The Samuel T. Orton Award for 1980
Presented by The Orton Society to
Leon Eisenberg, M.D.

Presentation by Drake D. Duane

The second recipient of the Orton Award is a man of medicine. But to define him as a physician or a psychiatrist is to do him an injustice, for his work reflects his appreciation of the human condition, that of man, the species, evolving over the ages; and man, the individual, evolving within his mortal span, placed in a social environment with which he must reach some harmony as best his genetic endowment and family and friends will permit.
Leon Eisenberg was born in Philadelphia, educated at the University of Pennsylvania, trained in New York and Baltimore, the latter at the Sheppard Pratt Hospital and The Johns Hopkins Hospital, where he subsequently joined the faculty in the mid-1950’s. His training experiences allowed him to study at the side of Leo Kanner at Johns Hopkins. From Dr. Kanner he learned of the problems besetting the dyslexic child and of the important contributions of Dr. Orton.

However, it was from a kindly woman who was willing to teach physicians as well as students that he gained clearer insight into the nature of the dyslexic person and the concomitant emotional impact. As you may have guessed, it was Margaret Rawson who was his subtle mentor, as she has been for me and so many others. From those early experiences, Leon Eisenberg proceeded to clarify the social, as well as intrinsic, determinants of reading disability.

When in the late 1960’s he moved to Boston, subsequently being named the Maude and Lillian Presley Professor of Psychiatry at Harvard University, his interests and efforts regarding those students with selective underachievement in written language did not cease. He has contributed to the medical and educational literature. Repeatedly he has been sought as the author on reading disorders for the text, *Pediatric Therapy*. In my judgment, his chapter in *Reading, Perception and Language* on the “Psychiatric Aspects of Reading Disability,” remains the definitive commentary on the emotional concomitants of the underachieving reader. He has served the Society well as a member of the Council of Advisors and of the Editorial Advisory Board for the *Bulletin of The Orton Society*. His incisive approach to complex issues, articulated with precision and style, has cleared the way so that others might follow enlightened.

The Orton Society and human society are fortunate to count him among their advocates. In this city, famed for its erudition, it is appropriate that a physician and especially this physician, be honored.

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**Response**

by

Leon Eisenberg, M.D.*

My introduction to the concept of dyslexia came when I was a student of Professor Leo Kanner at the Children’s Psychiatric Service of the Harriet

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