

Follow Your Star: From Mining to Heart Transplants - A Surgeon's Story

Terence English

AuthorHouse (Feb 11, 2011)

Unknown \$19.58 (245pp)

978-1-4567-7131-7

The first career path chosen doesn't always take you where you expect. If you're open to the possibilities, it might lead somewhere even better. That is the message offered by Terence English, who started out in the diamond mines of South Africa but later became a groundbreaking cardiac surgeon in Britain. In his detailed memoir, *Follow Your Star: From Mining to Heart Transplants - A Surgeon's Story*, English retraces the steps that led him to dedicate his professional life to promoting heart transplantation in British hospitals.

Never afraid of trying something new, English was an adventurer from the start. He writes about the diverse settings of his early work life, which took him from diamond-drilling sites in Rhodesia to mining camps in the Yukon Territories. English set out to become an engineer, but credits his willingness to "follow his star"—even when it led him in a new direction—to his eventual switch to medicine.

English takes a chronological approach to his memoir, going back as far as his great grandparents' 1850 arrival in Port Natal and moving steadily forward to the present. He shares few details from his personal life. Instead, he focuses on the professional realm, and supplies a somewhat formal account of the names, dates, and places involved. The illustrations English includes are similarly formal, ranging from graduation portraits to posed wedding photographs. English's documentation is thorough, if not especially affecting.

The lack of drama in the narrative comes as a surprise, for English's life story is certainly an interesting one. Responsible for the first successful heart transplant in Britain in 1979, English worked with the best surgeons in the world and met with luminaries of transplant technology such as Robert Jarvik, of artificial heart fame. The thrill of these endeavors, however, tends to get lost among the names of the doctors, funders, and administrators who worked together to make heart transplants available in Britain.

When English does offer personal reflections and patient profiles, he allows a more satisfying look into his life. So much of the memoir reads like an extended curriculum vitae that it is a bit of a relief when English describes his youthful follies as a novice hunter or tells the story of two transplant recipients who played golf together after their operations.

Follow Your Star doesn't follow the current tell-all trend in memoirs. Instead, English takes the broader perspective of a lifelong traveler and gives readers glimpses of the world, ranging from apartheid in South Africa to amazing advances in medical technology. He even provides a view from Mount Kilimanjaro, which he attempted to climb for his seventieth birthday. Clearly, Terence English is still following his star.

SHEILA M. TRASK (October 25, 2012)

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