



TRIUMPH OVER TRAUMA

Dr. Enrique Ginzburg wages war on injuries

While sheltering inside a stairwell in Lviv, Ukraine, Miami trauma surgeon Dr. Enrique Ginzburg recalls the building trembling as air raid sirens blared around him.

"When I was working, I didn't think about danger," says Ginzburg of his two volunteer stints in war-torn Ukraine to train doctors unaccustomed to treating victims of war. "It was only later in bed that the fear hit."

Ginzburg is a University of Miami School of Medicine professor at the DeWitt Daughtry Family Department of Surgery, Division of Trauma Burns, and Surgical Critical Care. But after Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, the critical care specialist offered his services to the nonprofit Global Surgical and Medical Support Group (GSMSG), which brings much-needed burn and trauma surgeons and medical equipment to treat patients in war zones.

Ginzburg first went to Ukraine with GSMSG four weeks after war broke out in April 2022, then returned three months later.

Born in Cuba, Ginzburg's grandparents are two-time refugees—first leaving the Ukraine for eastern Poland during World War II, and later fleeing Cuba to start over in Miami in 1960.

His medical journey began in 1979 at the University of San Diego—as did what he calls his "awakening." Then 23 years old and a pre-med student, he wiped out while surfing, hit his head on his board, and lost consciousness—yet survived.

"I saw a white light and experienced one of the most pleasant feelings ever," he says. "When I came to, I realized I had to give back when I had the chance."

Ginzburg chose vascular and trauma surgery because "they're among the few areas of medicine where you can literally snatch people from the jaws of death," he says. When he graduated from medical school in Miami in 1985, he made it his mission to save the gravely wounded. Today, he's the medical director of trauma at Ryder Trauma Center of Jackson South Medical Center. He's proud that trauma surgeons he and his colleagues have trained now operate out of places like Israel, Haiti, Ukraine, and Bhutan.

The ultimate goal, he says, is helping nations "have the know-how to take care of their own."

But he does the work, too. Hours after a 2010 earthquake decimated Haiti, Ginzburg parachuted into Port-au-Prince's airport with Dr. Barth A. Green, professor and chairman of Neurological Surgery at the University of Miami, who co-founded Project Medishare to aid Haiti. The pair, along with several other medical professionals, operated in a hangar at the airport, performing 1,500 surgeries.

How does he balance the trauma he sees? Ginzburg points to his wife of 36 years, Barbara, an occupational therapist, as "my backbone. She grew up on a farm and is tough."

He also embraces the wisdom of Mark Twain: "Courage is resistance to fear, mastery of fear—not absence of fear."

So don't be surprised if you hear that Ginzburg has returned again to war-torn Ukraine, despite his harrowing experiences—even at the age of 66. "I know I'm mortal and only have limited time," he says. "But in that time, I want to do things that provide me with purpose and help others." —Michele Meyer