

The art of falling

Mariana Barreto¹; Carlos Arroyo²; Trabal Alfonso³; Martínez Levin⁴

¹ Residente de Urología, Cátedra de Urología Prof. Dr. Levin Martínez, Hospital de Clínicas Dr. Manuel Quintela. Facultad de Medicina UdelaR. Montevideo, Uruguay. ORCID: 0000-0003-3443-4299, maribarroto92@gmail.com

² Ex Profesor Agregado Cátedra de Urología, Jefe de Servicio de Urología Hospital Pasteur, Montevideo, Uruguay. arroyovieira@hotmail.com

³ Bachiller, Estudiante Facultad de Medicina Udelar. Montevideo, Uruguay. Alfonsotrabal123@gmail.com

⁴ Profesor titular Cátedra de Urología, Hospital de Clínicas Dr. Manuel Quintela. Facultad de Medicina UdelaR. Montevideo, Uruguay. ORCID: 0000-0002-4587-5471 drlevinmartinez@gmail.com

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It was a Thursday afternoon on June 7, 2020, nearing 5 o'clock when I entered the coffee shop. The moment I sat down, I started to think about how I had reached that exact moment. It had been seven months since I had failed the urology residency entrance exam, which took place on December 5, 2019. I had dedicated years of preparation to this test, strenuous months of studying, leaving behind other aspects of my life. When I received the result, I felt like I was free falling. After shedding a lot of tears, changing my hairstyle, and getting three tattoos, I started moving on with my life again. That Tuesday, far from being reconciled with urology, I was going to thank one of my mentors for his help and tell him that I was not going to retake the exam. It was 17:25 when I saw Dr. Carlos Arroyo walking through the door. He had long finished his formal role as a urology teacher, but he continued teaching for free to those aspiring to be urologists, with the goal of helping them prepare for the exam out of his own volition. He sat down, ordered a latte, and without me saying anything, he looked at me and said, "Mari, I can see you are sad, but it is not a valid reason for you not to retake the exam, unless you give me one, I'm not gonna change my mind." Several coffees later, we analyzed everything that had transpired, my worst fears, my doubts, my anguish, and my lack of tolerance for frustration. Finally, he looked at me and said, "None of your reasons are valid to not retake the exam because they are founded in fear of failure and anguish. You've always liked urology more than many, and what happened is a great fall. Many people go through the same. It's not a measure of your intelligence, it doesn't say how much you are worth, it is simply something that could happen and happened. This doesn't define you as a professional, what does define you is your ability to move on with the situation. Prepare yourself better, gather your best weapons and take that exam again. We have all fallen sometime, in urology or in life, it's not something new. It's the way in which you fall down that defines how you get up." I walked out of that coffee shop with more strength and motivation than ever before. A lot of coffee and five months later, on December 5, 2020, the jury announced me as the valedictorian of that year's urology residency exam. It's very easy to teach things when everything goes well, congratulating the student when they get good results, but what is really challenging is teaching how to tolerate frustration, accepting that not everything is going to go well and that we must learn from it and overcome adversity. Falling is inevitable, but we can choose how we fall and what we make out of it.

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