

Choosing your path

I got lucky; I decided early in life that I wanted to go into dentistry.

Part of the reason was the encouragement of a dentist in the small town where I grew up (in 1967 he took me to a lecture on the radical topic that bacterial plaque caused periodontal disease); part of it was that I like biology and love to work with my hands; and part was because in those days of the conflict in Southeast Asia, it was important to stay focused on your studies to avoid getting a free trip to Vietnam.

In college, I had one particular professor, Arthur Johnson, who truly motivated me to do the best possible in whatever field I ultimately chose. He let me understand the amount of work it took to achieve the goals I had set for myself, a lesson that continues to be of benefit more than 30 years after my college graduation.

In dental school, it was Jim Clark who explained the intricacies of periodontics, which caught (and has held) my attention since 1968. In graduate school, a gigantic, gruff man with a heart of gold named Saul Schluger had the ability to get the most effort out of every student. He was known as a bone cutter, but strongly defended any approach as long as there was science behind it. He encouraged me to look at new ways to solve my patients' problems and conceded that we knew little and needed much.

Thus, I was launched into the dental world in 1974 and have been in private practice ever since.

Another debt is to that traveling lecturer, who shall remain unnamed, who in 1982 said that 90% of his patients stayed on their suggested three-month recalls. Since I had been taught to doubt, and did not believe his premise, I surveyed every patient in my practice and found that less than 20% actually came for maintenance as scheduled. While it helps my ego that these data have been shown to be consistent in studies from all over the world, this is not the important issue. The most important consequence of my first research was that I learned to love the literature. Since the publication of my first paper, with thanks to Bill Hurt and John Prichard, I have found more and more reasons to spend time reading through journals. Most of the time it has to do with questions that will benefit my patients, but it's often just because I want to know the answer.

I have two sons, Trey and John—wonderful, bright, young men whom I love dearly. It is my sincere hope that they find mentors and a path that brings them as much joy and fulfillment as mine has.



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