

# Understanding Acne: One Man's Journey

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Acne and rosacea are challenging disorders. It is wonderful to be able to dedicate this special issue of *Cutis* to these subjects. Neither is a trivial medical problem, but sometimes good comes from them—an amazing story comes to mind.<sup>1</sup>

In 1913, a young American was asked by his Dean to leave Harvard College at the end of his freshman year. He was the scion of a rich New York family, raised in luxury in an exclusive part of Manhattan's Upper East Side. He chose to travel around the world, with an itinerary that included supporting himself by working his way across the Australian outback for a year and a half. He was employed as a "boundary rider" on a sheep ranch in the interior of south Australia in temperatures that sometimes reached 120 degrees in the shade. He later volunteered as a Naval pilot in World War I, flying 247 missions and surviving intact after some narrow escapes. During the war, his family's giant meat-packing empire collapsed, and they moved to the shores of Lake Geneva in Switzerland, where he joined them.

There he felt great compassion for his beautiful sister, who was devastated physically and emotionally by acne. As he described it, "My sister Dulcie, in her twenties, was in a deep, suicidal depression because her beautiful face had been scarred by acne."

Because of his sister's condition, this young man was inspired to enter medical school, beginning at the University of Geneva. When his sister married a businessman from Zürich, the family moved there. He transferred into the University of Zürich second year medical school class, and fell under the mentorship of the

noted professor of dermatology, Bruno Bloch. Graduating from Zürich in 1926 at the age of 31, he remained as Bloch's assistant for 2 years. Next he relocated to Silesia to join Professor Josef Jadassohn in Wroclaw (Breslau) for one year as an assistant in his renowned dermatology department, housed then as now in an architecturally impressive brick building dedicated exclusively to dermatology.<sup>2</sup> This magnificent edifice had been built through the efforts of Jadassohn's predecessor, Professor Albert Neisser, of *Neisseria gonorrhoeae* fame.

This extraordinary man returned to America in 1929 at the age of 34, with the hope of revising American dermatology on the central European model, thereby bringing not only advanced European methods but also the practice of having each dermatology department completely occupy a large great building. Working closely with Professor George Miller MacKee, he helped to turn what was originally named the New York Skin and Cancer Hospital into a state-of-the-art facility that was successfully merged in 1949 with New York University. He went on to become one of the most noted scientific and administrative leaders of American dermatology, Professor and Head of Dermatology at New York University (1949–1960, emeritus professor 1961–1983); Clinical Professor of Dermatology, University of California San Francisco (1961–1980, emeritus until 1983); and United States Army Technical Director of Research in Washington, DC, and later San Francisco, with the assimilated rank of Lieutenant General



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(1961–1969). He was a cofounder in 1937 of both the American Academy of Dermatology and the Society for Investigative Dermatology, serving as first editor of its journal (1938–1947). His pioneering research and clinical efforts in dermatologic allergy and immunology were also memorable, as was his classic book, *Dermatologic Allergy*.<sup>3</sup> He was the author or coauthor of 7 books and 438 scientific articles, and was elected an honorary member of 41 societies of dermatology or allergy in 29 countries. He received so many honors and awards that he was known as “Mr.

Dermatology” for his leadership role in elevating the specialty. His name was Marion B. Sulzberger.

## REFERENCES

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