Remarks on acceptance of the Proctor Award

Thank you, John, for your very gracious introductory remarks.

I'm rather surprised by what you've been able to extract from sources I once thought to be loyal.

Dr. Podos, officers and members of the Association, ladies and gentlemen:

I am profoundly grateful to the Trustees of ARVO for having invited me to deliver the Proctor Lecture. It is a great privilege to honor the memory of Dr. Francis Proctor, and I am especially pleased to have this opportunity to express my gratitude to the splendid group of colleagues with whom I have worked, and with whom I now share this most prestigious award.

Some of you here today may recall that Dr. Proctor was intensely concerned with alleviating the suffering of trachoma victims amongst the American Indians, that he devoted his later years to studies on the prevention and control of that dread disease, and that he inspired the investigations that led ultimately to the identification of the trachoma virus.

But I believe that Dr. Proctor's selfless efforts to promote the interaction between clinical and basic research for the advancement of visual science will stand perhaps as his greatest legacy.

In a very real sense, I have been the beneficiary of this enlightened view.

When I joined the staff at New York University some 25 years ago, eager to make use of my training in clinical and basic science, Dr. Goodwin Breinin provided unfailing support and encouragement. More important, he was instrumental in nurturing the close association between laboratory and clinical activities that has become the hallmark of the department.

Although in those early days we were ensconced in the bowels of the old Bellevue Hospital, it was an exciting time for all.

Dr. Breinin's electromyographic studies had already received wide acclaim; I learned of the insidious Morax-Axenfeld bacillus from my loving next-door neighbor, Helena Fedukowicz, and Ralph Levene introduced me to endotoxins. When Jules Baum, Paul Henkind, and Arnold Shapiro joined the group, the problems associated with tissue culture, retinal vascular pathology, and protein chemistry became topics of daily discussion. The intellectual stimulation was without parallel.

If there were any doubts as to the course I was to follow, they were quickly dispelled by the results of a collaborative project with two bright, enthusiastic young ophthalmologists, George Goodman and Barry Smith, which convinced me of the merits of an interdisciplinary approach to the study of hereditary retinal disorders.

This happy collaboration also led to the establishment of a small clinical facility, which soon thereafter came under the able direction of my dear friends and colleagues, Ron Carr and Irwin Siegel. Their interest and expertise are reflected in the devotion with which they developed the Retinal Clinic to its present level of eminence.

The growth of the Clinic was rapid, but as you might expect, the more we improved our diagnostic capability, the more aware we became of how little we knew of the entities we were so carefully classifying.

It was clear that further progress demanded the use of more sophisticated clinical methods, as well as a broad-based program of laboratory research.
The fundus reflectometer, an apparatus that from our standpoint, was designed to ask the right question of nature, provided the first important adjunct to our clinical studies. In this connection, I take special pleasure in recalling my indebtedness to Professor Robert Weale of the Institute of Ophthalmology in London, who instructed me in the elegant technique he devised for the study of photochemical reactions in the living human retina. The collaboration with Weale has been particularly gratifying to me; during the 20 years of our association, his insight and spirit of inquiry never cease to amaze.

In the laboratory, it was my very good fortune to have the collaboration of John Dowling and Paul Witkovsky. It has been a privilege to be associated with these superb scientists and to benefit from their creativity, intelligence, and patient understanding of my own shortcomings.

A number of other co-workers made significant contributions to our research efforts, most notably Manou Shakib, Bruce Mehaffey, Ken Brin, Bruce Szamier, Dick Chappell, and Doug MacDonald. I thank them all most warmly for their encouragement, their kindly and thought-provoking criticism, and most of all, for their friendship.

I wish also to express my gratitude to Jane Zakevicius, not only for her talents and hard work but also for her willingness to regard every concern of mine as her own.

In a quite separate category are my wife, Jeanne, my children, and of course, the latest addition to the family, my grandson, who give joy and meaning to all my endeavors.

Finally, I want to express my appreciation to Dr. Carl Kupfer and his associates at the National Eye Institute for their efforts on behalf of the vision research community. I have witnessed firsthand the difficult problems they wrestle with on a daily basis, and I stand in awe of their accomplishments. We are fortunate indeed to have so concerned and compassionate a group overseeing the course of eye research.

Harris Ripps