

We're all familiar with the heart-wrenching drama depicted on TV shows like "House" and "Grey's Anatomy" – the painstaking removals of lung-choking spears to the chest, lifesaving surgeries on seizing breathless babies, meticulous cutting away of face tumors the size of watermelons. ¶ The following five hard-working South Florida physicians are the real deals. They've spent many years keeping our hearts beating, blood flowing and lungs breathing, and all have true tales that rival any TV writer's imagination. ¶ When we asked each to share his most memorable and challenging case, share they did. Their tales are touching, awe-inspiring, sometimes perplexing and occasionally difficult to read. But all will leave you appreciative that these doctors exist in a sometimes dangerous, precarious world.

EXTRAORDINARY MEASURES

5 DOCTORS REVEAL THEIR MOST MEMORABLE AND CHALLENGING CASES

BY DIANNA SMITH

A SHOT IN THE DARK

It was a slow July afternoon in 2010 for Dr. Ahmed Elhaddad when he learned of the boy who was about to make his day – and career – more interesting than ever before.

As a trauma surgeon, Dr. Elhaddad had thought he'd seen it all – gunshot victims,

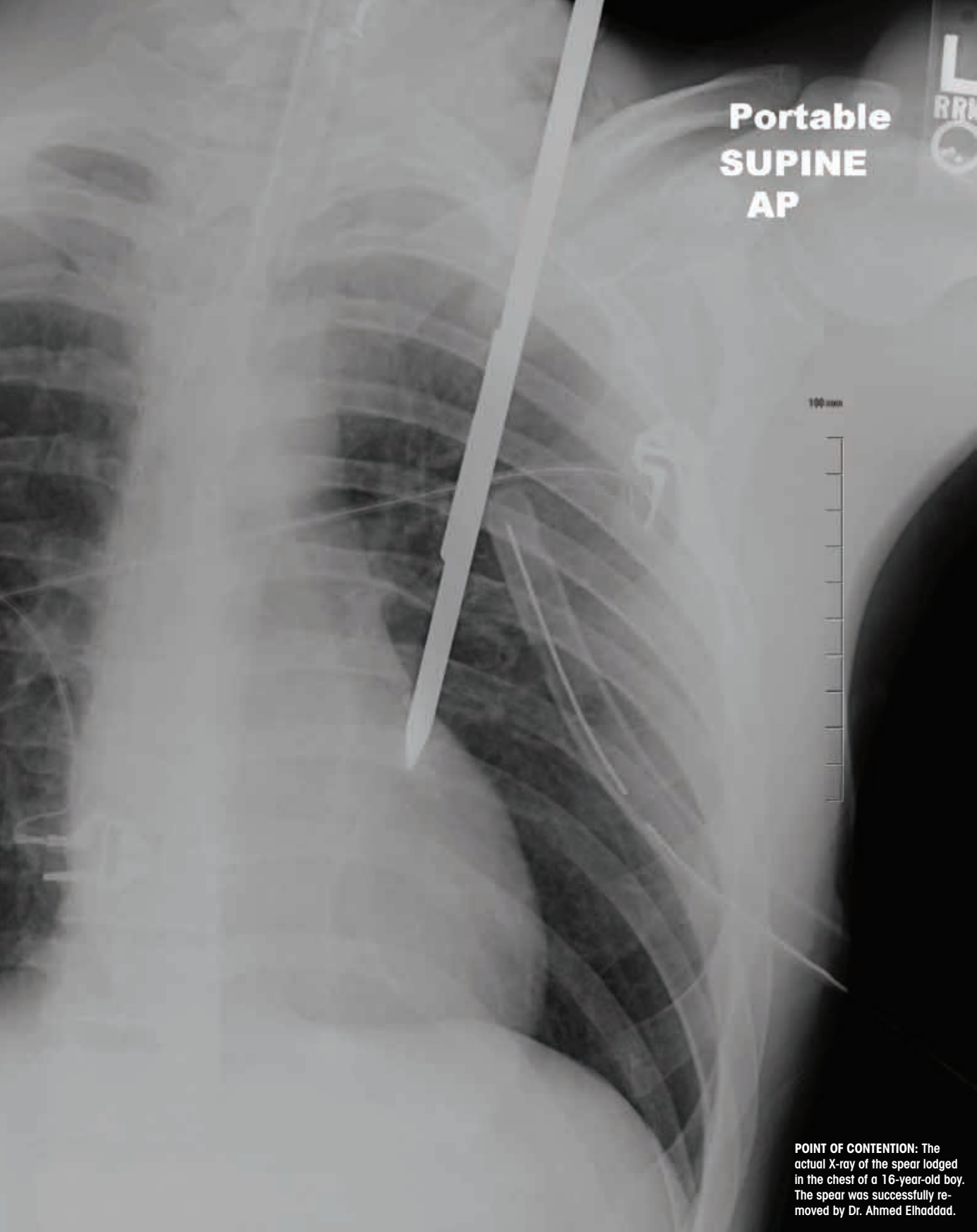
stab wounds and bodies mangled from car wrecks. But for the first time, he was about to operate on a 16-year-old with a fishing spear protruding through his body.

The boy had been on a boat with friends when one of them inadvertently shot him with a spear gun.

When Dr. Elhaddad received the trauma alert at St. Mary's Medical Center in West Palm Beach, he figured the kid would already be dead. But when emergency crews rolled him in on the gurney, the teen was awake and speaking clearly and Dr. Elhaddad recalls promising, "Don't worry, we're going to get this out of you."

It was the first time this doctor had even seen a fishing spear.





Portable
SUPINE
AP

POINT OF CONTENTION: The actual X-ray of the spear lodged in the chest of a 16-year-old boy. The spear was successfully removed by Dr. Ahmed Elhaddad.

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The spear entered the left side of the boy's neck and sliced through his chest, very close to his heart, piercing his lungs. Dr. Elhaddad had to cut a section of the spear immediately in order to put a chest tube in his lungs to stabilize him. The first bolt cutter broke because it couldn't handle the thickness of the spear.

The second cutter, borrowed from a fire rescue truck, worked.

Another surgeon at the hospital whose hobby is spear fishing joined Dr. Elhaddad in the operating room to help, and, after a rather short surgery, Dr. Elhaddad managed to remove the spear and the boy surprisingly survived.

Not long after the teen was released from the hospital, he returned to thank Dr. Elhaddad. He brought with him a framed picture of the X-ray with the spear cutting through his chest.

It's now hanging on a wall in his home, reminding Dr. Elhaddad daily that his job is and always will be unpredictable.

"Your heart is racing and at the end you realize that you did it. You saved his life," he says of challenging cases such as this one. "There's nothing that can compare to the feeling of that."

A FAMILY AFFAIR

There are doctors all over the world like Dr. Gene Manko, a physician who works with women struggling with infertility. He prides himself in knowing he's giving them a chance to become mothers.

About three years ago, one of those women included his own daughter.

Dr. Manko, who works at IVF Florida in Jupiter, treated his daughter, Amy, because she so badly wanted to be a parent and couldn't get pregnant on her own.

But this story isn't just about that.

First you need to know that Dr. Manko and his wife had two daughters — Amy and another girl, Lisa. Lisa died at 18 months, leaving then-4-year-old Amy without her

best friend. Amy spent years mourning the loss and never dealt with the grief until deciding to study social work in college, where her healing finally began.

After Lisa's death, Dr. Manko and his wife welcomed a son, Andrew. He coincidentally was born on the Fourth of July, the same day Lisa was buried the year before.

Andrew grew up wanting to know everything about Lisa, his deceased sister. He once even visited a psychic and as he walked in the room the psychic cried, "Who is that female spirit over your head?"

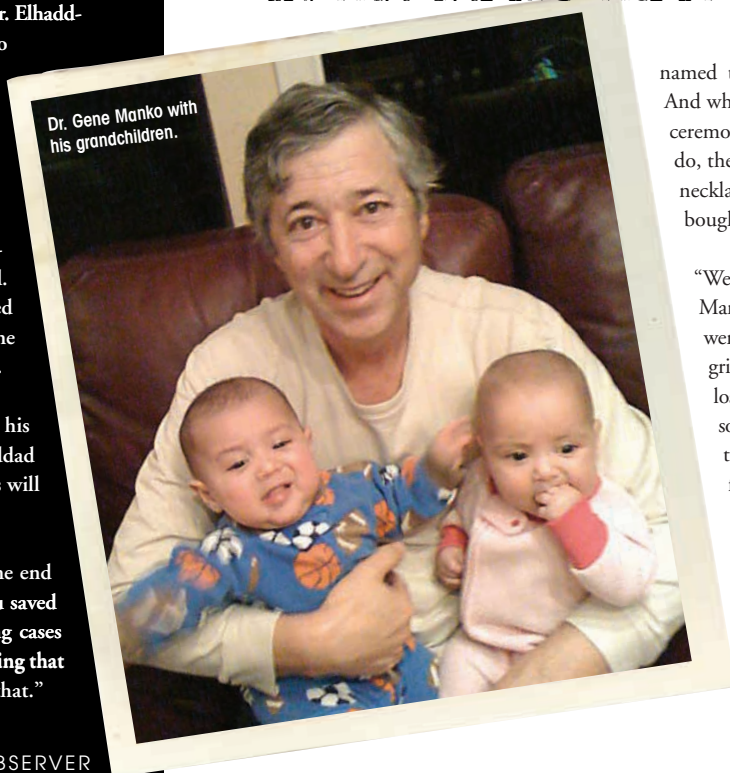
It was Lisa, Dr. Manko says, his son's guardian angel.

And it seems Lisa's spirit was watching over Amy, too.

After a grueling 18 months of treating his daughter Amy for infertility, she became pregnant with twins. A boy and a girl. She

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named the girl after her sister, Lisa. And when it was time for her naming ceremony, something Jewish families do, the baby wore a dress and a pearl necklace that the Mankos had bought for Lisa so many years ago.

"We just cried and cried," Dr. Manko recalls. "The whole circle went round for us. Many couples grieve their entire lives when they lose children as we have, but it's so wonderful to see the blessings that we have in the years that follow. My wife and I found peace in our loss. Amy found peace. My son found peace."

He adds, "It's just a fulfillment in life."

that some people couldn't bear to look at her. She was mistreated often in Haiti – people avoided her on sidewalks and if she tried to hail a taxi, drivers would keep going.

So here, in South Florida, Marlie and her family came looking for a miracle. And they found it when they met Dr. Gomez, a University of Miami/Jackson Memorial Hospital oral surgeon.

Through tireless fundraising, Marlie was able to have her first operation, which took a whopping 17 hours – the longest surgery Dr. Gomez has ever performed. He was able to remove 70 percent of the mass and, even to this day, Dr. Gomez is still rebuilding Marlie. She's had seven operations so far and each time he meticulously carves her face like a sculptor would his art.

Her story has been shared through countless media outlets, including an entire show dedicated to her battle on the Discovery Health Channel called "A New Face for Marlie." Dr. Gomez has held many press conferences to update the public on her condition and he's published articles in journals and shared her story in international medical meetings because doctors around the world are amazed by his work.

"You create a lot of fame with more complicated cases," he says. "It opened Pandora's box. We have a lot of patients now asking for help."

The problem: Many of these patients are poor, like Marlie, and would require years of fundraising to pay for their treatment.

Though Marlie still has a long journey ahead, life is nowhere near as difficult as it was. She can finally eat and breathe and talk with few problems. And it seemed so fitting when her first words to Dr. Gomez were a simple, "Thank you."

THE MOUTH OF BABES

It's not often that the Palm Beach Gardens Medical Center staff sees Dr. Scott McFarland sweat. This emergency room physician's been doing his job for 27 years and it takes a lot to make him nervous.

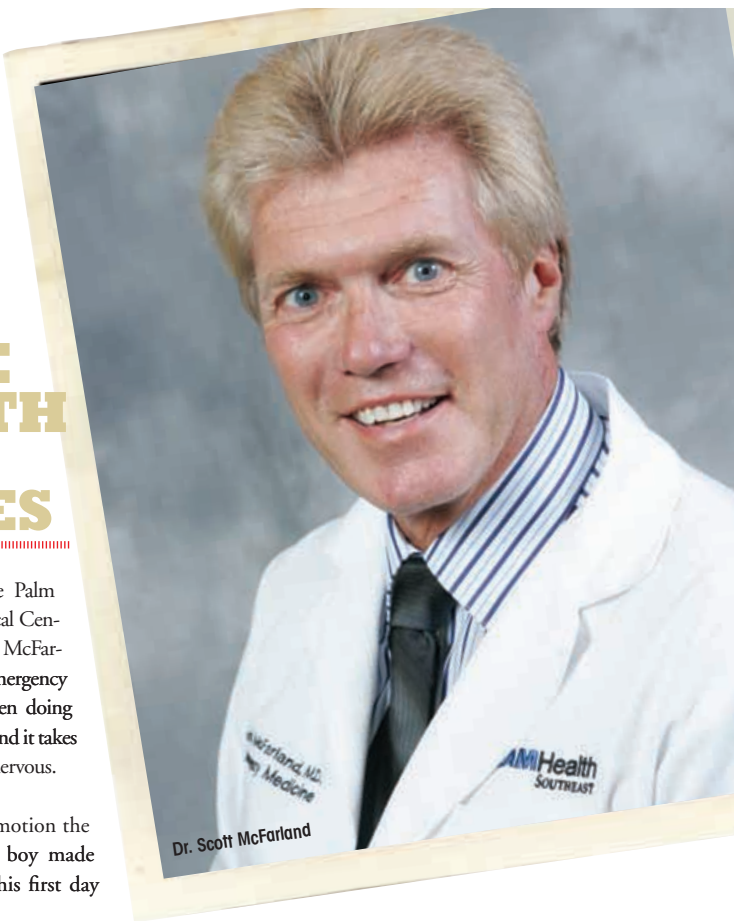
But he recalls with emotion the time a 6-month-old boy made him feel like it was his first day on the job.

The baby had contracted meningitis, which is fairly uncommon nowadays. When he arrived at the hospital, he was shaking uncontrollably, had a high fever and wasn't breathing. He'd suffered a seizure and it paralyzed his mouth, forcing it shut and ambulance crews couldn't open it to get a breathing tube inside.

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But what scared Dr. McFarland even more was the spinal tap he performed to determine the fever's cause. The fluid was the color of skim milk – it should have been clear like water – because thousands of white blood cells had invaded. White blood cells normally aren't found in spinal fluid.



Dr. McFarland had little hope the baby would survive.

"It scares you because you know there's a precious little life here that's about to be extinguished," he says.

Dr. McFarland immediately tried to pry the boy's mouth open with his fingers as the boy's little body flopped around from the seizure. After several attempts, he managed to insert a breathing tube. Minutes later, he and his crew were able to stop the seizure and lower the fever.

And in just 30 minutes, the baby was sleeping soundly in his mother's arms.

"It was so peaceful," Dr. McFarland recalls. "It was incredible teamwork. And I think there was probably a lot of heavenly intervention as well. I ask for a little Godly support when I need it."

Since that day, Dr. McFarland has seen the boy often. His parents bring him to the hospital to say hello and to thank him once again with cards and smiles. The boy, now in kindergarten, always runs up to his miracle worker and hugs his leg tight.

"It's a lovely, wonderful, gentle thank you," Dr. McFarland says. ○