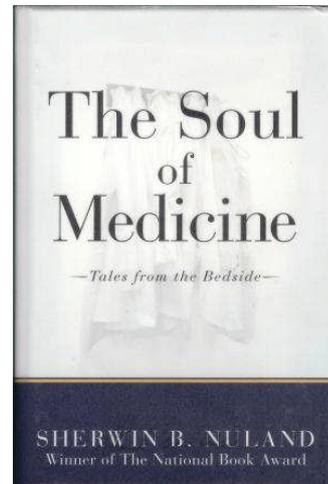


A Review of  
***The Soul of Medicine:  
Tales from the Bedside***

Author: Sherwin B. Nuland

In this collection of 21 “tales” collected from medical specialists of all fields, we hear their answers to the question author Nuland asked of them: “what was your most memorable patient?” He himself describes the book’s contents as “a sort of *Canterbury Tales* of medicine” – thus each chapter is titled a “tale” - and that is what we find and enjoy in this latest of Nuland books, written as they were from doctors at a “Cantebury Hospital,” certainly part of the fictional way to preserve confidentiality. The stories are both his own personal experiences and second hand stories of fellow physicians of all types with enough changes in the details to protect both original story teller and the patients. But it should be emphasized that all the stories are factual in enough detail to convey the message but not reveal the participants. For most, Dr. Nuland follows each “tale” chapter with his own thoughtful commentary on the lessons or medical issues underlying that story, which lifts them to a higher dimension of enlightened understanding in our reading. In some cases we get some inside look at an even deeper human story when Nuland adds his own observations when he knows the story teller personally or may even have participated in the event himself. In the telling, I found myself confused as to what part was a retelling of another’s story, or what was Nuland telling of his own personal part in the story, but no matter, in either case it was a fascinating tale.



As technical as his medical detail can be, the reader feels a very human person at the other end of the pen in these stories, adding a refreshing and self-deprecating element to the elegant style we have come to expect from this author in his many other writings. It is amazing to realize that even now into his late 70’s, Nuland has such recollection of detail as we see again in the (re-)telling of these tales. The experiences are mostly from three or more decades past. Each chapter covers from two to 10 pages in this smaller book format that makes for easy reading. Unlike so many books that capture us as a story links from one chapter to the next, each leaving questions to be addressed in that next chapter, these tales are self-contained. Never the less, I found myself quickly getting into each following chapter just because of the interesting variety of stories.

The stories are not all the triumphs you might expect, but rather are interwoven with tragedies, even some caused at the hands of the medical professionals themselves, so expect both human horror and tearful joy as you read this honest book. The tales are not without some touch of humor, even when buried within some medical mystery. When it is necessary to fully understand a story, the authors (or as I expect, maybe Nuland’s edit), provides a much appreciated, clear layman’s lesson in the anatomy needed, something he is gifted in being able to convey for his readers. Often in reading of procedures that have been replaced with more modern ones in today’s practice, the reader comes away appreciating even more that progress made over the years in such practices, and in some cases, the loss of judgment given over to the technology advances of today .