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## Book Review

**Nadler S: *The Language of Cells: Life as Seen Under the Microscope*, 197 pp, New York, Random House, 2001 (\$24.95).**

Within the genre of “books by physicians” one encounters everything from biography, through medicine for the layman, to simply a second interest in writing. The present title is not about signaling among cells (which is in vogue in cell biology) but rather observations on people and life by someone who happened to devote his professional activity to the cellular level. The author is a widely published surgical pathologist who had his formative years in Canada, engaged in specialty training in New York and Los Angeles, and then, for the bulk of his career, was employed by a large community hospital in Southern California.

The book consists of eight essays, all written in a sensitive and insightful manner. The subjects will conjure up further contemplations in the broad audience for which it seems intended. However, this reviewer had difficulty in finding profound and novel concepts. In the introduction, Spencer Nadler contrasts his “cellular” days behind the microscope with his “whole patient” encounters in the past decade. “The Old Soldier” exemplifies this theme, the author’s seeking out patient bonding after so many years peering at slides, and being once removed. This approach

has obviously fulfilled the writer, but the average reader may wish for a tad less morbidity.

The format and size of the text make for pleasant reading. The selection of color illustrations, reproductions of microscopic slides according to the essay, makes sense but is largely lost by having them ganged together in the front of the book, after the table of contents, rather than inserted as chapter introductions. This was surely due to an unhappy cost reduction, imposed by the production department.

In Australia in the 1940s and 1950s I recall that it was not uncommon for mothers to consult family doctors on career counseling for their sons and daughters. It was intended to be based on cumulative observations during the pediatric years, on the perceived fitness of their minds and bodies for future activities. At second thought it was not all that quaint, but I doubt that it happens anymore. Perhaps this circumstance pertains because today’s medical professionals do not enjoy the community respect of their antecedents, and they are normally not as broadly educated, especially within the humanities. His essays indicate that Dr. Nadler is an exception on both counts.

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