



#GETTING TOKNOWDOS

Dr. Lawrence "Nick" Cetrulo
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1. How has COVID-19 personally affected you?

NC: The biggest effect it has had on me is limiting my ability to regularly take care of my patients. I'm fortunate in that I don't know anyone personally who has gotten extremely ill or hospitalized, but I know of friends of friends who have. Although it's disrupted work, it's allowed me to spend more time at home. We have a 9 month-old daughter, Lily, and the one positive effect of COVID-19 is that I've been able to spend more time with her than I normally would be able. It's sort of like a second paternity leave.

SS: We understand you sometimes bring Lily to early morning virtual work meetings. **NC:** Yes! [laughs] She wakes up at 6:00am so I take her and let me wife sleep in a bit. That means she occasionally makes an appearance at the General Surgery faculty meeting.

2. What made you decide to become a surgeon?

NC: I always knew I wanted to be a doctor. I was one of those 5 year-olds who would tell classmates at show and tell I wanted to be a doctor, but I didn't really know what kind until I started to learn more about medicine in general. When I was about 13 or 14 years old, one of my cousins who

I was very close with was going through medical school and living with us because his school was in the same city. He was interested in general surgery and so I heard a lot about that from him. That's what started my interested in it and then when I was in medical school it became more clear that was what I wanted to do.

I like problem solving and one of the things I like most about general surgery is that I can intervene to fix a discrete problem and know that I'm creating a direct and positive change in people's lives.

SS: If you didn't go into general surgery, what would have been your second choice? **NC:** While I was going through medical school residency, I would have said anesthesiology because I like the acute events and nature of it. You're in charge of a patient's life for a very short but incredibly important amount of time. But now I would say radiology because I find it so interesting how we have such amazing technology to identify and diagnose problems.

(continued on page 17)



Dr. Cetrulo and his daughter Lily at 6 months (left);
Hiking with wife Kayla and dog Buck in Grand Teton National park on their
road trip from Charlotte to Seattle two years ago (right)

SS: What if your career choice wasn't in medicine? **NC:** Maybe a veterinarian because I love to spend time with animals, but on the other hand, I like animals too much to think of the details of being a vet. Now I would probably start a taco/food truck with my wife while living in Hawaii and raising our daughter on the beach. My wife and I are actually practicing making bagels with the goal of selling them at our farmers market. So maybe a bacon, egg and cheese bagel truck.

3. What's the best career advice you've ever received? How about the worst?

NC: The best: don't allow every person's direct opinion of you to affect how good you are at what you're doing, whether it's a compliment or a criticism, especially in medicine. If you don't have the self-understanding or the self-confidence to know what you're doing is right, you're going to be so reliant on other people telling you you're right that you're never going to be able to make critical, difficult and independent decisions. I was given this advice while in my third or fourth year of medical school and I think it's so important regardless of what field you go into. Related to that: recognize that everybody's human. So, if someone criticizes you for what you did that day, take what is constructive from it, but don't allow their negative reactions to you wholly define your worth. You don't know if that person got in an argument with their spouse that day or maybe their child is sick at home, etc. Take the opportunity to improve but don't internalize the negativity. That goes for compliments too. Take the feedback but don't live for that approval.

SS: What's the worst career advice you've ever received? **NC:** To tell people you can do everything, like going into an interview and saying

"Oh, I can do this, this and this. I can do everything you need me to do perfectly." It's never true and it sets up a false expectation for what you can accomplish. I was told once to go into an interview and say I was interested in and willing to do everything, when it just wasn't accurate. Thankfully I was able to recognize the folly in that advice.

4. Where's the last place you traveled? What did you do there?

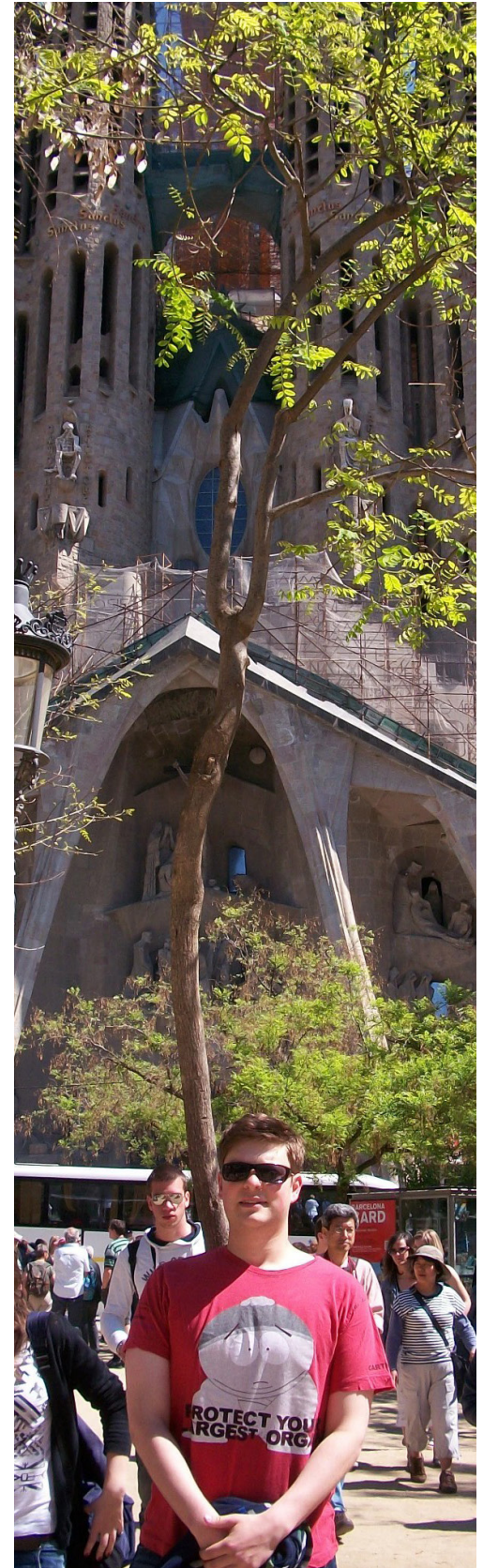
NC: We went to Boston to visit my family for Christmas and before that we traveled to the San Juan Islands and stayed in Friday Harbor—we loved it. It was one of the things we did during our first year in Seattle that made us fall in love with the area. The only event we had booked was a whale watch, which we ended up canceling because my wife was pregnant and we didn't want her to get sea sick. We explored some of the island, went to some of the restaurants and went to the Krystal Acres Alpaca Farm. We love going to places like that and just wandering around and talking to some of the locals to learn about the area. **SS:** Where are you planning to travel next? **NC:** We are planning to go to Orcas Island once COVID-19 restrictions are lifted. We want to be able to bring along the baby and dog and make it more of an outdoorsy trip. For our 10 year wedding anniversary, my wife is going to take me where she lived in Japan for two years after she graduated from college as part of the Jet Program. We're also planning to visit Tokyo on that trip as well. I'm really looking forward to it.

SS: What's your favorite place you've visited? **NC:** When my wife and I finished medical school we spent ten days in Barcelona, Spain. It was special because we were engaged at the time and it was one of those trips you don't get to do very often.

(continued on page 18)

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Barcelona Spain at the Sagrada Familia

5. What was the last book you read?

NC: “The First Fifteen Lives of Harry August” by Claire North. It’s about a guy who believes he lives his life over and over again but every time he dies, he is born again into his three-year-old self. **SS:** So it’s reincarnation but into the same person over and over, he doesn’t come back as Napoleon or Queen Cleopatra? **NC:** Exactly. He claims he dies at different times each time comes back; once when he was really old and one time he died when he was younger and once was from suicide. It’s really weird but very interesting.

6. What’s the most recent show you’ve binged–watched?

NC: “Brooklyn Nine-Nine” with Andre Braugher and Andy Samberg. We’ve watched it from the very beginning and while it’s getting a little formulaic like many other TV shows eventually become, it’s a really funny, light-hearted show. My other favorite things to binge-watch are all of the cooking and baking championships on the Food Network like the Halloween or the Spring baking championships. Then my wife and I try and bake the dishes in the shows—my wife is actually a fantastic baker. There is a woman who won one of these Halloween baking championships and teaches classes in the Seattle area and we’ve taken three classes instructed by her.

7. Who is your favorite musician?

NC: Unfortunately, most of them are dead, but I would say Tom Petty and Prince. My favorite current living musician...I probably listen to Dr. Dre the most. When I’m in the operating room I mostly choose hip-hop. I do love jazz and classical. I actually played jazz on the saxophone and bass guitar all through high school **SS:** Is there any style of music you won’t listen to? **NC:** No, but I can’t listen to classical music in the operating room or I’ll fall

asleep. I’ll even listen to country. I’m not sitting at home listening to it but if someone really wanted to listen to it, I wouldn’t object. I did my fellowship in Charlotte, North Carolina and had to learn to accept it. One of the doctors I worked with had a Sirius radio station for Canadian country and listened to it every single time he operated.

8. What is something we’d never guess about you?

NC: I have multiple, large tattoos. That’s a good question because that is something that nobody guesses about me. I have a tattoo of my dog and cat on my left shoulder. I have a hump-back whale on my right shoulder that goes down my arm a little bit and my entire right leg has different dinosaurs in various scenes.

9. Where did you live before the Seattle area? What are the biggest differences you see?

NC: I moved all over but was in Boston for the majority of my life. Then I was in Philadelphia for residency for five years and was in Charlotte for one year in fellowship.

Philly is my favorite since it’s where my wife and I started our life together away from where we met in Boston; it’s where we really established our life as a couple. Philly holds a lot of amazing memories mostly around that. **SS:** What are the major differences you’ve noticed between Philly and Seattle? **NC:** People are much friendlier in Seattle. For example, when you walk into a store in Philly or Boston, the clerks will literally turn around and go fold clothes rather than ask you if you need assistance. It also seems to be a little less oppressive here in terms of freedom around lifestyle and expression. People here are more accepting of how you live your life. I much prefer the weather here as well. I hated the hot summers and cold winters on the East Coast.

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10. What’s the best piece of non–professional advice you’ve ever received?

NC: The best piece of advice is even when you feel like you want to do nothing, do something because something always helps and it’s better than nothing. An example is volunteering—you may feel what you’re doing is small and meaningless but it’s not meaningless to someone.

11. What is your fondest childhood memory?

NC: One of my childhood memories I love most may sound a little silly, but being in New England we’d go skiing in Vermont and we’d always visit this dairy farm where they had Holstein cows. I remember being a little kid loving going to this farm, petting the animals and seeing nature. I grew up in the city so being on that farm felt like I was out in the wilderness and was so tranquil. That is something that has really stuck with me.

12. What is your favorite Amazon purchase?

I have a flannel Snuggie I purchased from Amazon that I love to wear when I sit outside. Also a 36" piece fondant and cake decorating set.

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