

# The Bailey Way

*Jeff Van Eps, M.D., fourth-year General Surgery resident*

Through the generosity of Charles R. Millikan, D. Min., vice president for Spiritual Care and Values Integration, an annual award competition was established at Houston Methodist Hospital among the resident staff. To enter the writing competition, residents must submit a poem or essay of 1,000 words or less on the topic, "On Being a Doctor." A committee of seven was selected from Houston Methodist Hospital Education Institute to establish the judging criteria and select the winning entries. The following is the third-place winning entry for 2018.

"Surgeons only like to cut; they don't really care about the patient"—a harsh branding commonly peddled by some critics of our craft. Yet he needs only to see the name on the clinic chart before his lips curl into a small grin as he effortlessly begins to summarize the long history he's shared with this patient over nearly a decade of care. He chooses his words with careful intentionality and expects you to do the same. Each one is uttered thick and slow, like molasses, dripping with the wisdom imparted by a lifetime of experience and the constant pursuit of excellence. A seasoned storyteller, Dr. H. Randolph Bailey speaks with reverence of the cancer that was eradicated, reciting by heart its exact stage and narrating the tenuous course from its discovery on screening colonoscopy to adjuvant treatment, surgical resection, and now routine follow-up. He swells with pride when speaking of the patient, not merely as the object of his success but, rather, his equal and willing partner in the process for whom "it's been a real pleasure" to care for.

Walking on the ward floors you may still note the occasional limp—a remnant of a hip that could not endure the long hours of standing at the operating table and finally had to be replaced. However, when operating, his hands move with the same precision and grace that have defined him for a generation. For practitioners like Dr. Bailey, the origins of surgery as an apprenticeship model of experiential learning are sustained one patient encounter at a time and through each meticulously placed stitch. At the same time, he realizes that surgery is not a static art but a constantly evolving skillset that the lifetime learner must continually strive to master.

Some wear mentorship like a disposable badge on their shirtsleeve to be brandished when they feel like it, taking for granted the daily opportunity to mold the next surgical generation. Others, like Dr. Bailey, have mentorship so deeply entwined in the fibers of their work life that it oozes from them continuously. Despite a long history in positions of academic surgical prestige and power, there is no air of superiority surrounding Dr. Bailey. From the casual observer to his senior surgical trainee, he makes himself available to all interested learners and actively invests himself in maximizing their potential. As a budding surgeon and longtime mentee, I have been fortunate enough to benefit from Dr. Bailey's investment in and out of the operating room.

If you share a meal with me, you will find that I routinely eat with my nondominant left hand because, after all, that's how my mentor learned to suture with either hand. I will forever hear his voice telling me "Don't poke the fat" when I suture closed the abdominal fascia. I will be present for preoperative positioning and wrap my patient's legs in warm blankets because he's shown me that the line between success and failure is remarkably thin, and death lies in the details. I will realize my dream of following in his surgical footsteps at a top subspecialty fellowship largely due to the invisible stamp I wear from his authentic endorsement. Finally, and most importantly, I will leave my surgical training as a better surgeon, scientist, husband, and father—having learned, from such a humble giant, *his way*: the Bailey Way.

*Dr. Van Eps is continuing his medical training with a Colorectal Surgery Fellowship at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis, MN.*