Remembering Marion Sulzberger, 1895–1983

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Marion Sulzberger, cited as “Mr Dermatology” in JAMA (Hoffman, 1983), is Dermatology’s Man of the Century. In this issue Dr Holubar outlines some of his accomplishments, which are detailed in many articles and bibliographic sources. Marion died 20 years ago. Part of the Jewish tradition when visiting a grave is to leave a pebble on the tombstone; the tradition of leaving a stone started with Jacob’s sons putting stones on the grave of their mother, Rachel. We are Marion’s intellectual “sons and daughters” in many ways, and our pebbles of discovery would produce a towering cairn, even more enduring than stone. He would appreciate this intellectual legacy.

Marion saw skin as a source of inspiration from which would flow the answers to many of the important problems of biology. Prophetically, at the end of the 1976 Montagna Symposium on the Biology of the Skin, he and William Epstein published an article, “Epilogue as Prologue” (Sulzberger and Epstein, 1976). His message was very modern: pure science and problem solving do not exist in isolation, but should be aimed directly at disease prevention and management. He felt that “we are all inspired and supported by the vision of the ultimate clinical application of our findings.”

This Journal began under his editorship (1938–1947), and his name adorns our masthead monthly. A special issue of the journal, marking Marion’s sixtieth birthday (JID 24:341–373), contains a bibliography of his work, commentaries, and a series of invited papers by the leaders of investigative and clinical dermatology during the first half of the twentieth century. The Table of Contents of that issue is reproduced in the following pages. His bibliography is extensive and worth reading to see where we came from and where we might go. It has a fascinating section of “100 secret and confidential reports” to the US military. His life and accomplishments are further documented with words and photos in his autobiography, including others’ perceptions of him and his work (Sulzberger, 1986).

One quotation by William Epstein from the memorial service for Marion on March 5, 1984 may capture the man and his impact on others: “The fire that burned brightly came from within and took many forms, darting hither and yon and illuminating all of us. Every one responded to Marion’s challenge and became stronger, better and more capable” (Sulzberger, 1986).

The pebbles with which we mark Marion’s accomplishments are the tangible analog to articles on paper and the more ethereal but just as permanent electrons and atoms in silico by which we communicate in the 21st century. Marion Sulzberger was very interested in education and the dissemination of information and would have welcomed the accoutrements of our information age. He would be interested in how observations on the immune response and sweating are being elucidated on a precise molecular level.

We are his legacy and our science and its applications are the pebbles we leave; we have the responsibility of passing his legacy to future generations. Marion died 20 years ago this month, and we dedicate this issue of the JID, which reflects the breadth and depth of our science, to his enduring memory and the significance of his influence on cutaneous biology and dermatology.

REFERENCES
Hoffman NY: Marion Sulzberger, MD ‘Mr Dermatology’ JAMA 249 (1243): 1247–1249, 1983