



The Year They Tried to Kill Me: Surviving a surgical internship...even if the patients don't

Salvatore Iaquina MD

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"The only people who think you are a doctor are you and your mom."

Not exactly the warm welcome I hoped for. But I was just a naive Wisconsin boy, fresh out of medical school and new to Oakland, California. I chose Highland Hospital for my surgical internship: an entire year filled with sick patients, brutal work hours, more brutal staff surgeons, and flawed attempts to maintain a long-distance relationship. Yet, somehow, it's a work of nonfictional comedy.

I take on many roles throughout the story. I'm a kid who still plays Tetris, a guy who can't commit to his girlfriend, an untrained doctor who finds himself cutting open people's skulls, and a fish out of water who is called to the ER to drain the blood from a cocaine-engorged penis. But this adventure isn't just crazy hospital anecdotes or what it takes to become a surgeon. It's a coming of age tale about learning what it means to be a caregiver. Sure, I worked 40 hours without sleep, but that is only one of the ways *They* tried to kill me. Their real evil was crushing the enthusiasm and compassion of their trainees. I struggled to remain a "normal" human while joining a fraternity of holier-than-thou surgeons, and nothing grounded me more than trying to cope with the illnesses within my own family.

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