

Dying or Flying?

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There are people in my life who think I'm crazy for doing what I'm doing. And they're probably right. Let's face it: I've now reached my 10th year of medical training and my title is "First Year Resident." Other people think that I'm enlightened, pursuing a paramount ideal that all strive to attain: well-being for our fellow humans. I'd like to think that they are right too. But, insane or enlightened, it's all pretty close I would say. It's just how you look at it, a narrow boundary, as thin as my budget.

No, you don't come to enjoy studying hard, no one likes that. Yes, it gets easier the more times you do it, as one "most important test of my life" fades into another. And no, you don't get used to watching people die, though in the course of the last ten years I have done more of that than I would like to admit. Yet somehow, I am still ok putting my time and emotion on the line for the most beautiful expression of my life and others'.

You see, it's all a little bit about uncertainty. At the boundaries of the ability to survive, that is where this profession is defined. As doctors we are like mountain climbers: always striving to reach the apex of what is possible. We grapple with rock and ice, trying to block out the empty space below, trying to forget that one misstep may mean falling and death. But, when you have finally gathered enough good equipment, you can embrace the possibility of failure. Then, it is no longer fear that defines your journey. And then you realize that the empty space which before meant death is really just opportunity that you once saw as insurmountable. Now, the windier the day, the more overhanging the pitch, the more covered the wall is with crumbling hoarfrost,

the more chance that you will separate from the ice. But if you packed a parachute beforehand, you don't just fall, you glide gracefully away from the mountain on newfound wings. Maybe you even catch a thermal, soaring quickly beyond the tops of even the highest mountains towards the sun.