

Heart to Beat: A Cardiac Surgeon's Inspiring Story of Success and Overcoming Adversity--The Heart Way

Brian Lima

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Heart to Beat is a practical memoir about what it took to become a leading cardiac surgeon.

Brian Lima's inspiring memoir *Heart to Beat* is about how he became a top heart surgeon.

Growing up in New Jersey in a Cuban immigrant family, Lima's father encouraged him to think past his immediate circumstances and take all available opportunities. A close friend from a disadvantaged background who received academic awards drove that advice home: it dawned on Lima that the differences in their performances were due to the hard work each put in. Lima became determined to work to achieve his dream of becoming a cardiac surgeon.

Focused and specific, the book is meant to inspire others to follow their dreams, too, applying dedication and hard work to achieve goals. It highlights the challenges that Lima faced on his way to becoming a surgeon and his ultimate feelings of accomplishment, as when he was named valedictorian and won a college scholarship.

An impassioned and enthusiastic tone establishes a mood of optimism. Lima recounts many challenges—having to dedicate a lot of time to his studies, for example—but shows that those efforts paid off in the long run. The text is consistent in reiterating that Lima's success did not come because he was special; its perspective is that anyone willing to apply themselves can achieve similar successes.

Anecdotes make technical topics more accessible, as when Lima discusses the severity and prevalence of cardiovascular disease, complementing this information with an account of a patient in his sixties whose heart was too sick for transplant surgery. This patient's story helps to explain how most patients are unconscious of the seriousness of the illness, only becoming aware when it is too late.

Statistics are incorporated for more exact understandings, as with describing the odds of surviving certain diagnoses, while humor makes the text more engaging. After years of medical training, Lima thought he'd make a grand entrance, but instead of excitement found that his value would be calculated based on the amount of revenue he brought to the hospital.

Apart from Lima's parents, who appear on occasion, other supporting characters—an algebra teacher who gave encouragement and an interviewer who remarked on his achievements, for example—only make brief appearances, and there's not much depth or flavor when it comes to characterizations beyond Lima's own.

Steady in its pace, the text focuses on, and resolves, the challenges at each stage of Lima's life before it progresses. Each stage proved harder than the last, but Lima records exceptional accomplishments at each. Accessible discussions punctuate the chapters, pronouncing what should be learned from them and emphasizing relevant qualities to cultivate, like focus. The text ends in a hopeful way, though with the reminder that achieving dreams comes at a cost.

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EDITH WAIRIMU (November 18, 2019)

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