

So Now We Have “Bodies”

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Robert M. Rene was born in Brooklyn, N.Y. and received his Bachelor of Science degree in 1948 and a Master's Degree in Pharmacology in 1950 from the University of Michigan. While a medical student, he was elected to Alpha Omega Alpha Honorary Society. He interned in Medicine and Surgery at the First (Columbia) Division of Bellevue Hospital in New York City and completed one year of residency in Internal Medicine at the University of California Hospital San Francisco. He then entered military service assigned to the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research and was stationed at the Biological Warfare Center, Fort Detrick, MD. After returning from military service, he completed his second year of internal medicine residency and a fellowship in Rheumatology in the Department of Medicine at the University of California at Los Angeles. He practiced internal medicine and rheumatology for 40 years in West Hills, CA, as Assistant Clinical Professor at UCLA. Now retired, he pursues his passion of fine-art black and white photography. He has had several gallery exhibitions, and his work hangs in private collections. He has been married to his adored wife Alice for almost 50 years. They have three children and six grandchildren.

During our 50th reunion while walking along a corridor of Strong Memorial Hospital, I told my wife that being with my classmates made me reflect on some of the high points of my life. Falling in love and marrying her and having our children were at the top of my list, but right up there were the four great years at the U of R medical school. So many of my medical peers who went to other schools talked about their extreme stress, wondering if they would make it to their sophomore years. Not so at the U of R School of Medicine and Dentistry. I loved the congeniality of my classmates, the emphasis on learning in a non-competitive atmosphere and the influence of giants in the medical field on my medical education.

On a less serious note, I remember being in pathology class, facing Dr. Whipple one-on-one. When the time came to give a diagnosis, I was sweating and without a clue. I took a wild guess and said "amoebic liver abscess". He looked at me in a quizzical fashion and said "Well, you're right." That was like winning the lottery and, by the way, I've never won anything since.

I believe role models play an important part in an individual's life choices and I was fortunate to have had two.

My Dad, a German immigrant who fought for three years in the trenches in World War I on the Russian and Northern Italian Fronts, came to this country in 1925. Having had little formal education himself, he was adamant that education was the key to a productive and fulfilling life. I remember his asking me, while I was in high school, what type of work or profession I would aspire to. I answered that medicine would be my first choice, but since money was scarce for tuition, books and living expenses, perhaps I should pursue a teaching career. Unhesitatingly, he said "You'll go to medical school. Don't worry about the finances". He also instilled in me the values of hard work, integrity and discipline which I hold dear to this day.

My other role model was Dr. Morris Jonas, my best friend's father. He was the epitome of the old fashioned GP. I remember, fondly, his pince nez glasses, starched collars and dark suits. During the depression, very few of his patients had cars so house

calls were a major part of his practice. When Dr. Jonas came to our home, my mother saw to it that everything was tidy and that I was dressed appropriately if not in bed. I was fascinated by the ritual of boiling the syringes and needles and actually was not frightened by an injection. A prescription for a cough or ear infection meant a cure was imminent even though this was prior to the antibiotic era and was essentially a placebo. I don't know of anybody who was held in higher esteem by my family and me than Dr. Jonas.

How far we have come from those days, from that environment to the current one in which we as physicians are called "providers" and our patients are labeled "customers" or even "bodies" by managed care organizations such as the one that came to our office shortly before I retired. They made a presentation telling us they could provide us with several thousand "bodies". I can imagine the response from Dr. Jonas and my father!

I still feel, however, that our profession is a noble one and that our Class could serve as a model for how young physicians learn and develop attitudes about the practice of medicine. So, back to where I began, I want to thank all of my great classmates for the opportunity of joining together for the celebration of our fiftieth year reunion.