

The TRATTLERS

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HARNESSING A BALL OF ENERGY

BY HENRY L. TRATTLER, MD

My son Bill was a ball of energy even as a young child. He rarely slept for more than 5 to 6 hours a night, so my wife and I tried to channel his energy into sports. I coached him in youth baseball for 8 years, and he became one of Miami's top high school players. He went on to play baseball for Dartmouth College and then transitioned onto its snow ski team, with which Bill competed during his last 2 years of college (Figure 1).

As a parent, I feel blessed that my son has gained a great career in ophthalmology and is enjoying the profession, which I, too, love. I did not expect this to happen, because his initial exposure to ophthalmology was unusual. On an evening in 1972, in preparation for an upcoming lecture, I was reviewing a movie that demonstrated how to perform an upper eyelid blepharoplasty. As I watched footage of my scalpel incising the skin, I suddenly heard from the back of my living room, "Dad, you killed that person!" Turning around, I saw 6-year-old Bill staring wide-eyed and turning green. "No," I said, "that is surgery," and I put him back to bed. He kept coming back into the room and turning greener as the night went on. Needless to say, he was turned off by what I was doing.

Then, in middle school, Dana, a very cute classmate of Bill's, surprised him. I had recently performed cataract surgery on her grandmother, who had achieved wonderful visual results. Dana wanted Bill to know what a difference

cataract surgery had made for her grandmother and for her family. Her saying that "it must be wonderful to be able to do what your dad does to help people get their vision back" made Bill realize that being an eye doctor was something that he wanted to pursue.

AN AUTHOR IS BORN

After Dartmouth College, he returned to Miami for medical school. During his freshman year, I asked Bill to join me in writing a manual for nursing students on the cranial nerves. The project was a success. The next year, he complained that he did not like the microbiology textbook that he was studying and said that he was going to write his own. I did not think that was such a great idea, but after reading the initial 4 chapters he had written, I realized that his book was really good. Bill then got a third-year medical student, Mark Gladwin, to help, and they published the book. It is now available in eight languages and is a worldwide bestseller in the category of microbiology.¹ This endeavor started Bill's writing career.

MICROSURGERY

I was a model builder as a kid and enjoyed construction with my Erector Set (Meccano), but Bill did not have much interest in those types of activities. When he stated that he wanted to become an ophthalmologist, I wondered how he would do in performing microsurgery. With his excellent training at the University of Pennsylvania Scheie Eye Institute as a resident and a corneal fellowship with James McCulley, MD, at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical School, Bill mastered his microsurgical skills.



Figure 1. Bill playing baseball at Gulliver Prep School, learning to race at age 7, and skiing.

UP TO SPEED

Bill did not tell me what to do during his first year in our practice, but then, he said he was “going to get me up to speed.” Indeed, he has. We have had a great time working together, and we now perform laser cataract surgery as a team.

He has had a great interest in keratoconus and performed corneal collagen cross-linking on more than 1,000 patients in the United States before technology for the procedure was approved by the FDA. One of his most important patients was his own daughter.

PRIDE AND HUMILITY

Bill continues to enjoy authoring textbooks, writing in and editing multiple journals, teaching, helping with several ophthalmology organizations, and practicing with 14 ophthalmology partners, including me, in our private practice.

He has been humbled by the numerous awards presented to him by his peers, and I am always delighted to be introduced to everyone as Bill Trattler’s dad!

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

BY WILLIAM B. TRATTLER, MD

I have many reasons to be thankful for my father, but one relates to my senior prom. Quite often, classmates or teachers would approach me in junior high and high school to share a story about how my father had helped them or a family member with their eyes. He was a hero in the way he helped so many people. Perhaps not so surprisingly, then, I met my future date to the senior prom, Dana, in sixth grade when she approached me at lunchtime to let me know that my father had performed cataract surgery on her grandmother, who could now drive again. Thanks, Dad!

In eighth grade, as I started to ask more questions about his role as an eye doctor, my father had me spend the day with him. He introduced me to a long-time patient and asked me what I thought of his eyes. I stood just a few feet away, and both eyes looked normal to me. My father then proceeded to remove the patient’s left eye, which was a prosthesis. I was a bit shocked, but the patient expressed his appreciation of my father’s care of the healthy eye and the good cosmetic result after the loss of the left eye. The rest of the day was spent seeing additional patients and learning more about the significant impact eye doctors have on their patients.

HURRICANE

Having decided to pursue ophthalmology, I elected to stay in Miami for my internship year. Shortly after the year started, Miami was hit by Hurricane Andrew, a category 5 storm. My father was the ophthalmologist on call, and we ended up staying at the hospital overnight. A look outside on the first morning revealed incredible devastation. We spent the next few days working side by side in the emergency department, suturing lacerations, and helping the many injured patients who arrived for care. There was fortunately only one patient with a serious eye injury who presented to the emergency department, and I had my first opportunity to assist my father in surgery.

CHANGES IN PRACTICE

After completing my residency and cornea fellowship, I was lucky to have the opportunity to join my father at the Center for Excellence in Eye Care, a practice that consisted

of 14 ophthalmologists prior to my arrival. Interestingly, this practice did not exist during my residency. When I finished medical school, my father was part of a wonderful four-person general ophthalmology practice. He realized that it might be hard to bring me aboard, however, because the practice did not have enough patients to support an additional ophthalmologist. My father also recognized that South Florida was changing such that it might be difficult for small groups to survive in the future.

In 1994, he therefore began working with a number of other solo ophthalmologists and small group practices to create one large group practice that opened in 1996. Without question, my father's vision of getting "competitors" in South Florida to join together produced a fantastic environment for my development as a young ophthalmologist. The group had the resources to stay current on new technology and get involved in clinical research, all while providing excellent care to our patients.



Figure 2. Bill and Henry in the Miami Heat's locker room.

"I look forward every day to heading to the office or OR and getting to work with my dad."

HEAT

One exciting aspect of my father's career has been his involvement with the Miami Heat (Figure 2). He was invited to be the team ophthalmologist when the organization was founded in 1988, and he has served in that capacity ever since. Prior to each season, my father evaluates every player to ensure that his eyes are healthy, because these athletes can suffer ocular trauma during practice or games. My father

also attends virtually every home game and is prepared in case an eye injury occurs. Players typically downplay injuries, because they want to return to the court. It is my father's responsibility to ensure that athletes return only when it is safe for them to do so.

IMPACT

On a daily basis, I have the opportunity to care for patients who share their appreciation of my father's care, whether it is someone on whom he performed cataract surgery many years ago or someone he saw for an emergency visit recently. One of my father's gifts is his ability to connect with patients, and I do my very best to follow in his footsteps.

Recently, we started working even more closely together. On surgery days, my father now spends time with each cataract patient prior to the procedure and provides background on what to expect, which typically relaxes him or her. My father then performs the laser portion of the procedure, and I follow up with the remaining part of cataract surgery. Patients have shared with me that the time he spends with them makes a significant difference in their expectations and experiences during surgery, which emphasizes to me the importance of connecting with each patient, no matter how busy I may get.

I am grateful to have my father as a role model, and his efforts have allowed me to be a better physician and to get involved in our profession in so many ways. Having recognized the impact one person can have, I greatly enjoy helping other ophthalmologists in their careers. Most importantly, however, it has been a fun experience and journey together, and I look forward every day to heading to the office or the OR and getting to work with my dad. ■

1. Gladwin M, Trattler W. *Clinical Microbiology Made Ridiculously Simple*. 6th ed. Miami, FL: Medmaster; 2016.