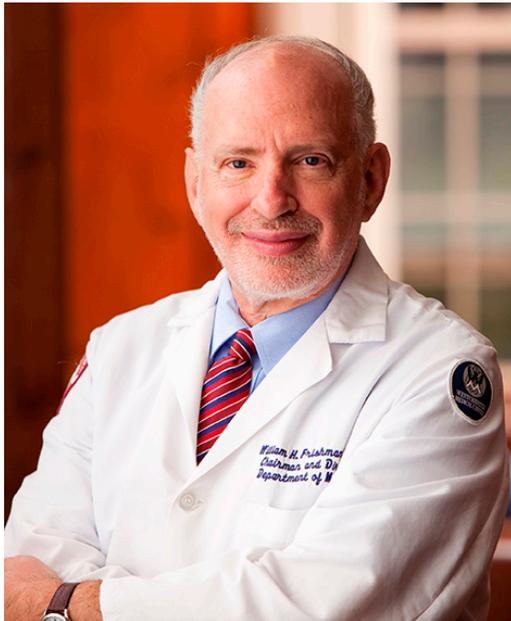


WILLIAM H. FRISHMAN, M.D.

TRIUMPH OVER TRAGEDY: *The Odyssey of an Academic Physician*

Author Biography



Dr. William H. Frishman is the Director of Medicine at Westchester Medical Center and the Rosenthal Professor and Chairman of the Department of Medicine at New York Medical College of Touro College and University located in Valhalla, New York.

He was born and raised in the Bronx. An early calling to the field of medicine, as well as his father's premature death from cardiac disease, convinced him he wanted to be a physician and cardiologist. His career began at Montefiore Medical Center, the University Hospital for Albert Einstein College of Medicine, and stretched from 1976 until 1997. During this period, he began his prolific writing of original research articles, reviews, book chapters and books. He currently serves as an editor of the *American Journal of Medicine* and *Cardiology in Review* and for 10 years he edited the *Yearbook of Medicine*. Dr. Frishman has also participated in major federally funded cardiovascular research trials as a co-principal investigator, including the Bronx Longitudinal Aging Study and the Women's Health Initiative.

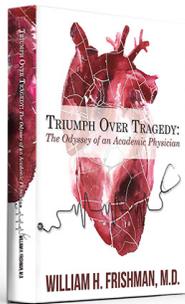
His main research work has primarily involved the discovery and evaluation of drugs to decrease myocardial ischemia, heart failure, high blood pressure and various arrhythmias. Since the early 70s, he has been at the forefront of the pioneering efforts in cardiovascular therapeutics beginning with propranolol in 1973. His major text, *Cardiovascular Pharmacotherapeutics* is now in its third edition and has been hailed as the, "comprehensive source of information on the medications used for the prevention and treatment of cardiovascular disease." One of his greatest joys still comes from running down to the hospital emergency room to reassure a frightened young wife and her children that Dad will make it after his heart attack. At the center of everything he has accomplished, is his own father's memory which is honored each time another person is saved through the work he has had the pleasure to pursue.

Dr. Frishman has also received numerous awards and recognition for his work as a medical educator, including the Teaching Scholar Award from the American Heart Association, the Preventive Cardiology Academic Award from the National Heart Institute and the distinguished teacher award from the Association of Medical Colleges and Alpha Omega Alpha.

In his memoir, *Triumph Over Tragedy: The Odyssey of an Academic Physician*, he details his unique experiences, through text and photos, as a son, student, soldier, doctor, teacher, husband, father and academic leader. In the book, he notes that being chairman and hospital chief are the best jobs in academic medicine, and he has had the good fortune to achieve his dream of becoming both. He derives great enjoyment from his loving family. He and his wife have three children and six grandchildren who all live close to home.

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Author Q & A

1) Why did you decide to write this book now?

I have had a long and very rewarding career in academic medicine. My students would often ask to hear my life story, so I actually wanted to develop my autobiography for them. In addition, my mentor, Dr. Thomas Killip II, one of the leading cardiologists of the twentieth century, told me it was time to write the book. He was approaching 90 and wanted to write the foreword. I also wanted to write the book while I was still healthy and active in my academic and clinical work.

2) Who is the intended audience for the book?

I had the intention of writing the book for my students and for my family, however, as the story began to take shape, my publisher and I both realized my story has a much broader appeal than I had initially envisioned. Ultimately, this book is for anyone who has ever struggled with hardship, heartbreak and loneliness - basically, all of us. I am so fortunate to have been given so many opportunities, but as Epictetus said, "Fortune favors the prepared mind." Another key audience for this book is anyone interested in pursuing a career in academic medicine - this memoir might be considered something of a "guidebook" for successfully navigating what can be a very rewarding, and extraordinarily challenging, vocation. Finally, it's not only a history of my life, but a history of the "golden age" of cardiac drug development, which may be of interest to both the lay public and to medical students and professionals.

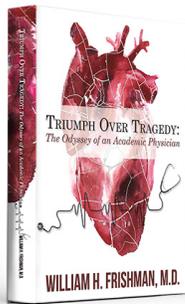
3) What is the most significant message of the book?

There are actually several important messages, but I think the most significant is the positive transformation of grief and hardship into a life that seeks to alleviate, or at least mitigate, the suffering of others. The premature death of my father, as well as several other family members, from cardiac disease was devastating. It has been so rewarding to have been a part of the "golden age" of cardiac medicine. I mention in the book that after many years one of my greatest joys is being able to reassure a frightened family that their father will make it after his heart attack. It is at times like these I realize that my father's premature and tragic death was not in vain.

The other key message is the importance of mentors. Throughout the book, I describe the tremendous influence of mentors in my own life, and how important it has been to me to mentor my students and faculty.

4) Can you describe your childhood in the South Bronx?

The South Bronx of my youth was the poorest area of New York City and had the highest crime rate in the



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Author Q & A (continued)

country. I had to run to school every day to avoid being attacked by neighborhood bullies and gangs. We lived in a poorly heated tenement in two rooms. At the beginning of the book I describe how, as a child, I would leave out a glass of water next to my bed at night, and by morning it was frozen over. I shared a bedroom with my sister, while my parents slept in the living room. They never had their own bedroom. That was how we lived until I went away to college and medical school.

5) The death of your father from heart disease had a profound influence on you. How old were you when your father died and how old was your father?

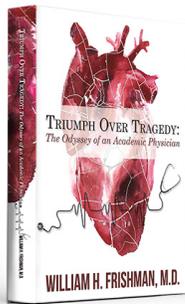
My father was a vibrant, active man who worked very hard, six to seven days a week, from morning until night; unfortunately, he had been a heavy cigarette smoker since his teenage years. My father first suffered a myocardial infarction in his 30s and had been warned to stop smoking, but continued after his recovery, right until his death at age 46. My father's premature death was a tremendous loss that occurred just before final exams during my junior year of high school. Before that time, I knew I wanted to be a doctor, but it was then I decided I wanted to go into cardiac medicine to ensure that what happened to my family would not happen to other families. I became extremely focused and goal oriented.

6) Where were your mother and father from?

My great grandparents and grandparents were born in eastern Europe. My maternal grandmother was from Hungary, my paternal grandmother from Austria, and my two grandfathers were from Russia. My grandparents all married in the U.S. Both my parents were born in the U.S., and I am a second generation American.

7) You went to Boston University for the 6-year combined liberal arts/medical school program. You came from a family without a lot of financial resources. Did you have a scholarship to Boston University? How did that work out? How did you choose Boston University?

I was attracted to the program because of the ability to accelerate in pursuit of a medical degree. It was actually a new program at that time that was very innovative and funded by the Rockefeller foundation. I also attended on the advice and encouragement of one of my earliest mentors, our family physician, Dr. Goodman. He had a tremendous influence on me at an early age, which I describe in the book. I always worked at after-school jobs in college and in medical school. As an undergraduate I worked for room and board as a telephone switchboard operator and as a food server in the dormitory cafeteria. One of my favorite early jobs was as a first aid attendant at sporting events and concerts at the Boston Garden.



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Author Q & A (continued)

8) When you went to Boston you were, in a way, upgrading your living standards?

Well, I had a room of my own for the first time.

9) I understand you served for two years in the armed services and that it was a useful endeavor for you. Can you describe that?

Because I was so young when I graduated from medical school, I was a prime target for being drafted into the service. I joined the Berry Plan, and I was deferred so that I could finish all my internal medicine and cardiology training. In 1974 I entered the military for two years. My experience in the military was, and continues to be, invaluable. It instilled in me a great understanding of discipline, team spirit and working for the good of the team and, most importantly, that integrity is one of the top attributes of a great leader, and I have never forgotten that lesson

There was great camaraderie in the medical corps, and I was always patriotic. My father and uncles had served in the military during World War II. I felt that the soldiers involved in the Vietnam War and their families had made a great personal sacrifice, and the military physician had an obligation to them. I felt privileged to be in the Army. Because of my positive experiences, I joined the Reserves afterward. Overall, it was a very positive experience for me, and it completed my training as a physician.

10) Do you still practice medicine? What is a typical day like for you?

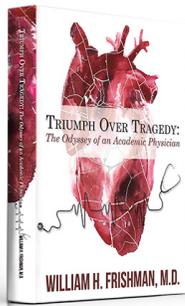
I do still practice and see patients in both internal medicine and cardiology, and on the clinical wards. I am still heavily involved in research as a clinical investigator. I am also a frontline teacher in basic science, serve as a hospital chief and medical school chairman, was the founder of our successful cardiology (Westchester Heart and Vascular) and internal medicine practices (Advanced Physician Services), enjoy my duties as a journal editor/author and as a member of various boards. My days are very full. One major advantage is that I don't need much sleep, which, given my schedule, is quite fortunate.

11) Are you married and do you have children?

I am very happily married to my lovely wife, Esther. We have three children and six grandchildren. I am very lucky in that my children and grandchildren are all nearby, so I get to see them often.

12) What do you do in your spare time?

I enjoy time with my family and attending family functions. Balancing family and career is so important. Despite my busy schedule, with all my children I never missed a sporting event, concert,



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Author Q & A (continued)

recital, etc. I may not have been able to stay for the whole function, but they knew I had made an effort to come see them. I also do that with my grandchildren now. I am also fond of travelling, walking, sports and reading (especially history). I also have a keen interest in U.S. presidential history, and have published in this area. In addition, I get immense satisfaction from attending and participating in various veterans activities.

13) What are you reading right now?

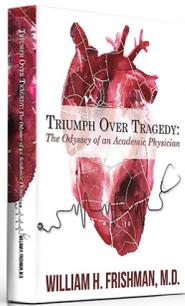
I truly enjoy reading about history. I recently read a fascinating history of Bellevue hospital by David Oshinsky entitled, *Bellevue: Three Centuries of Medicine and Mayhem at America's Most Storied Hospital*. I also enjoy reading books with my grandchildren, and having discussions with them about the characters, plot, etc. hope to instill in them the same love of reading that I had as a child and still have as an adult.

14) Are you working on any other personal writing projects now?

For several years, I have been working on a book on the history of the physicians of several U.S. presidents. I wrote an extended article on the subject, and have been working to expand that into a full-length book.

15) Is there anything you would like to discuss that we have not discussed?

One of my residents recently wrote a book. As a mentor, this makes me very proud. He sent me a kind note that read, "As a young medical student, I fondly remember seeing you interact with your patients with a unique style, intellect and expertise. Far more than being a chief of medicine, I will always have recollections of you as the consummate 'mensch.' In my mind, there is no higher accolade." My interactions with all my 7500+ students and 1500+ residents and fellows over the years has brought me immense satisfaction. I hope my book will help them in some small way to navigate their careers in academic medicine and succeed beyond their wildest imaginings.



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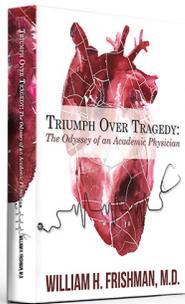
Example Book Review

I recently came across the following quote by Pericles, “What you leave behind is not what is engraved in stone monuments, but what is woven into the lives of others.” The remarkable new memoir, *Triumph Over Tragedy: The Odyssey of an Academic Physician*, by Dr. William H. Frishman, not only substantiates this sentiment, but provides incredible insight into just how important relationships are in determining the course of our lives and giving it meaning and purpose.

Although *Triumph Over Tragedy* is a work of non-fiction, it reads more like a novel (dare I say, a Dickensian novel). It begins on a cold, snowy evening in a tenement apartment in the South Bronx. The author is suffering from a high fever and a cough. Although he’s trying “to be brave” he believes his illness may “get far worse before it gets better.” His kind family doctor, aptly named Dr. Goodman, makes a house call, and is so soothing and charismatic that when he asks young Billy what he wants to be when he grows up, he replies, “a doctor.” As Dr. Goodman is leaving, Mrs. Frishman extends her hand to pay his fee. He gently pushes it away stating that because Billy intends to be a doctor, the fee is waived as a “professional courtesy.” It was a transformational moment in the author’s life.

Dr. Frishman goes on to describe the difficulties inherent in the life of a shy, introverted boy in a poor, rough neighborhood with working class parents, both under a great deal of stress. Despite the situation, he is motivated by his academic achievements, Jewish faith and traditions and an intense enthusiasm for baseball, specifically, the Yankees. He associates all things baseball with his beloved father, with whom he attended his first game in 1955. The chapter describing his love of all things Yankee, including the stadium, is suitably titled, “Paradise.” It is here that the author notes, “Going to games with my father was so special because I had very little time with him.” He goes on to say, “I was very close to my dad, in many ways he was a model father.”

The next big milestone in the author’s life is being accepted into the prestigious Bronx High School of Science (BHSS). It was here that he finally felt at home amongst other students with whom he shared many academic and personal characteristics. He states, “For the first time in my life, I felt like I ‘fit in.’” The reader is so happy for him at this point that it makes the next major development utterly devastating. William Frishman’s father, Aaron (Harry) Frishman, died suddenly of a heart attack at the age of 46 on Sunday, December 10, 1961. At the time, William Frishman was a junior at BHSS. Aaron Frishman had gone to his second job that morning. Feeling ill, he had tried to drive home, but never made it. The last time Dr.



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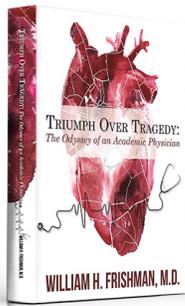
Example Book Review (continued)

Frishman would see his father alive was that Saturday evening, the last night of Hannukah. Although his grief was almost unbearable, he states, “I tried to find meaning as to why such a profound loss would come to a family that was already suffering...as the days and weeks went by, I started to discern a possible meaning to such a tragedy. As a result of my father’s death, I had an even greater motivation to pursue a career in medicine to honor his memory and to help others.”

Not only did the author’s father die from cardiac disease, but also his grandfathers and an uncle had fatal heart attacks before the age of 60. He decided to transform his grief from these devastating losses into a lifelong search for treatments for heart disease. Although he knew from a young age he wanted to be doctor, it was at this point he realized he wanted to specialize in cardiac medicine. He states, “Sadness from a tragedy has a shelf-life, but the grief endures and either expands you and gives you a greater capacity for empathy and achievement, or it diminishes you.”

The remaining chapters are dedicated to his detailed and lively descriptions of his accelerated academic life (he graduated from medical school at the tender age of 22), his legendary professors and his incredible career spanning the last 40 years during the aptly named “golden years” of cardiac medicine. He has participated in more than 200 clinical trials and played a role in the evaluation of almost every cardiovascular drug approved for clinical use since 1972. He is currently the Director of Medicine at Westchester Medical and the Rosenthal Professor and Chairman of the Department of Medicine at New York Medical College in Valhalla, New York.

prolific writer and researcher, Dr. Frishman has participated in the development of over 1,100 academic articles and 14 full-length textbooks. He is also the co-editor, co-author of the seminal textbook on cardiac medications, *Cardiovascular Pharmacotherapeutics*. The appendix of the book is a treasure trove of information and contains many of Dr. Frishman’s key essays and publications on a wide variety of subjects ranging from beta-adrenoceptor antagonists to the devastation of 9/11. Although this is his first personal non-fiction work of how his early experiences and personal family tragedies shaped his life and career, he has plans to write additional non-fiction books in the near future. One of his current projects is a history of America’s presidential physicians. It is good to know that we can look forward to additional titles from this inspiring and insightful author.



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Reader Reviews



“Dr. Frishman has had a long and illustrious medical career over which he has contributed enormously to the education of generations of students and trainees. In these pages we are provided important insights into the people and events that helped shape his career and thinking. We are once again reminded of the importance of family, self-reflection, resilience and purpose. We owe him a debt of gratitude for sharing these glimpses behind the scenes of his remarkable journey.” – *Patrick T. O’Gara, M.D., Professor of Medicine, Harvard Medical School, Director of Clinical Cardiology at Brigham and Women’s Hospital, Boston, Massachusetts, Immediate Past President of the American College of Cardiology, Co-Editor of Cardiology in Review and Associate Editor of JAMA Cardiology*



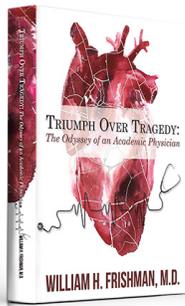
“*Triumph over Tragedy – The Odyssey of an Academic Physician* is the memoir written by William Frishman, one of the great academic physicians of our time. His story is a profound inspiration of what can be achieved in a life that unfolds through a career in medicine and is driven from its earliest moment by extraordinary compassion and commitment to help and assist others. Despite nearly debilitating early hardships, Dr. Frishman persevered and, through his dedication and research, pioneered the modern management of hypertension and coronary artery disease.

The memoir is replete with numerous pictures of him with past presidents, corporate, political and community leaders and medical colleagues who always sought out his medical advice attesting to his great clinical acumen and encyclopedic medical knowledge. For me and for many others, Dr. Frishman’s greatest contribution was that he was our teacher whom we deeply revered. His memoir recounts the numerous national awards that he received as an outstanding medical educator and the privilege that he felt in having the opportunity to teach over 7500 medical students and 1500 residents. He was an inspiration to us at the bedside, in the classroom and in our research endeavors, and the encouragement and confidence he gave us to achieve in our own careers remains incalculable. To this day there is not a lecture, bedside round or case discussion that I give where I don’t have in mind the image of Bill Frishman teaching me 30 years ago and where I try my best to recreate his magic.

While this memoir is about a personal and professional journey in a medical career its message of triumph over tragedy will resonate universally and I encourage all to read it.” – *Marc Klapholz, M.D., Professor and Chair, Department of Medicine, Rutgers New Jersey Medical School*

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Reader Reviews (continued)



“I have known Bill Frishman for 40 years – since July, 1976, when I arrived at Albert Einstein Hospital in the Bronx from Israel to have my training in cardiology. It was Bill Frishman’s first year as a faculty member and the beginning of what was going to be a remarkable academic career. Bill was a mentor, teacher and a friend, a very special individual whose wisdom and kindness have influenced my own career. Bill Frishman is a person with a rare combination of qualities. On one hand a great intellect with ambition and determination which led him to great personal achievements, and at the same time leading by example and having a great compassion for helping and encouraging other people to aim high and try to achieve their goals. Bill Frishman is the consummate academician who has had great achievements as a clinician, a teacher and a mentor, a researcher and a writer and at the same time a devoted family man. He has been an inspiration to me over the years in my own life and academic career, and his remarkable life story, as so beautifully described in this memoir will be an inspiration to every medical student and young physician.” – Uri Elkayam, M.D., Professor of Medicine and Professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology, University of Southern California, Keck School of Medicine, Los Angeles, California



“I have known William (Bill) Frishman for more than 40 years. We have worked together on committees, clinical trials, educational venues, and for the last 11 years, the *American Journal of Medicine*. William Frishman is one of the world’s leading academic cardiologists. He displays excellence in all aspects of our profession: research, teaching and administration. His autobiography traces him from his childhood years in an economically challenged immigrant family to the present when he is one of the most outstanding academicians alive today.

Bill is my co-pilot on the *American Journal of Medicine*. Whenever I have a manuscript or issue that requires an intelligent, rational and deliberate approach, I reach out to Bill. Our lives have many parallels: we survived the trauma of the “every other night on call” period of training; we have had wonderful mentors who enabled us to see the future and what needed to be done; we have contributed to advances in cardiovascular medicine, and we have maintained enduring relationships with family and friends.

This book is a wonderful read for anyone who is planning a career in medicine. The historical and personal information contained in this revealing recollection will give the reader many hours of pleasure and much practical advice. The only thing on which Bill and I disagree is which major league baseball team to support. Although I was a Yankee fan during my youth in Connecticut, many years in Boston as well as personal contacts have converted me into a Red Sox fan. I am sure Bill will forgive me for this transgression!! Congratulations to Bill for a life well lived and recounted in this wonderful autobiography.” – Joseph Alpert, M.D., Editor-in-Chief, *American Journal of Medicine*, Professor of Medicine, University of Arizona College of Medicine

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