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OUTSIDE THE OFFICE

Figures. Dr. Riha and his daughters sailing (1), enjoying ice cream (2), and skiing (3). A photograph taken lakeside while on vacation in the Alps (4). Dr. Riha sailing (5).

# SAILING THROUGH LIFE



A reflection on family, career, and fulfillment.

BY WOLFGANG RIHA, MD

Being an ophthalmologist is a multifaceted role that includes the management of a large volume of patients, the performance of delicate surgical procedures, leadership within the clinical business environment, involvement in education, and participation in projects. We practitioners dedicate ourselves to delivering optimal patient care while simultaneously ensuring our clinics' efficient operations and encouraging growth in various areas. Often, we delve into projects that transcend our daily clinical practice.

## A COMPASS FOR LIVING

My daughters, Helena and Florentina, were born in 2015 and late 2016, respectively, a remarkably intense period of my professional life. This life-altering time was punctuated by an article I discovered in the September 2016 edition of *CRST* that forever changed my

outlook. Esteemed ophthalmologist and mentor Arthur B. Cummings, MB ChB, FCS(SA), MMed(Ophth), FRCS(Edin), wrote, "Investing time in my family when they were young and needed parental guidance on a daily basis has paid off more than any financial investment that I have ever made."<sup>1</sup> (Scan the QR code to read the article.)



READ IT NOW

The simplicity and power of Arthur's words provoked a profound realization that shaped my journey as a parent and realigned my priorities. I decided to decrease certain professional commitments and travel and to invest more time in connecting with my children. In the ensuing years, I discovered the joy and fulfillment that came from heeding his wisdom. The

quality moments spent with my children, the shared adventures, and the sense of purpose I experienced not only enriched their lives but also profoundly affected my own. Reflecting on this time, I feel a deep sense of gratitude for the *CRST* article and Arthur's words, which have guided me like a compass.

## ADVENTURES OFF THE BEATEN PATH

It's widely recognized that a balanced life can mitigate stress and foster happiness and fulfillment. As a parent, my pursuits beyond the professional sphere typically center on quality time with my daughters, particularly enjoying outdoor activities together (Figures 1 and 2).

During the winter months, my family and I love spending time in the mountains, where one of my passions, skiing, is ignited (Figure 3). The sport offers an exhilarating experience and a vigorous workout for all of us.

With stunning scenery, fresh air, and opportunities for family bonding, it is the perfect winter sport. After a day on the slopes, we warm up by the fire, enjoy a hot chocolate or a glass of wine, and play card or board games. Sledding and playing in the snow are frequent additions to our winter fun in the mountains.

My family and I treasure spending time in the Salzkammergut, a picturesque area close to our home in Salzburg, Austria. We enjoy sailing and swimming in the clear waters, followed by an afternoon BBQ with friends and family. Our excursions often involve hiking in the mountains, where we search for fresh berries and mushrooms to spice up our evening meals. Being near the water and mountains is rejuvenating and helps us unwind from our hectic weeks (Figure 4).

#### LESSONS FROM THE SEA

My enthusiasm for sailing regattas worldwide has led me to attend international events (Figure 5). Although I now approach sailing with less competitiveness than in my youth, the thrill on the water remains a source of joy. It's invigorating to meet with friends of various ages and professions in stunning locations, united by our shared interest. The spirited competition revitalizes my mind and frees it of day-to-day concerns.

During my 20s and 30s, competitive sailing held a significant place in my life. The pinnacle of my sailing career was

winning the World Championship title in 2001 in Newport, Rhode Island, in the Yngling Class—a keelboat designed for three sailors—and placing second in 1999 and 2002. Racing at international championships around the globe imparted lessons that resonate with my personal life and career as an ophthalmologist.

**Prepare.** A thorough education and training allow you to maintain your composure and complete your task on the racecourse and in the OR.

**Prioritize teamwork and collaboration.** A strong team is vital to achieving goals. Success relies on each individual's professionalism.

**Pay attention to detail.** Small details can make a significant difference, something every refractive surgeon understands.

**Be disciplined and manage your time wisely.** Maintaining strict discipline and time management is essential in sports and a large-volume clinic.

**Be adaptable and decisive.** Quick thinking and adaptability are necessary in sports. They also enable you to adjust to each patient and make the best decisions in your daily practice.

**Learn from failure.** Failure is an opportunity for growth in both sports and medicine. Analyzing and learning from mistakes can lead to improvements in your work.

#### EXPLORATION AND ENRICHMENT

Although traveling as a family poses challenges, it brings increased joy and

bonding. A notable journey occurred a few months before the COVID-19 pandemic began. We spent 3 weeks exploring Argentina and Uruguay, visiting remarkable places such as the breathtaking Iguazu Falls and the Valdez Peninsula in North Patagonia, where we witnessed mesmerizing wildlife and scenery. During the subsequent years of the pandemic, we chose nearer destinations and discovered the enchanting coastlines of Croatia and Northern Italy.

Traveling promotes adaptability and flexibility, which are essential skills for handling unforeseen circumstances. It also fosters humility and encourages openness to new perspectives. These experiences enrich my professional skills, broaden my social network, deepen my understanding of diverse patient populations, and enhance the quality of care I can provide to patients.

#### A BALANCED PERSPECTIVE

Juggling work and family responsibilities can be demanding, but it is an endeavor worth pursuing. Engaging in hobbies and quality family time enables me to lead a more gratifying life. ■

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