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To Karen
Erich and Hallie
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and
The late Dr. Howard I. Down
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I am writing from my favorite place in the world—Nantucket Island. I have only a few instruments with me—an ink pen, a pencil, and a pad of paper. An American flag is flying over the water, and a few boats are making their way through the harbor.

The scene is special to me. Our house, discovered by our son Erich after my wife Karen and I returned from Cincinnati to Boston after 23 years, is blessed by a 40-foot Osprey pole where the female is right now standing guard after feeding two rapidly growing chicks. And I am fortunate having some of my family here with me; Alexandra, who is resting a broken foot, and her husband Peter.

I recently turned 80 years old as did Karen. I have been blessed both professionally and personally. As one who slept on the couch when 8 to 10 years old living on the lower east side of New York City in the 1930s and 1940s in my grandparents’ apartment, I have been privileged to have been able to work my way to a position where I hope that I have contributed at least somewhat to expanding the knowledge of surgical science and practice. It has indeed been a privilege to have taken a part in educating and mentoring some 105 Fellows from the United States and abroad and to know that today 22 of those Fellows have their own departments. It is also a privilege to have been part of great institutions during the course of my career—from the Massachusetts General Hospital to 23 years as Chairman of Surgery at the University of Cincinnati, then 8 years as Chairman of Surgery at Harvard at the Beth Israel Deaconess in Boston.

I also have been blessed personally. None of my professional accomplishments would have been possible without my wife Karen, a beautiful and very bright and articulate social worker whom I met on my first Saturday as an intern at the Massachusetts General Hospital in 1961. Karen and I have been together for 56 years and married for 52. She has been a source of advice, has played a central role in building my departments, and has raised two wonderful children—Erich and
Alexandra.

Erich, 50, is a successful business consultant who, with his wife Hallie, has given us two grandchildren—Asher and Aleksei. Asher, 4, is a very bright and articulate little boy who shows early signs of fascination with the medical profession (we can only hope!). When not swimming he is exploring the outside and playing with my vintage Lionel train set that has 32 engines, many cars and a huge number of accessories. He is also somewhat of a conman and very good at it. On the second day of camp this summer he ran down for breakfast exclaiming, “No camp today.” At 7:30 AM of the same day Erich came down to the kitchen asking Asher if he was ready to leave for camp. Asher left without an apology. He is also a caring and vigilant older brother to Aleksei. At 2 months old, Aleksei is the newest member of the family, a relaxed baby (except when hungry!), he has started to smile—and we have all the best hopes for him. Our daughter-in-law Hallie recently “retired” from the financial world and is a graphic designer. She is very beautiful, very bright, and is an extremely attentive mother. She is currently progressing with her own graphic design business.

Alexandra, 47, did not fall far from the tree medically and chose to care for animals. She has been named one of the top veterinarians in Washington, DC and is married to Peter, an award-winning anesthesiologist who pilots his own plane and recently joined the Naval Reserves. They have no human children by choice but foster several dogs and cats—many of whom may outlive us all thanks to her.

The good Lord has been kind to us indeed. It has been a pleasure to contribute as editor to the third and fourth editions as well as produce the fifth, sixth and now seventh edition. I am pleased for how relevant the Mastery of Surgery remains despite radical changes in learning and media influence on our own society.

Principal mentors in my career, although there are many luminaries who have helped and supervised my development of my career, there are three who stand out:

**Professor Claude Welch**

As a surgeon and human being Claude Welch was my idol. He was a
quick, very accurate surgeon and very knowledgeable. He was especially quick in removing cancer. When I undertook cancer of the rectum I tried to allow patients to retain their rectum. He said I was wrong. But when I did not have recurrence he stopped criticizing but never adopted this approach himself.

**Professor Julias Axelrod**

He was a role model for me at the National Institutes of Health. He started as a technician and became the head of the Laboratory section. He never forgot his past. He was a great teacher and only had one technician who ground up the tissues and washed the glassware. Helen was African American, rare at that time.

**Reuven Katz, Esquire**

Mr. Katz was a wonderful attorney and head of a major Cincinnati law firm. He was a brilliant teacher and was a major influence on my success, for the 23 years I was chair of the Department of Surgery, and as how to relate to various people. He became a major influence in the 23 years I was chair of the Department of Surgery at the University of Cincinnati.

**Josef E. Fischer**

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