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Nothing prepared me for my first bladder perforation during a tumor resection. The horror stories from my seniors, ones I've kept as though they were my own to learn from, didn't simulate the sickening feeling of seeing sudden black after my swipe, followed by red from the vessels surrounding the gaping defect. I didn't anticipate the nauseating dread that washed over, as my attending pressed on the patient's lower abdomen and whispered to himself, "I think she's getting full."

Failures, during simpler times, were so hard to come by that they had to be manufactured. An arbitrary score of 65 or detention from a disgruntled teacher now brings nostalgic chuckles rather than shame. Age and progression through life's chapters brought along an evolution of how I've come to define my own failures. No longer do I have numerical scores to differentiate failure from success (save the annual in-service examination), but now my own self-criticism, expectations, and morals siphon out what are achievements, failures, and what fall in-between.

Even within residency, my definition has noticeably evolved. At one point, failing to place a difficult foley weighed heavily on me. Now, it is the screams of the writhing demented man, held down like an animal as I successfully place a needed catheter and try selfishly to convince myself that I helped him. Now, it is a bladder perforation during a resection, but someday it will be stumbling over words as I tell my patient's family that their loved one passed because of a surgery I'd once reassured them about. As my achievements, responsibilities and expectations grow, as do the gravity and nuances of my failures.

After my attending and I scrubbed out of the TURBT, he said with a tease in his voice, "It's fine." He rattled off learning points: ways to hold the scope for greater stability, the motion to aim for with posterior wall tumors, the fine balance between over- and under-distention. Yet beyond the technical skills, there was another lesson he was trying to instill in me.

To allow failures to function as seeds for growth, I had to forgive myself. Being self-critical had brought me thus far – it had pushed me to work harder, study more, practice often, even if it came at a cost to myself. Yet as my failures changed and deepened as I progressed in training, I've realized it was that same voice that had become debilitating and kept me from moving forward. In a field where criticisms – be it from colleagues, attendings, or even patients – run rampant, it was suffocating to add my own voice to the mix.

I have only just begun my long pursuit of doing no harm, a goal to always strive for yet impossible to achieve. Failures and setbacks are natural within our field, yet it is the grace permitted to oneself to keep falling and getting back up, to look back in order to look forward, that will teach us to be steadfast and resilient.