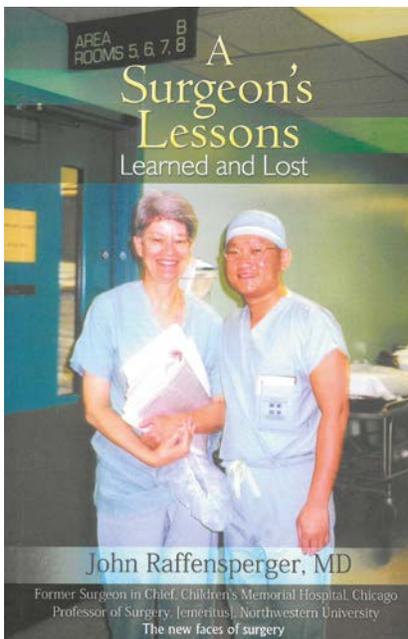


John G Raffensperger's Books: A Surgeon's Lessons: Learned and Lost and Children's Surgery: A Worldwide History



American specialist of children's surgery, John G Raffensperger, has recently published his newest book entitled *A Surgeon's Lessons: Learned and Lost* (1). It presents the author's autobiography from his graduate medical studies until his retirement, spanning more than 50 years. It is an easy and interesting read of 213 pages that is at the same time full of useful facts and life advice. The book details the author's career, which developed from the public hospitals over military service to private institutions during the second half of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, thus enabling him to judge their advances and pitfalls.

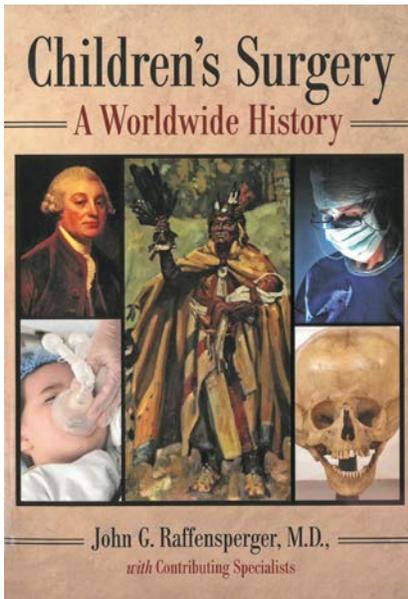
As such, it represents the history of medicine narrative from the eyewitness account.

The book is divided into chapters named according to the author's working positions. They usually start with an introduction of a short history of medicine, and then continue with the presentation of the state of art during the described periods of the author's enrolment in the particular medical fields, in order to end with his observations on the implementation of various changes, but not necessarily improvements as such. For example, in the

chapter entitled 'A Revolution in Diagnosis' he describes his reactions toward the introduction of the newest radiological diagnostic techniques, such as US or CT, which undoubtedly provided the practicing physicians with the powerful tools for the diagnosis, but at the same time estranged them from the patients and undermined the role of a history taking and physical examination (2). The entire book is a cord of try and fail methods used with the aim of helping diseased children and other patients, in which each person's ill state is described with a meticulous precision due to the author's excellent memory and thus represents an oral history of medical development. The author also raises various ethical questions that are still being discussed, and helps readers formulate their own standpoints toward them with the examples from his medical career.

Croatian readers will most surely compare Doctor Raffensperger's book with Matko Marušić's book *Medicina iznutra* ('Medicine from inside'). The both books give their author's autobiographies spent in the medical careers during the same periods of time, but here all similarities end. While Matko Marušić has never moved beyond medical school, Doctor Raffensperger has developed an inspiring career in the children's surgery to whose development he himself has contributed. Their treatment of colleagues is also the opposite, while Marušić makes fun of his teachers, colleagues and students in order to make his book more readable, Raffensperger remembers his colleagues with compassion in order to make them examples from which can be learned. The biggest difference is in their general attitude toward medicine as a profession with, on the one hand, Matko Marušić's notion of its superiority and constant progression, founded primarily on his reading of scientific papers due to the lack of any actual clinical experience, and on the other hand, Doctor Raffensperger's humility and sincerity in acknowledging his accidental mistakes that occurred during his lifesaving efforts and despite his best intentions, which were common to all medical practitioners, but that nowadays only a few are ready to publicly acknowledge, thus proving an Aristotle's claim that only a good person can be a good physician.

In a way, the mentioned book represents a sequel of the author's previous book in the area of history of medicine, entitled *Children's Surgery: A Worldwide History* (4). It was written together with his children's surgery fellows and the other medical professionals, not only from the USA, but also from other countries, ranging from India to China. The book comprises 340 pages and is illustrated with black and white figures. It gives a sound and concise presentation of the development of medicine in general, from



the ancient times until the modern achievements, with a particular interest in children's surgery in the first part, while in the second part it concentrates on the most common diseases of children and brings the developments in their descriptions, understanding and treatments. Together with the widely known facts about the famous surgeons, such as the Spanish Moor Abu al-Quasim Khalaf ibn Abbas al-Zahrawi or Latinized Albucasis and the French Huguenot Ambroise Parre, the book also brings to light the others who are generally lesser-known, such as the four early modern Swiss

Protestant surgeons in the chapter entitled 'Some New Birth Defects'.

First among them, Felix Wuertz, from Zurich (1512–1575) described frights as a cause of the congenitally deformed feet in his book *Practica der Wardartzney*, written in German and published in 1563. Another one, Pierre Franco (Provence, 1500/1595 – Lausanne, 1565/1578) worked in Bern and improved the operations of the bilateral cleft lip of 'hare's teeth', an indirect inguinal hernia with the preservation of testis, hydrocele, which he first correctly described, ureteral stones and congenital cataracts, as it was described in his book *The Surgery*, written in French and published in 1556. Next, Guilhelmus Hildanus Fabricius (Geneva, 1560 – Bern, 1634) spent his career mainly in Lausanne, where he described omphalocele, developed a new method for the incision of a closed anus, and treated hemangiomas. The last, Johannes Fatio (Italy, 1649 – Basel, 1691) in his book from 1689 entitled *The Helvetian Reasonable Midwife* described treatments of penoscrotal hypospadias, hydrometrocolpos, nevi, hemangiomas and hydrocephalus. He also performed what is nowadays perceived as the first successful separation of conjoined twin sisters, which were joined from the xiphoid process to a single umbilicus, and whom he divided with the ligature performed by the silken cord (5).

Both books are full of historical facts about the development of children's surgery that make them valuable to historians of medicine interested in this

demanding specialty. At the same time, they provide children's surgery specialists with useful background information on their profession, which is not just a nice read, but also offers practical advice on their careers. Special value is given to both books with the author's comments, dating from his life spent in children's surgery, thus giving life to historical achievements of ancient physicians, and proving once again that the history of medicine is not just a monument to passed times, but if properly treated it can become a useful tool in everyday's practice. Therefore, I would highly recommend reading both books, not only to surgical specialists, but to other physicians as well, and especially students of medicine and young doctors who are still choosing their career paths.

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