic responsibility. This part of the book has to be read to be believed, but the change of this hospital from a highly competitive private practice hospital to a reasonable teaching one during Dr. Gardner's longtime there, has been maintained. New non-University training programs are being accredited now, from the glut in domestic medical graduates and the ever-evolving work force needs.

When Dr. Gardner returned to the mothership of the University of Medicine and Dentistry in New Jersey, he found a number of things had changed compared to his time at Downstate in Brooklyn. He was recognized repeatedly as an outstanding teacher and the change in emphasis for undergraduate student teaching between the latter part of the twentieth century and the early part of the twenty-first is exactly the sort of thing that has made the "me first" generation exactly that, and only a minority have accepted the old fashioned obligation to their education and patient care.

The end of this book carries a number of lessons that are woven throughout about Dr. Gardner's unique ability to build a rapport with patients and his innate kindness for people in distress for surgical care or other reasons. That ode to honesty in patient dealings is a wonderful closing theme for a lively, enjoyable, and, indeed, hard to imagine or recall era in surgery in America.

Hiram C. Polk Jr.

E-mail address: hiram.polk@louisville.edu.