

## BEHIND THE MASK

*When I Was Hooked*

The sun began to set. On the far side of the Zumbro, it neared the low horizon. The sun's light danced on the water. It changed from white, to gold, to none.

The late summer air smelled of soil. The tractors that tilled the plots that filled with corn that fed the kids with straight blond hair had all been put away. Engulfed in the grass, my father and I saw a ripple where a carp had risen.

We had arrived in Minnesota, home of Al Franken and the makers of Spam. In this land of the gopher, in the last days of childhood, I formed my first technical memories. Woven together by the softest threads of nostalgia are Shirley Partridge, Flip Wilson and the terms truncus, tricuspid and transposition.

My father, a fellow at the Mayo Clinic, and my mother, a nurse, mentioned names at dinner: Blalock, Kirklin, mighty McGoon. I do not remember knowing then that these were surgeons. I did not know that they had invented such devices as the heart-lung machine. In those days, I was busy skating on ice.

Forty years after the night of the ripple, a girl asked me: How did you become a surgeon? We were at North Miami Beach High School's Career Day. We had gone through didactic maneuvers – one liver, two kidneys, a blend of secondary sexual organs – but this was not enough for her.

I reviewed what I had wanted to become – hunter, commando, explorer – but this was useless. Even a vocational aptitude test had yielded no clue: It suggested I had best be a farmer.

I do not know exactly when my professional awareness began, but I think it preceded the carp.

A few years ago, some doctors tried to keep me from doing prostate-cancer surgery in a new way. To my aid came a brain surgeon, Allen Kantrowitz.

For reasons that were then unclear, I felt in my bones that my father knew this name. When I said "Kantrowitz," my father sent a photo. Taken when I was nine, it showed the surgical team behind the world's first pediatric heart transplant. In the back stands my father. In the front sits Adrian Kantrowitz, the pioneering surgeon and the father of Allen.

Forty years after the world's first pediatric heart transplant, we sons of that team were unaware of joint paternal histories. Why did a brain surgeon and prostate surgeon ally? Because they knew, if not consciously, that they were on the same team. Awareness precedes consciousness.

I became a surgeon despite what I planned. If I cannot identify the point of becoming, maybe I never became. Maybe I have always been a surgeon, even as I had no idea.

I turned to the girl and I spoke of a carp and a ripple. A smile took form on her face. It appeared she was also a surgeon.

*Arnon Krongrad, MD is President of the Krongrad Institute, America's longest running LRP program, and Chairman of the not-for-profit The Prostate Cancer Project.*

