There is a famous saying in English: “You should never meet your heroes.” The reasoning behind this is that you idolize and idealize your heroes for their achievements, but when you meet them in person they can turn out to be pretty terrible people. The trauma of having your dreams shattered is too horrible to imagine.

I have been extremely fortunate throughout my career. I have met all of my heroes in cardiothoracic surgery, and gotten to know many of them as close friends today. I cannot even begin to describe what a wonderful feeling it is when the great surgeon who wrote those legendary papers and books you read – no, worshipped – as a trainee is now your partner in a clinical study, your partner in a committee, your co-author on a paper... or your friend to have a drink with. And you know what? I have never been disappointed to meet my heroes. The old saying is disproved because great thoracic surgeons also happen to be great people too – a happy coincidence.

This book obviously gives you a chance to share a little of how it feels to meet your heroes. Through intimate interviews in a casual, relaxed environment, the top experts in thoracic surgery today share their time and thoughts with you. It is as close as you can get to having a coffee or a beer with any of them. Through these interviews, you are not reading their formal, rigid writings in official journal articles, but hearing their actual words in their actual voices speaking directly to you.

But this begs the question: if you do meet your heroes, what do you actually want to talk about? It would be a waste of time to just talk about what they have achieved: you can just read about that in their papers and books. For me, it is more interesting to explore those issues that even the experts cannot get published. International journals do not publish fanciful speculations, and respected textbooks do not print opinionated ramblings. And yet the gurus of surgery are humans after all, and they do have such views that they want to share if given the right opportunity. The interviews in this book provide that opportunity – free from the constraints of having to write a ‘scientific’ article. Their views may surprise you in their honesty, or open your eyes to how the experts really think. Each interview allows you to really know the person behind the ‘hero’ label. For me, that is what this is all about.

In one of the interviews in this book, I was asked to talk about ‘glasses-free 3D’. I don’t use this ultra-advanced technology myself, and I am certainly no expert in 3D. However, I surprised even myself with the depth of discussion that the interviewed led to, exploring how technology fits into modern thoracic surgical practice from my
standpoint as an experienced VATS surgeon. In the process, I learned a little about myself. For me, that is exactly a perfect example of why this book ‘works’. When you get experienced surgeons talking beyond where their writings normally stop, the conversation illuminates new ways of looking at things and opens new perspectives on surgery.

I hope that this book of interviews brings you an experience that is as rewarding for you as meeting my heroes was for me. Sit back with your favourite drink as you enjoy each conversation, and get to know the thoracic surgery masters up close and personal. This should do fine for now, until the day you actually do meet your heroes in person!

Alan D. L. Sihoe

MBBChir, MA(Cantab), FRCSEd(CTb), FCSHK, FHKAM, FCCP
Clinical Associate Professor, Department of Surgery, The University of Hong Kong
Chief of Thoracic Surgery, The University of Hong Kong Shenzhen Hospital
Guest Professor, Tongji University Shanghai Pulmonary Hospital