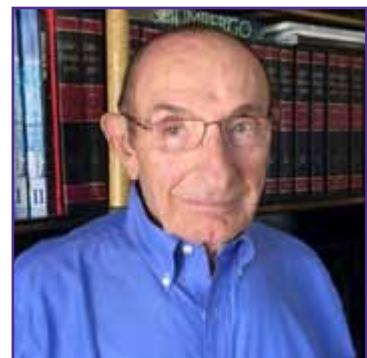


Prof. Dr. Salomón Schächter (1926-2025)



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Salo is gone. We never worked together in a hospital or clinic. I never saw him operate. We belonged to different disciplines. It is hard for me to go back and trace exactly how our paths first crossed. I shared with him other aspects of our medical life. I served on the AAOT Board of Directors during his presidency. Later, I worked alongside him at SLAOT and at the Faculty of Medicine. Finally, when Jorge Romanelli was unable to present his book, he asked me to do it. I will use here some paragraphs of that presentation at the Argentine Medical Association a couple of years ago, because in reading them one can glean many biographical details, his achievements, and his legacy. I remember asking ChatGPT from OpenAI for help at that time.

“Schächter por Schächter. Una historia de vida”: I had read it in the summer of 2022. I was in Pinamar; it was a good time for reading. I didn’t write notes in the margins, but I wrote down many definitions and reflections. I didn’t read it twice because I didn’t want to study it like a textbook: I wanted to read it as a book. Perhaps I will return to it in the future, as I do with many books. But every book leaves an impression on the reader. Perhaps, as Joseph Conrad said, *“One writes only half the book; the other half is with the reader.”*

In presenting the book, it was essential first to speak about its author. He was known by many, each from different perspectives. Schächter was a distinguished physician, with virtually every achievement, honor, position, and recognition a medical professional can aspire to. He lacked nothing, except writing that book. He had published five others, but this last one was different. It was his story.

The book was essentially his biography: his journey from distant Tarnopol, in Poland (today Ukraine), where he was born, to the pampas of Argentina. He embodied the archetype of the Argentine physician—the son of immigrants, an immigrant himself—who came from Europe and grew up, trained, and flourished here. With few demands, I imagine few rights, and many obligations, mostly personal ones. He transformed every environment in which he worked, trained physicians, and left behind disciples. His time in the different departments left indelible marks. I was told he was a demanding chief, requiring absolute attention, a devotee of punctuality and precision. His perseverance and, above all, his intellectual rigor and honesty were admirable. A master surgeon, yet always deeply respectful of the patient. A surgeon of unwavering precision, always the same number of stitches in every THA. He was never heard raising his voice, though he was not paternalistic.

Although I had known Salo for many years, our clinical work never overlapped; our specialties were different, I worked in pediatric hospitals. But I came to know him deeply through his institutional, societal, and academic roles. He was the sponsor of my doctoral thesis. I had the pleasure and honor of accompanying him through various scientific and professional institutions. That is how I came to understand his work within the Argentine Association of Orthopedics and Traumatology. Later, in the early 1990s, during his presidency of the Latin American Society of Orthopedics, and then at the Faculty of Medicine in Buenos Aires, when he served as Dean at the end of the last century and the beginning of the current one. Later still, when he created ESCORT, a pioneering distance-learning platform for orthopedic surgery.

In SLAOT, as we used to call it, many years ago, we enjoyed giving lectures in places throughout Latin America, some of them quite remote. At the Faculty, he lived through turbulent years. We would meet at 6 a.m. at the café on Marcelo T and Azcuénaga to plan the day. It is a pity the Faculty could not be fully set on the right course during his tenure; he remained loyal to ideas and principles that politics could never bend.

What can I say about the book? The book unfolds across four main sections: *Mis comienzos* (My Beginnings), *Mi trayectoria* (My Career), *Plática con y para mis nietas y nietos* (Conversations With and For My Grandchildren), and finally *Y ahora qué* (And Now What).

In *Mis Comienzos*, he recounts his early years in a Europe shaken by tension and uncertainty, with the distant rumblings of World War II already audible. It was a troubling and increasingly hostile environment, especially for Jews. His arrival in Buenos Aires brought his family to what he describes as a safe, welcoming Argentina—an Argentina open to those willing to work hard. It was, in his words, a land of opportunity. His description of adapting to school life is particularly striking, portraying both the linguistic hurdles and the perseverance required to overcome them. A quiet sadness weaves through those pages.

In *Mi Trayectoria*, the first hundred pages reveal a man with an almost priestly relationship to medicine. He appears as a kind of medieval monk, devoted exclusively to the love and study of his discipline—living almost entirely for the practice of medicine, with scarcely any intervals of leisure. His approach feels reverential, nearly ascetic.

As Dean, his most significant ambitions were curricular reform and adjusting the Faculty's educational capacity. He believed the undergraduate curriculum should be grounded in an integrated basic-clinical model, with early exposure to real clinical settings where knowing and doing must be inseparable. Educational capacity, he argued, should be shaped by the availability of actual healthcare resources. His persistent reflections on study, work, and responsibility paint a vivid portrait of his character. His conviction that ethics and morality are learned within the family—at home, not in the Faculty—is a core principle running through his thinking.

In the newspaper La Prensa, over several months in 2020—likely during the height of the pandemic—Schächter published a series of anecdotes accompanied by his own reflections. The stories of Evaristo, his interviews with Escardó (Piolín de Macramé), the anecdote involving Sandro and his connection to Ferré, his mentor, are truly unmissable. The narratives are unique, and the reflections that follow them even more so, ranging from the humility that elevates character to the understanding and tolerance that must never be absent in a physician.

In *Plática con y para mis nietas y nietos*, he opens himself to a wide array of questions: What is my philosophical orientation? Do I believe in the existence of God? How do I see myself socially? What do I love most about my work? He speaks about art, life and death, what he might study if not medicine, and the “youth of my old age.” And in the final conversations with Nico, he reflects on how he positions himself politically, socially, and philosophically. I don't want to spoil the details, but it is in these pages where his personality emerges most transparently.

I must also highlight a series of phrases and passages scattered throughout the book.

When welcoming new students, he writes that one must work with love—and that is how one works when one carries within oneself the spring of an ideal. He then affirms that those who work under such conditions imprint a stamp of youth upon their actions, and that youth is found precisely in those who work with enthusiasm for an ideal.

He states that science is neither good nor bad, neither moral nor immoral in itself. It is human beings, it is the scientist who gives—or fails to give—it its ethical and human substance.

With a note of nostalgia, he reflects that overspecialization, excessive technicality, and the massification of medical care have, in some measure, contributed to the decline of the physician's traditional wisdom, artistry, and virtue.

He claims that his greatest professional merit was having worked intensely; and, in another paragraph, he summarizes a philosophy that shaped his entire career: one learns to work by working, one learns to teach by teaching, one learns to operate by operating.

He would often repeat Antonio Machado's reflection on knowledge and culture: Only what is kept is lost; only what is given is preserved.

Paraphrasing Mother Teresa, he wrote that one must never stop in life. If one cannot run, one must jog. If one cannot jog, one must walk. If one cannot walk, one must use a cane. If that is not enough, then a wheelchair—but one must never stop.

In the final section, he asks himself, "And now what?" He reflects on old age. A friend's sarcastic remark serves as illustration: human life can be divided into four stages—childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and "my, how good you look!" He reflects as well on regrets, and even asks forgiveness for believing he may have made mistakes.

I ended by telling Salo that I had truly enjoyed reading his book—his life story, both professional and intimate, all the way to Dulcinea and his family.

I wholeheartedly recommend reading this book to anyone wishing to understand the life and work of Schächter (with an umlaut on the a, as he always insisted). Its pages relieve me—or at least greatly ease—the task of presenting him and recalling him today. I sense that almost everything is already there.

Allow me to add Francis Bacon's words:

"Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested."

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