European Journal of Orthodontics 31 (2009) 664–668

Book Reviews

European Journal of Orthodontics 31 (2009) 664
doi:10.1093/ejo/cjp096
Advance Access publication 29 October 2009

Bernard G. Sarnat. 20th century plastic surgeon and biological scientist (2008)

Author: Pete E. Lestrel
Publisher: World Scientific Publishing Co. Pte Ltd, Singapore
Price: £35.00
ISBN: 978-981-281-317-6

This book is a celebration of an extraordinarily long and productive life. Bernard 'Bernie' George Sarnat, MD, MS, DDS, FACS was born in 1912 in Chicago, the third and last child of Isadore Sarnatsky and his wife Fanny (née Silverman). Isadore had immigrated to the USA in 1907 from Belarus following the anti-Jewish pogroms in the Russian Empire and was joined by Fanny and their two eldest children in 1909. Bernie Sarnat grew up in Chicago and was educated at Hyde Park High School and the University of Chicago (BS, 1933; MD, 1936), followed by internship at Los Angeles County General Hospital. He then decided to study dentistry, choosing the University of Illinois because of the reputation of Dr Isaac Schour, at the time the foremost biological researcher in dentistry in the USA. Illinois also had such other well-known figures as Frederick Noyes (oral histology), Allan Brodie (orthodontics), and Maynard Hine (oral pathology) on the faculty. In addition to being a dental student, he was also engaged in teaching and research and after three busy years received both his MS in histology and DDS in 1940.

The next stage in his career was training in plastic and reconstructive surgery. After a residency in oral and plastic surgery at Cook County Hospital, Chicago, Sarnat was to spend 3 years (1943–46) with the famous Vilray Blair group in St Louis. In 1917, Blair had been appointed to head the subsection of Plastic and Oral Surgery at the Office of the Surgeon-General to the Army and was chief consultant in maxillofacial surgery to the American Expeditionary Force in France—and while in Europe, he had spent time with Harold Gillies at The Queen's Hospital, Sidcup, Kent, to gain experience of the type of surgery being carried out on facially mutilated soldiers. It is of interest to note that the separation of plastic and maxillofacial surgery is more recent than one might think because from 1946 to 1956 he was Professor of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery and Plastic Surgery at the University of Illinois. He then moved to Los Angeles where he had a plastic surgery practice in Beverley Hills (he was the fourth—there are now over 50) and was Adjunct Professor of Oral Biology in the School of Dentistry and of Plastic Surgery in the School of Medicine at University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA). He retired from practice in 1991.

The above are the bare bones of Bernie Sarnat's career and if I have one criticism of the book, apart from devoting the first 60 pages to describing the Jewish Diaspora, it is that it fails to convey what an important figure Sarnat was in the emerging fields of bone and craniofacial biology—he was the prototype clinician–scientist, someone who maintained a laboratory-based experimental research programme alongside his clinical practice. I first came across the name Sarnat while reviewing the literature as an orthodontic resident at the University of Washington. His early research was on teeth and dental structures, but in the 1950s he co-authored several papers on dentofacial growth in the *Macaca mulatta* monkey, pig, and rabbit using the then state-of-the-art techniques of metallic implants, vital staining, serial cephalometry, and autoradiography. The 1960s which were the high-water mark of the functional matrix theory of craniofacial growth that Melvin Moss had promulgated, motivated Sarnat and his co-workers to carry out a series of experiments on the growth effects of resecting the mandibular condyle and nasal septum. He was the co-author with Daniel Laskin of the classic textbook, 'The temporomandibular joint: a biological basis for clinical practice' that first appeared in 1951 and it was a great personal honour to be asked to contribute a chapter entitled 'Remodelling' to both the third (1980) and the fourth (1992) editions.

In 1984, the Bernard G Sarnat International Lectureship in Bone Biology was established at UCLA as a forum to bring in worldwide specialists in bone biology to present their research; the list of lecturers reads like a who's who of bone biologists and clinicians. Bernie has now reached the venerable age of 95 years, a scholar and clinician who has left a lasting mark on three generations of students—one can but hope that we have not seen the last of the polymaths.

Murray C. Meikle