SEARCHING FOR THE BEST MEDICINE

*The
Life and Times of a
Doctor and
Patient*

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*The
Life and Times of a
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Columbia University, USA

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For my grandchildren

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Prologue

It was a typical cold mid-winter morning in the Bronx in 1945. My father woke me at four AM and we drove down the East River Drive to his pretzel bakery which was located in a dank cellar on the Lower East Side. He mixed flour and water into dough and then we twisted the dough into pretzels and baked them. We talked little if at all. After three and a half hours or so of work, when enough pretzels were produced, I was allowed to leave and take the subway back up to the Bronx and go to school. I was 10 years old. When I wasn't in the bakery or at school, I was minding my little brother at home until my parents came home from work.

These were the main events of my pre-teen and teenage years: working in the pretzel bakery, attending school, and taking care of my brother. I knew from those early days that I had to find another life as soon as possible if the future was to be tolerable. And as a young man in post-war America, I was able to do so. I was able to obtain a first-class education, fall in love, marry and become a parent, and eventually become a successful scientist and physician. Along the way, I was diagnosed with advanced cancer.

This book is about my life as a student, a doctor and a patient over the past 70 years. More broadly, it is a story about education, medical practice, and medical care in America over this time. I write as a grateful beneficiary of the best of all three. As an active participant in these endeavors, I have seen, for better and for worse, dramatic changes during this time span. My understanding of these changes — how things used to be, how they are today, what is different, what remains the same — is to a significant extent a subjective understanding, one that can only be communicated through the prism of my personal experiences.

I have described the people and events in the book as accurately as my memory allows, but patients' names have been changed to ensure privacy. I alone am responsible for any factual errors.

The book has four parts: Part One is the story of my experience with cancer; Part Two is about my education, and training in medicine; Part Three describes my views on the processes involved in the practice of medicine and the training of physicians, as well as my experiences becoming a hematologist and practicing hematology; Part Four addresses the problems of practicing medicine and being a patient in today's world as well as potential solutions to the current crisis in American medicine.

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