

# Hot Lights, Cold Steel: Life, Death and Sleepless Nights in a Surgeon's First Years

By Dr. Michael J. Collins

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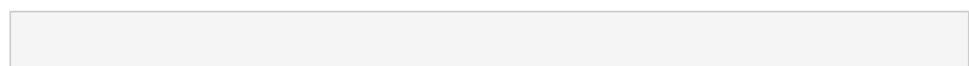
## Hot Lights, Cold Steel: Life, Death and Sleepless Nights in a Surgeon's First Years By Dr. Michael J. Collins

When Michael Collins decides to become a surgeon, he is totally unprepared for the chaotic life of a resident at a major hospital. A natural overachiever, Collins' success, in college and medical school led to a surgical residency at one of the most respected medical centers in the world, the famed Mayo Clinic. But compared to his fellow residents Collins feels inadequate and unprepared. All too soon, the euphoria of beginning his career as an orthopedic resident gives way to the feeling he is a counterfeit, an imposter who has infiltrated a society of brilliant surgeons.

This story of Collins' four-year surgical residency traces his rise from an eager but clueless first-year resident to accomplished Chief Resident in his final year. With unparalleled humor, he recounts the disparity between people's perceptions of a doctor's glamorous life and the real thing: a succession of run down cars that are towed to the junk yard, long weekends moonlighting at rural hospitals, a family that grows larger every year, and a laughable income.

Collins' good nature helps him over some of the rough spots but cannot spare him the harsh reality of a doctor's life. Every day he is confronted with decisions that will change people's lives-or end them-forever. A young boy's leg is mangled by a tractor: risk the boy's life to save his leg, or amputate immediately? A woman diagnosed with bone cancer injures her hip: go through a painful hip operation even though she has only months to live? Like a jolt to the system, he is faced with the reality of suffering and death as he struggles to reconcile his idealism and aspiration to heal with the recognition of his own limitations and imperfections.

Unflinching and deeply engaging, *Hot Lights, Cold Steel* is a humane and passionate reminder that doctors are people too. This is a gripping memoir, at times devastating, others triumphant, but always compulsively readable.



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- Sales Rank: #106062 in eBooks
- Published on: 2007-04-01
- Released on: 2007-04-01
- Format: Kindle eBook

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### Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Collins begins this personal chronicle with an account of a choice he had to make between amputating a 14-year-old boy's leg and saving the limb at a greater risk to the boy's life. (He amputated the leg.) This dilemma came at the conclusion of Collins's grueling four years of residency at the Mayo Clinic, culminating in his appointment as chief resident in orthopedic surgery. Now in practice in Illinois, he details, with admirable humor and insight, the early, virtually sleepless years when he learned not only to perfect his craft but to come to terms with the emotional impact of causing pain and losing patients. Collins brings to life the dramatic moments when he made his first, terrifying incision and hand-drilled a traction pin into a weeping six-year-old's leg. Collins and his wife, Patti, wanted a large family, but the economic strain of having three children in three years (they eventually had 12) forced him to moonlight every other weekend at rural hospitals. There are moving passages about his love for Patti and the bonds he developed with other residents, and empathetic evocations of those he treats. Collins describes powerfully how he came to understand that his calling was not just to develop as a skilled surgical technician, but to treat his patients humanely as individuals.

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From [Booklist](#)

*\*Starred Review\** If he didn't feel overwhelmed before the Mayo Clinic senior orthopedic surgery resident lobbed a beeper at him with the nonchalant order, "Cover for me," 29-year-old ex-cabdriver, ex-construction worker, and, at the time, brand-new resident Collins certainly did then. It was his first day on the job, and instantly he began fielding calls from staff nurses requesting orders for patients he hadn't laid eyes on. If it hadn't been for his innate sense of humor--brilliantly demonstrated in this memoir of his Mayo residency--and a sense of perspective derived from that experience, he might have failed. He didn't, and here he honors those who helped him along the way and those whom he helped. As a man who recognizes that he, too, makes his living with his hands, Collins anguishes over the options available to a carpenter who had severed four fingers. After assisting at a young cancer patient's leg amputation, only to learn later that she had died within months, anyway, he agonizes over what drew him to his profession in the first place and what could possibly keep him on course. "I wanted to be the guy who confronted the arbitrariness of life and strangled the unfairness out of it." Instead, while honing his craft, he learned from a Vietnam vet that the main thing patients deserve is compassion. If Collins' scalpel is as sharp as his pen, his patients are in capable hands, indeed. *Donna Chavez*

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Review

"Like the very best episode of ER, Collins' memoir races from one trauma to the next, keeping this reader spellbound all the way. Collins' life as a surgical resident is heartbreaking one minute and triumphant the next. You'll laugh and cry and cheer along with him as his epic journey to become a doctor races toward its gripping conclusion. I love this book and won't soon forget it."

- Augusten Burroughs, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Dry* and *Magical Thinking*

"One of the best, funniest medical memoirs I have ever read. *Hot Lights, Cold Steel* is at once darkly humorous and truly compassionate. Not since *House of God* has there been such a ferociously funny look at the world of hospital medicine."

- Michael Palmer, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Fatal* and *The Society*

"I adore this book. It's so polished and hilarious. It brought back all the stomach-churning anxieties of my own residency so vividly that I felt exhausted reading it. Dr. Collins has my highest admiration. I give this book a 10+!"

- Tess Gerritsen, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Surgeon* and *The Apprentice*

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### **From reader reviews:**

#### **Anthony Pippin:**

Why don't make it to be your habit? Right now, try to prepare your time to do the important act, like looking for your favorite publication and reading a e-book. Beside you can solve your long lasting problem; you can add your knowledge by the publication entitled *Hot Lights, Cold Steel: Life, Death and Sleepless Nights in a Surgeon's First Years*. Try to stumble through book *Hot Lights, Cold Steel: Life, Death and Sleepless Nights in a Surgeon's First Years* as your close friend. It means that it can to get your friend when you truly feel alone and beside those of course make you smarter than previously. Yeah, it is very fortunated to suit your needs. The book makes you a lot more confidence because you can know anything by the book. So , let me make new experience in addition to knowledge with this book.

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Reading a book can be one of a lot of pastime that everyone in the world really likes. Do you like reading book and so. There are a lot of reasons why people enjoyed. First reading a reserve will give you a lot of new information. When you read a book you will get new information mainly because book is one of numerous ways to share the information or maybe their idea. Second, examining a book will make a person more imaginative. When you reading a book especially tale fantasy book the author will bring you to imagine the story how the character types do it anything. Third, it is possible to share your knowledge to others. When you read this *Hot Lights, Cold Steel: Life, Death and Sleepless Nights in a Surgeon's First Years*, you may tells your family, friends and soon about yours e-book. Your knowledge can inspire the others, make them reading a guide.

#### **Jessica Hodgkins:**

A lot of people always spent their free time to vacation or go to the outside with them family members or their friend. Did you know? Many a lot of people spent they will free time just watching TV, or even playing video games all day long. If you want to try to find a new activity this is look different you can read the book. It is really fun for yourself. If you enjoy the book that you simply read you can spent all day long to reading a publication. The book *Hot Lights, Cold Steel: Life, Death and Sleepless Nights in a Surgeon's First Years* it is rather good to read. There are a lot of individuals who recommended this book. We were holding enjoying reading this book. Should you did not have enough space to create this book you can buy the actual e-book. You can m0ore simply to read this book from your smart phone. The price is not very costly but this book offers high quality.

**James Fitzgibbons:**

As a college student exactly feel bored to reading. If their teacher requested them to go to the library or even make summary for some book, they are complained. Just small students that has reading's heart or real their pastime. They just do what the teacher want, like asked to the library. They go to right now there but nothing reading critically. Any students feel that reading is not important, boring and also can't see colorful photos on there. Yeah, it is to become complicated. Book is very important for you personally. As we know that on this time, many ways to get whatever we really wish for. Likewise word says, ways to reach Chinese's country. Therefore this Hot Lights, Cold Steel: Life, Death and Sleepless Nights in a Surgeon's First Years can make you sense more interested to read.

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