

The Wait

Fifty years ago, 1968 was termed “The year of heart transplants.” It was a fascinating, thrilling, inspirational yet, in many senses, tragic year. On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of that year, I reread Thomas Thomson’s best seller *Hearts: Of Surgeons and Transplants, Miracles and Disasters Along the Cardiac Frontier*. It was published in 1971, the year I began medical school at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston.¹ Despite being swamped with the torturing deluge of Dr. Michael E. DeBakey’s new 3-year curriculum, I found time to read that gonzo journalistic effort. It had a profound impact on me because we were still living the dream and fallout of that 1968 heart transplant and mechanical circulatory assist device (MCAD) epoch in 1971—indeed, the first such epoch. Several years later, after completing a residency and fellowship and joining Baylor as faculty, Dr. DeBakey asked me to be on the team that would restart those programs. Heart transplants were again being performed at St. Luke’s/Texas Heart Institute, cyclosporine would soon be available, and the drama of Barney Clark’s 112 days with a total artificial heart was playing out. As a young pup on the faculty, it was an extraordinary honor, and I have been enmeshed in that world ever since. What I experienced was profound: medicine at its best (and sometimes worst); learning the meaning of true love and gifting as I dealt with brain death, organ donation, and retrieval; and the suffering of families of the near-dead and dying patients with advanced heart failure. They all became my heroes, and they still are.

A prized possession of mine is a framed collage that we made to celebrate the “second epoch of cardiac transplantation.” It was February 21, 1994, the tenth anniversary of restarting The Methodist Hospital’s heart transplant program. In the center of the collage is a dramatic picture taken in the operating room as our surgeons lifted a recently arrested and amputated donor heart from the chest cavity. Three hands are in the picture,

two of the retrieval surgeon and one of the assistant. They were captured in the photo lifting the heart up high, and it is a beautiful site—a perfect heart that soon would rest in the thorax of a fortunate death-defying recipient. The picture always reminds me of a priest lifting high the Eucharist at a Catholic Mass, because for me, heart transplantation has always been a sacred event. To the right of this image are columns of initials of 310 heart transplant patients who had rested within that second epoch. To the left is a poem I penned in 1985 out of frustration with the wait for an organ donation. The subject was a favored patient of mine. A profound dilemma of heart transplantation is the wait we still face (although MCADs are now making great strides to reach Dr. DeBakey’s vision of cardiac replacement machines). The autographs of Michael E. DeBakey, George P. Noon, Antonio M. Gotto, Jr., Hartwell H. Whisennhand, H. David Short III, and me are in the margins, though so many more teammates and teams-of-teams made heart transplantation possible and successful enough to continue to this day. Every time this procedure is performed we witness a miracle, and it reminds us of the extraordinary profession to which we are privileged to belong.

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Methodist DeBakey Cardiovascular Journal

REFERENCES

1. Thompson T. *HEARTS: of surgeons and transplants, miracles and disasters along the cardiac frontier*. New York: McCall Publishing; 1971. 304 p.

THE WAIT

I saw him
Alabama man
spying closed eyed into the late afternoon
early spring Texas sun
while quickly fleeing
some where
reigned short and
awake for an instant
from my defensive drowse

I saw him
sitting face gently up
with white chipmunk cheeks
sucking O2 and
afternoon rays warmth

Thinking of recent deaths
makes wonderment of
life and then

I saw him
grass green tube
nose stretched
giving sort of a
tethered life
While we wait for
someone else's tragedy
so that his
would not be

I saw him
wait
wait
wait
wait
and wait
waiting

Sometimes dying
more often alive

When will life's
drama
giving life
come
to stop

That awful
wait that
I saw him have
while lifting head closed eyed into a late
afternoon early spring Texas sun
while he was in
WAIT.

B.P. Noon

CARDIAC TRANSPLANTATION
The Second Epoch
February 21, 1984-1994



Forced to Withdrawal

H. David Stout, III

MULTI-ORGAN TRANSPLANT CENTER
The Methodist Hospital
and
Baylor College of Medicine

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James B. Young, M.D. 3/28/85

The Recipients

GS	DN	JH	RL	AK
NH	ST	LH	JP	RB
KC	RD	CK	WB	WP
DS	BW	CC	WC	DM
TK	DH	SC	DD	GF
HP	WD	FB	KK	JY
TW	JH	EL	EB	SS
BE	CG	CC	SH	JM
HG	TP	JH	RC	JE
JO	MG	NP	CN	CB
RL	AC	KD	RM	CB
TS	RA	KD	HC	JT
JG	JC	JH	WC	DJ
EW	WM	LF	RA	DB
BM	CD	RS	LG	AL
MS	CC	LP	QP	GK
NW	JB	HG	MF	WW
WF	GC	SL	JW	JK
KM	RV	JS	JP	TW
TB	VC	CD	FV	HL
LC	JE	GB	MW	MG
BA	JH	JM	TA	JA
HS	RC	MW	CB	DJ
LL	LS	WC	KB	VF
NH	WR	RB	LL	VC
GW	LW	TR	RH	JM
KJ	EB	FS	JG	TP
DD	JW	WC	AS	JS
MR	EH	EP	JA	PW
ES	JE	MW	CM	AL
GH	VT	MT	JA	AT
HIB	SB	MD	RS	BR
FB	SC	AS	AL	MG
JC	AC	JH	LS	RS
CP	JS	WH	DL	FK
JP	TH	AM	LY	RJ
MH	JS	AS	PS	MS
DW	JB	WW	DP	JK
MM	KS	EB	HA	DS
JL	WG	JB	AC	WB
DW	OB	JB	FM	HS
LW	MA	WH	AG	CB
LN	JR	HT	BH	VB
IJ	CM	JF	AO	JB
LP	RM	RD	FC	HIB
JS	MR	EB	JW	RR
DL	FS	WB	FC	CM
LN	BN	JN	NP	KJ
RM	SM	BP	CD	TM
CB	LR	JW	BM	RS
JR	MR	RB	TS	CF
WS	SW	NK	JH	
NT	CM	JA	MA	
DH	WS	HW	JF	
DS	JF	TK	GS	
WK	MF	JE	RC	
SM	BO	BW	KW	
PM	SS	MS	RW	
PH	RP	GT	JL	
RT	AM	PE	CS	
VB	JC	CL	RB	
JE	HC	MC	RR	

James B. Young

Michael DeBakey

Antonio M. Artero, Jr.