

# Sherlock and I Return

The Presentation of  
Additional Medical MYSTERIES

**Dr. Frederick Kassis**



*In his second book Dr. Kassis once again presents the reader with mostly rare medical conditions that he encountered during his 40-years in internal medicine. Unlike his first book, which began with his beginning his medical practice in a rural area, this book begins as he begins his medical education, proceeding then to a dissection of the cases.*

## **Sherlock and I Return: The Presentation of Additional Medical Mysteries**

By Dr. Frederick Kassis

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Additional Medical MYSTERIES*

**Dr. Frederick Kassis**



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# CHAPTER 1

## FLIGHT TO AN UNKNOWN UNIVERSE

**A**fter I had finished writing my first book, *Sherlock and I: A Memoir of Medical Mysteries in a US Rural Practice*, I realized that I had more to tell both about my life in medicine and about other medical mysteries that my profession presented to me -- a profession that I relished because it forced me to learn something new almost every day, while, at the same time, it maximally tested my medical knowledge on many, many occasions during my forty-year career.

In the first book I began my narrative at the time when I was beginning my practice in Rupert, Idaho. However, I am beginning this story at a time long before that – at the time I began my studies at Loyola-Stritch Medical School in Chicago. I will, eventually, discuss diagnostic mysteries that presented themselves to me



later in my journey, thereby allowing you to see in these writings my progression from a medical greenhorn to an astute medical diagnostician many years later. That journey was not an easy one, but ultimately brought me to a profession that I truly loved.

I graduated from the University of Santa Clara in the town of Santa Clara in California in June 1966 with a BS in biology. Those of us who were applying to medical school had begun completing the paperwork many months prior to the deadline for submitting it to schools in which we were interested. Somehow, even with my extremely limited mathematical skills, I had managed to pass the chemistry and physics courses. Knowing that medical schools look very hard at a prospective student's scores in organic chemistry, I had worked my tail off learning this "beast", and really aced the final; so I thought that I had a decent chance of being accepted by at least one of the schools to which I had applied: St. Louis University in Missouri, Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska, and Loyola-Stritch Medical School in Chicago (all schools that, by the way, did not require their applicants to have taken calculus!)

My best friend, Mike Pease, had also applied to the same schools, and both of us had our interviews with their representatives. Mike and I both had interviewed with the same doctor from Loyola-Stritch. That

physician had indicated that his recommendation for each of us would be favorable. We were delighted by that comment, since we both had that school as number 1 on our list of possibilities. Nevertheless, we would have been happy if *any* of the three schools accepted us.

As the months went by, Mike received his acceptance letters from Creighton and St. Louis, but not from Loyola. As the deadline for us to make our choice approached, Mike finally called the Admissions Office at Loyola-Stritch and discovered that the doctor who interviewed us had forgotten to send in the recommendation for Mike! Therefore, Mike signed on to go to medical school at St. Louis University, while I chose to go to Loyola-Stritch. It turns out that St. Louis is a relatively short train ride from Chicago, so we were able to visit each other during our training years. We have remained best friends for over fifty years (since our first year in college).

On August 30, 1966, I said goodbye to my parents at the Sacramento airport, and boarded my first airplane – the “mother of all airplanes at the time,” a gigantic 747, which would be flying nonstop from Sacramento to O’Hare International Airport in Chicago. My seat was near the rear of the airplane next to a woman of about fifty, who as a frequent flyer helped settle me down. She had let her hair become its natural grey, was of average build, and wore a high-end olive jumpsuit. I was not

only a little worried about the flight but also about where I was going to spend my first night in Chicago. I was not flushed with cash, so I located a YMCA which was probably a distance of about a \$10.00 cab ride from the airport. I figured that I could take the light rail (known as “the L”) from the YMCA to the school the next morning, and then take the same train (or bum a ride) from the school to the fraternity house (Phi-Beta-Pi) at 5600 W. Washington Boulevard, where I would be living with other students for the next year.

Soon I heard the crew closing the hatch doors, and we began our taxi to the runway. A petite five-foot blond stewardess now stood about ten feet from us, giving us the safety precautions of the airplane. As she spoke, I was thinking to myself, “We’re flying over the Rocky Mountains; if there is a problem, we’re basically going to slam into one of those beautiful peaks of which we all take pictures!” I feel the plane swivel onto the runway and stop, so that the pilots can run through the last of their safety check lists. After a couple of minutes, the engines begin their power surge as the pilot eases both throttles forward and guides the plane down the runway. As the plane begins its takeoff run, I wonder to myself just how much lift those two wings need to generate to make this behemoth become airborne.

We are near the end of the runway when I sense the first lift of the plane from the ground; it feels as if it has just jumped into the air. I feel a brief period of weightlessness, after which I have the sensation that a pair of giant hands have reached down and pulled the airplane into its climb. As we ascend above the clouds to about thirty-thousand feet I now view a blanket of white, fluffy clouds over which we were flying -- a magnificent view! Throughout the trip I gaze out the window -- first at the Sierra Nevada range, then at the Rocky Mountains, followed by the Great Plains, with their squares of crops, and then, finally, the skyline of Chicago looms ahead.

I disembarked the airplane only to find myself looking at the multiple corridors that comprise the maze of the O'Hare airport. My fellow travelers were kind enough to guide me first to the baggage claim area, and then to the area just outside of one of the mazes, where taxis waited for passengers. The line was long; however, twenty minutes later I climbed into the back seat of a taxi and explained to the driver where I needed to go. The YMCA to which I was headed was located at 2400 West Washington Boulevard. I was close on the cost; the ride cost a total of \$13, including the tip, which, considering my limited means, was perfectly acceptable.

I had been up since 6AM that morning, so it took me no time at all to go to sleep. The next morning, I packed

up my bag, and headed for the “L” for my relatively short ride down to the medical school. I considered my stay at the YMCA to be a great success, since I had been neither beaten up nor robbed; I considered this a positive omen! I found the train station and asked one of its riders if one of these trains would take me to Cook County Hospital. The man kindly told me which one to take; a few minutes later I heard it coming to a stop at the station. Along with my suitcase, I boarded and settled into a seat. Next stop Loyola’s Medical School!

In this era, Loyola-Stritch School of Medicine was located about a block away from Cook County Hospital in a dingy-looking old brick building. There was an empty corner lot next to the school’s building. As I walked to the corner and then turned to go to the school, I glanced up at the side of the building, where, in large letters I read “**WORSHAM SCHOOL OF MORTUARY SCIENCE**”! “Oh, Dear God!” I thought. “What have I gotten myself into?” I explored the

depths of my brain but could not come up with a picture that I might have previously seen of the exterior of the school building. “Oh well,” I thought ... it’s time to start my medical education; therefore, I continued walking, opened the door, and asked a janitor where I might find the registrar’s office.

The inside of the building did not, fortunately, resemble the exterior of the school building at all. Everything was clean, and the light-green walls radiated light, making the halls and other rooms look cheerful. With little effort I found the registrar's office, where a middle-aged woman with brown hair and dressed in business attire addressed me in a kind voice. "So, you must be Mr. Kassis she said. You are one of the last few yet to arrive; I was beginning to get a little worried. I am very happy to see that you made it here – you had a long trip! My name is Judith, and I will help you with all of the paperwork."

After the pleasantries between us were over, Judith went to work. She first told me that I had been awarded a scholarship large enough to cover almost all my first-year expenses, and then guided me through the paperwork and signatures which were involved in the registration process, which took approximately a half-hour. When we had finally completed that task, she then gave me two sheets of paper that outlined the courses that I would be taking during the first semester. The list was duly impressive, including anatomy, histology, physiology, embryology, biochemistry, neuroanatomy, and a couple of psychology courses thrown in for more fun. As I read through the list my slender frame began to feel weak, and a mild sensation of nausea ascended from my stomach toward my throat. The list that I was

perusing seemed to be endless! I thought to myself, “I am certainly not in college anymore.”

Judith counted out the money that I would need during the first quarter and directed me to a bank located three blocks away where I could open a checking account, suggesting that I do that next. She told me the location of the bookstore, but, since I would have quite a load, suggested that I return tomorrow to buy the books that I would need for the classes.

I thanked her and asked if she would watch my bag while I went to the bank. She responded, “Of course.” I then headed out the door to find the bank. That wasn’t hard; however, the paperwork through which I had to wade here made the registration paperwork look like kindergarten play. I thought, for a while, that I would have to grant the bank the rights to my firstborn child to establish my account. It became apparent to me that banks did not hold students in high regard in this city. Eventually I finished jumping through their hoops and left the bank with some cash and a shiny new checkbook. I went back to the school and picked up my suitcase, thanking Judith for her efforts.

I now had to begin my journey to the fraternity house. Judith had told me that the frat house was just two blocks west of the “L” that I had taken to get to the school; so that I merely had to grab the “L” going west

and get off at 56<sup>th</sup> Street. A two-block walk west would bring me to the house. So off to the “L” station I trudged with my bag. In just a few minutes I boarded the train for the half-hour ride to 56<sup>th</sup> Street. After trudging the two blocks west from the train station, I turned left, and there it was – a three-story tall, dark brick house, which was squeezed between two houses of almost identical construction. As I walked toward the house, I noted that, although it was only the end of August, many of the leaves from the trees lining the sidewalks had already decided that it was their time to fall to the ground. From the sidewalk I could see a large second-floor bedroom with windows overlooking the street. It looked as if the third-floor bedroom was identical, but I was not certain of that fact. I dragged my suitcase up the stairs and opened the door, which opened onto a large foyer. I looked upward, to the right, and then leftward; the house had twelve-foot ceilings everywhere that I looked. Coming from California where ranch-style homes with eight-foot ceilings were the norm, the height of these ceilings were awe-inspiring to me! To my right was a large living room, with obviously well-used chairs and couches scattered randomly around the room. I turned and started walking to the left when I heard footsteps approaching me from that direction – it was Dennis Marking, who introduced himself to me as being the house manager. He told me that I was the sixth person to



arrive, so that I could almost have my choice of bedrooms; and with that brief introduction, he gave me a tour of the house.

On the first floor there was a small kitchen at the rear of the house, which opened via a small door into a dining area, about fifteen by twelve feet in size, in which was situated a long, very old dining table and chairs. From this room we entered the living room. Most of the walls were covered with wallpaper which I estimated to be at least five years older than myself.

A stairway on the left side of the living room ascended to the other floors, each of which had a large bedroom with three large windows that overlooked the street. Each floor had a small middle bedroom with only one small window, through which one had a fine view of the adjacent ancient brick home. Rear bedrooms were slightly larger than the middle ones and had a larger window that overlooked the small back yard. Each bed had a small chest- of-drawers, along with a small armoire.

Dennis was now anxious to show me the “piece de resistance” – the basement, where the fraternity held their parties – and, according to him, they were quite the events. Dennis was in his second-year at the medical school, which is how he came by his job as house manager. Inherent in his duties as such was the job of

making sure that we had food on the table, as well as acting as the arranger of the fraternity parties.

Therefore, we now descended the stairs that led to the basement. It took my eyes a few minutes to adjust to the decreased light here (there was just one bare light bulb located just off-center in the room, and I figured the bulb to be forty watts at the most). The room was around eighteen by fifteen, and featured a supporting post located about five feet from the far wall. A washer and dryer were stuffed under the staircase. On the far wall I noticed that there was a wooden bar attached to that wall in such a way that it could be raised and lowered. To the left I gazed on a ping-pong table. Since I had been our high school table tennis champion, I was delighted to see this apparatus, which seemed to be calling out to me for some action. Dennis asked me, “Well, what do you think?” I replied that it was certainly a great place for parties, and that I was looking forward to the first one. (Actually, I could have told him the truth – the truth being that I hated parties; that I was shy and tended to mingle for just the amount of time that I thought was needed before I could make a socially acceptable exit.) But Dennis was in his element, and I did not want to give him a bad impression of me at our first visit. After a few more minutes of Dennis’s telling me about the nursing students who normally came to the parties, I

suggested that we go up to the second-floor bedroom, which is where I wanted to stake my claim for the year.

The room was, indeed, large. There was an alcove with large bay window that allowed for a great view of the street below. A large desk occupied the left side of that alcove. "Perfect," I thought. The bed associated with the giant desk ran along the front wall of the bedroom.

Just inside the door to the right I saw a bed along with a desk which faced the wall adjacent to the entrance, while another bed ran parallel to the left wall of the room, just in front of the steam heater. (I wondered if such a small-appearing apparatus could truly heat this large room; however, I was later pleasantly surprised that it performed that duty very well.) On that side the desk faced the left wall and was located about three feet from the bed that belonged to it. Once again, I noted that each of the beds had a small chest-of-drawers nearby, which would certainly be large enough for my meager wardrobe! I deposited my suitcase on the bed closest to the large desk, and Dennis then walked me down the hallway to show me the location of the bathrooms; there were two, each with a long sink and a large shower. He told me that there would be six people living on this second floor and that,

so far, there had not been any problem with the tenants using the bathroom facilities.

Having ended the tour, Dennis informed me that the rent was due on the fifth of each month and mentioned that the fraternity house provided breakfast and dinner (which is “supper” to some people). We would be at the school at lunchtime, and there were many options in the area for us to grab something to eat. He reminded me that dinner was served at 6 PM, so that it was up to us to make sure that we arrived back to the fraternity house by that time if we wished to have a hot meal.

Dennis and I parted ways at that point, and I went back to my room and made up the bed with the sheets provided by the fraternity house. I hung up some of my clothes, placing the others into the small chest-of-drawers located at the foot of my bed.

I then remembered that I needed to go to the bookstore to purchase the books that I would need for my classes. I backtracked my steps from yesterday to reach the “L” station and took the train.

There were actually four medical schools situated in the area around Cook County Hospital, all of which used that hospital for the “clinical years” of their students – years in which their respective students spent their days in the hospital, along with an intern and a resident, learning to examine patients -- trying, while doing so, to learn the art by which a doctor narrows down the

possible diagnostic possibilities (this process is known as “creating a differential diagnosis”). Being lowest on the pecking order, the students also ran errands for the intern and the resident, both of whom outranked them. The four schools surrounding Cook County Hospital were: University of Illinois Chicago School of Medicine; Northwestern School of Medicine; Presbyterian St. Luke’s School of Medicine; and Loyola-Stritch School of Medicine.

I exited the “L” at West Harrison Street, and made my way to the bookstore, a rather small building located across the street from the hospital. I gave my list of courses with their book requirements and watched in awe as the clerk rounded up each book, creating an ever-growing stack of tomes on the counter. “There,” he said to me at the end of his quest, “I believe that is all of them.”

I gazed at the roughly two-and-one-half foot mound of reading material, with *Cunningham’s Anatomy* forming the base of the literary pyramid. As yesterday, while at the registrar’s office, my heart seemed to sink, and a feeling of nausea once again came over me. However, reality was staring me in the face, and I saw no way to dodge it.

The bookstore had been there for many years and had seen a couple of generations of would-be physicians

come through its doors. Since the owners knew that a medical student usually had very little money, they had established a line of credit for every medical student who purchased books from them, allowing the student to pay twenty-five dollars a month on his or her account. If the student remained current with the monthly payment, he or she could purchase whatever books that were needed for their courses. However, just as there is no free lunch, the bookstore had agreements with the schools that simply stated that no medical student will graduate until their final bill is paid. Overall, it was truly a great deal, because all of us ended up buying extra books to help us pass our courses; without the bookstore's credit program, many of us would not have made it to graduation.

I paid my first \$25, grabbed the two double-bagged sacks, and headed back to the "L". Once back at the frat house, I arranged the books on the desk, and then decided that a nap would be a great idea!

I was awakened by Al Baltieri as he entered the room with his worldly possessions. He placed his suitcase on the bed on the left side of the room. Al was about 5,'8" tall, with dark brown hair and was dressed in Khaki pants and a checkered shirt. He weighed approximately 150 pounds. He told me that he had already received his diploma from pharmacy school, but had decided, instead, that he wanted to be a physician.

He was from Boston and had a girlfriend who was still working on her pharmacy degree back there. He seemed very nice. He spoke with a mild Bostonian accent, his speech accentuated by his arm and hand movements.

While we were getting to know each other, our last roommate entered the room lugging a large, brown suitcase that was almost too much for him to maneuver. Both Al and I helped this last straggler to get his bag onto the remaining bed, and then introduced ourselves to him.

Our last roommate's name was Ed Brannen who was from Portland, Oregon. He was a little shorter than both of us at about 5 foot 6, but still outweighed me because I weighed in at a strapping 117 pounds. Khakis seemed to be the dress of the day because Ed also sported those along with a polo shirt that complemented his outfit.

Ed explained that he had wanted to be a physician for years, following in his father's footsteps, who was a family physician in a small town about 30 miles south of Portland. He, too, had a girlfriend back home, who was getting her masters' degree in English at one of the local colleges. Ed explained to us that he did have one vice – he was a pipe-smoker; he hoped that that this habit would not become a problem for us. (Neither Al nor I smoked; however, Ed's desk was in the right corner,

away from both of us, so we did not think that his pipe-smoking would be an issue.)

The remaining students continued to filter into the fraternity house until about 8 PM. After the newcomers had deposited and organized their belongings, we all gravitated to the living-room area, and began to get to know one another. I discovered that there were students there from all over the country and from all different types of colleges. It began to dawn on me that I was sitting in this room on dilapidated furniture with men who had most likely graduated in the top 10% of their respective college classes! I graduated in the top 15% of my college class but had to study very diligently to manage that; I wondered if I would be able to compete with such talent during the coming four years.

For example, there was Alan Wetzel, who had graduated first in his class at one of the eastern schools, and, of course, Al Baltieri – already a graduate from pharmacy school. Stan Hashimiri seemed extremely confident as he spoke about his many accomplishments while attending his college. To hear him speak about his knowledge, one would have thought that he had already been to medical school. And on it went as we went around the room introducing ourselves to one another.

I, on the other hand, had merely studied my ass off during my college years, and had added no extracurricular activities to my university resume. In this



regard I felt some kinship with my third roommate Ed Brannen, who had graduated from the University of Portland without having participated in a boatload of extracurricular activities. (As I think about medical school admissions now, I realize that I would probably have no chance in hell of being accepted, because now all of them require that the candidates for admission take calculus in college – a subject that I could not pass even if someone held a gun to my head! Therefore, it appears that my having been born when I was turned out to be a very fortunate event as far as my life's career is concerned.)

## CHAPTER 2

### THE STUDIES BEGIN

The following Monday found all of us in a rather small and ancient classroom on the first floor of the medical school for our first lecture on histology, which is the study of the different tissues of the body. Then followed an hour of instruction in physiology, the science of *how* the different organs of the body perform their differing functions.

After a short lunch break, we all made our way to the anatomy lab, where bodies that we would be dissecting over the next semester were assigned to us. Three students were assigned to each body; and, over the coming months it would be our job to dissect this cadaver to learn the location of the different organs as well as the nerves associated with them – nerves which, in a living individual, helped to regulate the organs' functions.

Ed Brannen, Anthony Ruggero, and I were assigned to a cadaver whom we named “Henry.” We were instructed to dissect the body in sections, progressively working our way from the head and neck regions, through the chest and abdominal cavities, then examining the genitalia (some students had male cadavers, while others had female specimens; so that we had to share this part of the dissection with members of an adjacent examination table). By the end of the semester, we had completed our dissections all the way down through the lower extremities.

This was an extremely difficult course, with seemingly thousands of details that we had to memorize. “Practicals” were administered by the faculty every two weeks throughout the semester, during which we were expected to be able to not only identify an organ or muscle or nerve, but also to tell the professors the entity’s origin, function, and destination.

Fortunately, the three of us working on “Henry” worked well together throughout the semester, a fact which made the ordeal a bit more tolerable. The only disagreements that the three of us ever had concerned Ed’s absolute compulsion to identify *every* nerve that merely supplied a region of the skin in certain areas. Tony finally solved that issue by simply cutting and then removing those insignificant items, thereby eliminating

our having to deal with them. Ed was a bit put off by this behavior for a while, but finally came to the realization, as we had weeks earlier, that no one was ever going to ask us about these nerves. Later in our studies of neuroanatomy, we would get our chance to ascertain the importance of these cutaneous structures.

We studiously dissected our way through “Henry’s” anatomy for the entire semester, by which time the organs had come to resemble pieces of leather, to the point where Mary (one of the students) was unable to identify a penis during the last practical examination. All of us watched her and giggled a little as she held the organ at different angles vainly trying to identify the desiccated organ, which, by now, resembled a small piece of muscle tissue. Finally, much to our instructor’s dismay, we all yelled in unison, “Mary, it’s a penis!”

We attended endless lectures during the first week, many of which were narrated at such a speed there was no way to take decent notes. (During one such monologue Steve Steinman raised his hand and asked the lecturer to slow down because “My pencil is starting to smoke!). I would arrive at the fraternity house only to find that I still had 150 pages to read that night if I were to keep up with just one of the courses.

It was then that I realized that the lectures were worthless and that I could not possibly pass this year’s courses if I continued along this path. Throughout my

years in school, I had learned early on that I learned the required material best by reading the book, and then outlining the information into a form that my brain could more easily comprehend. In short, most of my learning occurred not in the classroom, where I was usually bored, but in the library as I outlined the book. I realized after that first week that I would have to spend my time with the books if I were to ever have a chance to move on to the second year of study.

Therefore, the following week found me getting up in time to grab some breakfast. Daily I took the books that I needed for that day and headed to the small city library located about four blocks from the house. There I would study until it closed at 5:30 PM. On the days that I had to be in anatomy lab, I would finish my work in the lab, and then mosey over to the University of Illinois cafeteria, where I would study until around 8:30 PM, before catching the “L” back to the fraternity house.

My fellow fraternity members were, at first, worried that I might be thrown out of school. However, as the third week passed, I began to hear grumblings from a few other students concerning the futility of attending worthless lectures, which did nothing more than rob them of valuable study time! It was at this time that two other students decided to follow my pathway to learning. Thus, the beginning of our fourth week found

Al Baltieri, Anthony Ruggero, and I hopping into Anthony's '66 red Mustang and travelling to a location where we might spend the day immersing ourselves in the material that we had to know to pass our exams.

To avoid boredom, we chose different locations in which to study – the library at a local girls' college, the public library downtown, the University of Illinois cafeteria, as well as the Elgin public library. We found ourselves usually skipping breakfast, driving to our destination, and then studying until 9 PM (with coffee breaks every few hours). We would then drive to a restaurant known as The Come Back Inn, where we would finish off our days with one of its magnificent burgers and a pint of the dark beer provided by this cozy establishment. (It was especially wonderful in the winter because of The Come Back Inn's large fireplace with its roaring fire.) Only then did we head back to the frat house to get some sleep, before starting the same ritual the following morning.

By now you must be thinking that I, along with my colleagues had ended up at a bad medical school. On the contrary, it was an excellent school! The problem with horrible lecturers seemed to be a universal phenomenon, because I heard the same lament from Mike Pease at Saint Louis University and from other college friends who ended up at other medical schools.

In what way was Loyola-Stritch a good school? During the first two years the comprehensive testing by which the professors of each course would challenge us every two weeks made us thoroughly learn the material. Most of the tests were multiple choice, so that I could eliminate some combinations of answers immediately. However, our physiology professor was not so lenient, and listed every possibility in the potential answer list. The physiology department also demanded that each of us take an oral exam at the end of the year along with the written test. At any rate, our frequent comprehensive review of the materials certainly contributed to our thorough understanding of each subject. However, since I am speaking about the quality of the education at Loyola, at this point I need to mention something about the teachers whom we encountered later in our training.

In years three and four (the “clinical years,”) I found that the school’s attending physicians in the hospital were excellent teachers and were willing to spend their valuable time at the bedside with us as we presented our cases to them. Additionally, Cook County Hospital presented us with an abundance of patients, whose illnesses gave each of us a unique learning opportunity. Of my attending physicians at that hospital, I remember three most vividly:

The first of these was Dr. Isaac Lewin, an elderly oncologist (cancer specialist), who had been teaching at that institution for many years. He obviously was at the top of his game as far as his specialty was concerned; however, what struck me most about this gentle man was his compassion – compassion for his patients and their families as well as his compassion for the medical students with whom he interacted. I say this because in this era of medical training, medical students, interns, and residents were not always treated kindly by the attending physicians – the terms “berated” and “harassed” readily come to my mind in this regard.

The worst episode of this belittlement that I ever observed was in an operating theater on the upper floor of the hospital. Three of us students had a spare half-hour, so we slithered into an operating theater where rows of staggered seating allowed interested persons to observe the operation in progress. As we sat watching the procedure, it became obvious to us that the attending surgeon was not happy with performance of the surgery by his senior resident. The attending surgeon would look at the operation field, walk a few feet away, and pace. After one of his inspections, the attending surgeon took off his gloves, walked over to the blackboard on the wall, and wrote the numbers 2, 3, and 4. He then called to the miserable resident doing the surgery, “If you’re wondering what I have written, it’s the number of



DAYS that I feel that this operation might last!” I am certain that the poor resident surgeon would have chosen death over his current situation if given the option. However, such humiliation of students, interns, and residents was not uncommon during this era of medical education.

The next attending physician who has remained in my thoughts these many years was Dr. John Tobin, a cardiologist, who was my attending on three different occasions as I rotated through different specialties at Cook. There were so many patients at that hospital with cardiac problems, a student could find a new heart murmur merely by walking through one of the wards and listening to every other patient. (A heart murmur is an abnormal sound made by blood passing through a damaged heart valve.) Therefore, whenever Dr. Tobin discussed these different murmurs with us, he was very careful to make certain that all of us had heard the murmur, but also required that we diagram what each murmur would look like on paper. By so doing he made certain that we all understood the physiology (i.e. the reason *why* the murmur was there in the first place). Later, as I began to teach medical students, interns, and residents, I realized that these trainees might be able to hear a murmur but had no understanding of its origin or of the consequences that the heart would ultimately

suffer because of its presence. (It was at these times that I truly appreciated how good an education I had received.)

The last attending physician whom I distinctly recall was a resident named Dr. Ketty Badrinath. Dr. Badrinath was from India and was in his final year of his hematology fellowship. In my first book I mentioned that I had started to read *The Great Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* when I was about seven years old. I was hooked beginning with the first story, *A Study in Scarlet*, and have re-read his adventures many times during my lifetime. Dr. Badrinath epitomized Sherlock in the sense that he was meticulous both in his perusal of laboratory information, in his expertise in history-taking, and in his examination of the patient. Here was Sherlock! I decided after my exposure to this intelligent and meticulous physician that I wanted to practice internal medicine. However, I have wandered a bit from my first year at Loyola.

As I returned late one evening to the frat house, I found a very concise letter from the biochemistry professor, Dr. Michael Lerieux. It read: "We are missing you in the lab."

So ... the jig was up! To say the least, I was a very naïve young man back in those days; so much so that I was certain that he would be receptive to my explanation for my absences. Therefore, I sat down at my desk on

the second floor, looked out at the thin layer of snow blanketing the street and sidewalks below, and wrote my reply to his letter:

Dear Doctor,

If you will accept the premise that I am here at Loyola-Stritch and committed to my learning the science of medicine. If you will also accept the premise that there are different ways by which one might digest the necessary material, and that I have discovered, through my many school years, that I learn best by reading the material and outlining it into a form that my brain can more easily understand. Lastly, if you will accept my passage of your exams as proof of my method of learning has allowed me to assimilate the required knowledge, then I would humbly ask that I be allowed to continue learning in the manner which I have found best for me.

Sincerely,

Fred Kassis

The following day I dropped by the professor's office and left my letter with his secretary. I then waited for the ax to fall. Surprisingly, I never heard anything

back from this or any other professor during the rest of the year.

As that first year approached its end, I began to feel even more paranoid about the entire matter, worrying that the powers that be may decide to hold me back a year even though I had passed every exam. My other two cohorts in this study endeavor began to have the same feelings of paranoia ... however, life merely went on as usual, and we completed the first year.

The traditional faculty-student dinner was held at the end of that year. As I was standing with Al in one of the room's corners that evening, I saw professor Lerieux approaching us from the middle of the room. I felt my heart sink down to my toes and my hands began to perspire as this stately gentleman approached. "You're Mr. Kassis, aren't you?" he asked. "Yes, I am," I replied somewhat nervously. "I still have a letter from you that I keep in a frame on my desk," he said. And with a slight smile, he turned to join another group of students.

After we had completed our first year of study, I spent the summer working in the same drug sundries warehouse in which my father had labored for many years. (I had been working there with him ever since I was thirteen years old, unloading boxes from boxcars that delivered the stock to the warehouse, marking the items, and then putting everything in their proper places on the shelves.) However, this summer I labored without

his companionship for he had suffered a heart attack in January, at which time the physicians also found a lung cancer in his right lung. This cancer, unfortunately, was the most aggressive of all the variants of pulmonary cancer that can attack a person. Since his chest x-ray already showed an enlarged lymph node in the middle of the lung, radiation and chemotherapy were the only options available for treatment.

My Dad was still able to drive at this time, so that he could manage to get to the oncologist and to his radiation therapy. I would finish work at 3 PM each day, after which I would take my father to the local pool hall, thus getting him out of the house while, at the same time, giving us some happy times together. However, as the summer wore on, I could see that he was gradually losing ground in his battle with his malignancy; he was very slowly losing both his weight and his stamina. I treasured every moment that I had with this kind, sweet man. Fall came, and I had to decide whether to take my second year off or to return to my studies. I discussed the matter with my father's physician, who encouraged me to return to my studies. As I boarded the plane I wondered if I would ever see my father alive again.

# Sherlock and I Return

The Presentation of  
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