

BOOK REVIEW

Close to the Sun: The Journey of a Pioneer Heart Surgeon by Stuart Jamieson

Hardback, 336 pages

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Close to the Sun is the autobiography of heart-lung transplantation surgeon Stuart Jamieson who is also known for pioneering techniques to remove organized blood clots from pulmonary arteries.

Jamieson was born in what is now Zimbabwe and the first part of his book provides a comprehensive background to the origins of Rhodesia and its later civil war. He was brought up on a 2.5-million-acre ranch with evident love for the outdoors. He faces the mouth of a swaying black mamba, observes intoxicated elephants, sleeps near hungry lions, crosses paths with agitated hippos and disturbed crocodiles, yet what he fears is “the most dangerous animal of all...my own species”.

At times, Jamieson’s account reads like Indiana Jones and *The Jungle Book* intertwined. As a child, he spoke Zulu better than English and learnt the rules of the wild from an African tracker. In the cases of a zebra emotionally attached to an ostrich, and a giraffe whose demise is a cautionary tale of what human activity can cause, I was not reading Dr Doolittle! What happened when Jamieson was sent to boarding school was tear jerking, as was the tragic loss of loved ones from his life.

The second part of the author’s journey begins with a move to London to study medicine, against a background of civil unrest in Rhodesia, frozen bank accounts and consequential poverty. An intriguing account of his relationship with the eminent Rothschild family follows, but Jamieson never forgets what it is like to have nothing. This section of the book reveals the cardiac surgery scene at the Brompton Hospital, a treasure cave for anyone researching early transplant surgery in the UK.

Jamieson’s third life begins in the late 1970s when he enters Stanford University, at the time the only centre worldwide performing successful heart transplantations. The pioneering surgery and first-hand narrative on colleagues, many of whom are familiar names in the surgical world including Norman Shumway, Sir Terence English and Christiaan Barnard, are remarkable.

Destiny takes Jamieson to cold Minnesota, where broken promises, bureaucracy and untruths dominate. He fills in historical gaps, including what happened to the legendary C. Walt Lillehei. Then, in 1989, while still only in his early forties, his whole team follows him half way across America to San Diego where he starts a new life and, once again, builds an important heart centre.

Jamieson’s writing style is effective, consistent and avoids monotony. I highly recommend *Close to the Sun* to a wide audience and especially those researching the history of cardiothoracic surgery.

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