



Robert J. Ruben, M.D.



Biographical Sketch

I was born in New York and spent my childhood in Great Neck where I attended the public school systems. Science in general and biology in particular, politics, writing and books have always held a compelling fascination for me. At the end of high school, 1951, I had won an honorable mention in the Princeton Westinghouse Science Talent search, having bread wild mice selectively for the audiogenic seizure gene (prothetic), was head of the World Federalists and did my senior English paper on the imagery of Whitman's Leaves of Grass. Then to Princeton and the same themes but more directed. My theses was re-examination of the work of Adrian using the new vacuum tube (!) technology under the guidance of Ernest Glen Weaver. I was privileged to know him and work with him as a major source of my income was working as his laboratory assistant. That was and indelible imprint. Following that to Hopkins to study biology. When I arrived in September 1955 there was no otolaryngology laboratory. My career was headed for neurophysiology and neurosurgery until the end of my Junior year when Dr. John Bordley asked me to take over an NIH grant! From there I went to human cochlear potentials, deaf mice, finished a residency, and went to the National Institutes of Health as a research associate. Here I received an education in basic cellular biology and developmental embryology which resulted in the terminal mitosis paper. Having returned to New York, I met Tom Van De Water and we produced the organ culture paper for the inner ear. After two years at New York University, I became an Associate professor in charge of a division of otolaryngology in the Department of Surgery at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine. About a year after, I became one of the first two integrated departments between the Albert Einstein College of Medicine and the Montefiore Medical Center, was Full Professor and Chairperson.

It was about this time that I began to concentrate my practice in pediatrics. I was led to this by my work in hearing loss, cognition, embryology and language. There was also the need to recruit faculty who wanted to do head and neck, otology, facial plastic and others. In a way, no one else really wanted to do pediatrics and I found it fascinating. Another very strong influence were the other people who were concentrating in pediatrics. This was a group which was primarily interested in the patient and the problem. About 1970 to 1971 I began to completely limit myself to seeing children. I then had long talks with my teacher, mentor and very good friend, Gabriel F. Tucker Jr. I was partially responsible for his concentration in the children. He in turn continued to be my teacher and was instrumental in my development of endoscopic techniques and skills.

SENTAC was the first United States pediatric otolaryngic organization. It was conceived in the early 1970's. I wrote the By Laws at the time when there was political unrest and the perception of the need for a process in all areas including academic governance. As I thought about a new organization, I wanted to find out what its purpose was. To me it was to communicate knowledge and educate individuals concerning the problems of pediatric otolaryngology which included otology, laryngology, bronchoesophagology, communicative disorders, head and neck plastic and reconstructive

surgery and more. The criteria for membership should be those people who were interested and had the ability to contribute. Thus today we have members who are audiologist, otolaryngologists, pediatricians, speech pathologists, pediatric neurologists and more. Secondly, it was also evident that the senior societies had a second agenda, that of power. This second agenda, in many of them, made them less effective in their primary mission. On the basis I tried devised a set of By Laws which would reduce the acquisition of power and not have SENTAC be an "old boys" club.

Now some 20 years later, SENTAC is alive and well, serves as a way to communicate to educate, and, for me, is the most pleasant and useful meeting which I attend. It is truly an intellectual dialectic, with both the giving and receiving of knowledge. I am pleasantly surprised that it is still here after 20 years and hope that the format, with corrections for changing times, will give it life for many more years. It has been useful and I hope it will prosper, if not, it will be replaced. So far SENTAC has been extremely useful.