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Online Exclusive:

A Man on a Rescue Mission

A Profile of Dr. Maurizio A. Miglietta

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of Medicine*

"My life has been full of trauma," explains Dr. Maurizio A. Miglietta, Director of Trauma at Bellevue Hospital Center. He goes on to recount being in a plane crash on a runway of Kennedy Airport as an infant, being in an explosion as a teenager, being run over by a car as a young man, and other perilous episodes that have made him feel as if he has nine lives.



Dr. Miglietta on rounds in Bellevue's ICU

Photography: René Perez

"I love to react to emergencies," beams Dr.

Miglietta, Assistant Professor of Surgery at NYU School of Medicine. "I'm the kind of person who goes through life constantly envisioning worst-case scenarios and how I would deal with them." As he sits at his desk, seeming perpetually poised for action, you can almost feel the restless energy that makes this fast-talking, quick-smiling man describe himself as "an adrenaline addict." As a resident at Lincoln Hospital in the South Bronx, he recalls, "I hated watching the trauma patients go up to the OR while I stayed behind in the ER."

Dr. Miglietta — his colleagues call him "Migs" — is a man who never stops putting out fires. As a youngster, he smothered flames on a friend who accidentally ignited himself with kerosene. He's been on a rescue mission ever since. Dr. Miglietta's father, a neurologist who was born and trained in Naples, Italy, was one of the pioneers of electromyography, which measures the electrical activity of muscles. Having lost his

father at the age of 16, Dr. Miglietta says that becoming a trauma surgeon was his way of thwarting premature death.

Dr. Miglietta and his fellow surgeons practice their craft at an institution that is synonymous with trauma. Bellevue established one of the nation's first hospital-based ambulance services in 1869, when Dr. Edward L. Dalton began dispatching his horse-and-buggy teams to nearby disasters. Less than a decade later, in 1876, Bellevue opened the first emergency pavilion in the country.

Today, Bellevue is one of 22 Level-I trauma centers in New York City and one of five in Manhattan, but it's the only such hospital designated as both a Head and Spinal Cord Injury Center and a Limb Replantation Center. A study recently published in *The New England Journal of Medicine* concluded that "the risk of death is significantly lower when care is provided in a trauma center rather than a non-trauma center." Researchers examined both Level-I

trauma centers and hospitals without a trauma center in 14 states, including New York, and found that the former had an average mortality rate of 7.6 percent while the latter had a mortality rate of 9.5 percent — a difference of 25 percent.

"Trauma surgeons see death more than most other kinds of physicians," notes Dr. Miglietta. "That not only shapes our own sense of mortality, but sensitizes us to how devastating it is for a family to lose a loved one suddenly, unexpectedly, and tragically. I treat patients as I would want to be treated myself, because I've been there."

For a related article on Bellevue's trauma surgeons, featured in *NYU Physician* magazine, visit www.med.nyu.edu

For guidelines on treating trauma, visit www.med.nyu.edu/treating_trauma.html



Dr. Miglietta in Bellevue's OR
Photography: René Perez