

Jessica L. Hudson, MD MPH  
General Surgery, PGY4  
Washington University School of Medicine

I was honored to be the 2018 Scanlan/Women in Thoracic Surgery Traveling Mentorship Award general surgery recipient. This enabled me to spend two weeks at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina where I was fortunate enough to be invited into Dr. Betty Tong's surgical practice, home, and family.

When I discovered my passion for thoracic surgery late in residency, I was alarmed that only 5% of cardiothoracic surgeons are women because my personal definition of success had always included balancing being a wife and mother. Even in more gender-balanced fields, nearly half of female surgical residents and faculty believe that having children would be a career barrier while only 5% of their male colleagues feel similarly burdened. As a pregnant surgical resident with a toddler at home, I was worried. Through this mentorship opportunity, Dr. Tong proved to be a role model whose career and character I could emulate. I was able to see a realistic view of an academic surgeon as I followed her to the OR, clinic, inpatient wards, weekly conferences, and home. On operative days, I observed 2-port lobectomies, minimally invasive esophagectomies, complex chest wall resection/reconstruction, and many other fascinating surgeries. I had the opportunity to observe several of her partners operate as well. Her clinics provided a wealth of learning opportunities with the running joke being that eventually she would show me a straightforward patient. It was clear that her patients enjoyed and greatly respected her. One notable 5-year lung cancer survivor lovingly reported that she told her endocrine surgeon, "I know Betty Tong. You can't scare me with a thyroid!" Finally, she even arranged a relaxing happy hour with the clinic staff and a "girls' night out" for me and all the female cardiothoracic residents!

Without a doubt, though, my most treasured experiences occurred around the kitchen counter or over bedtime stories with her children. This nightly time outside of the hospital provided me with a much-needed pragmatic look into my future as she openly discussed both her joys and guilt as a working mother and spouse. I also got to know her precious daughters who greatly respect the important work that their mother does, even at their young age. Their nanny spoke highly of the parental strategies to ensure family cohesion, a functional household, and good patient care. Finally, her husband reflected authentically on the challenges of balancing a two-surgeon household.

Dr. Tong's exceptional candor provided me incredible insight into how she built her thoracic surgery career to blend her work and home lives as I attempt to do the same.

I am so incredibly thankful for Scanlan International, WTS, Dr. Tong and her family, and the faculty and fellows at Duke University Division of Cardiothoracic Surgery for this wonderful, unique experience. It far surpassed my expectations.