“Travels with Henry...”

...or HNW, as the author refers to himself in “A Personal History of Nuclear Medicine,” which is an engaging memoir from one of the field’s most prominent individuals, Henry N. Wagner, Jr. Personal it is indeed, yet this recently published book narrates the fascinating journey of HNW through the beginnings and growth of nuclear medicine. The journey begins back home in Baltimore—with perhaps a bit too much detail for the unfamiliar reader, though the story is spiced with vivid events such as his grandmother’s miraculous rescue (or “survival of the luckiest”) from the coal-fired steamship “Three Rivers.”

The journey soon expands. Against successive backdrops of the Great Depression, World War II, and the dawn of the Atomic Age, HNW acquaints the reader with many of the pioneers and discoverers of radioactivity, cyclotrons, radiotracers, recorders, and cameras and tells us of the many forces and personalities, often quirky but always fascinating, who ultimately delivered and formed an emerging specialty into what is nuclear medicine today, never complete and constantly changing. It also becomes evident how much these personalities and forces shaped HNW and his professional life. Having trained at Johns Hopkins University and Hammersmith (London) in internal (or “functional”) medicine, and recognizing the potential of “radioactive indicators” for revolutionizing biology and medicine, HNW sees himself “standing with one foot in each of two rowboats, one being radiology, and the other internal medicine,” and “walking up the upward-moving escalator of nuclear medicine,” soon to establish a division of nuclear medicine at Johns Hopkins University.

As the journey continues, the reader joins the many scholars who, from all over the world, flock to HNW for training in this new specialty and who become international ambassadors for nuclear medicine. They remain HNW’s lifelong colleagues and friends. The story of HNW’s journey is also as much the story of the clinicians, scientists, and pioneers of nuclear medicine, whom the reader meets at first hand while traveling with HNW through Europe, Asia, and Australia, as it is the story and recognition of their many contributions to molecular imaging, which has now become fully integrated into health care.

Throughout this journey, the reader appreciates HNW’s role as an ambassador, advocate, and spokesperson whose accomplishments and contributions have shaped the standing of nuclear medicine today. The book is richly illustrated with many images of early scintigraphic techniques, of imaging devices, and, even more so, of colleagues and friends. Don’t be surprised if you find your portrait in this book, but also if you don’t. As such, the book should be appealing to those interested in the evolution of nuclear medicine, viewing its past as a predictor of its future. It is equally informative to radiologists and to internists. It is, to speak with the author, a testimony to Henry Wagner’s dictum that “things don’t happen, people make things happen.”

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