

# Reflections on a Passionate Dental Historian, Colleague, Clinician and Educator Dr. Edward F. Leone (1923–2002)

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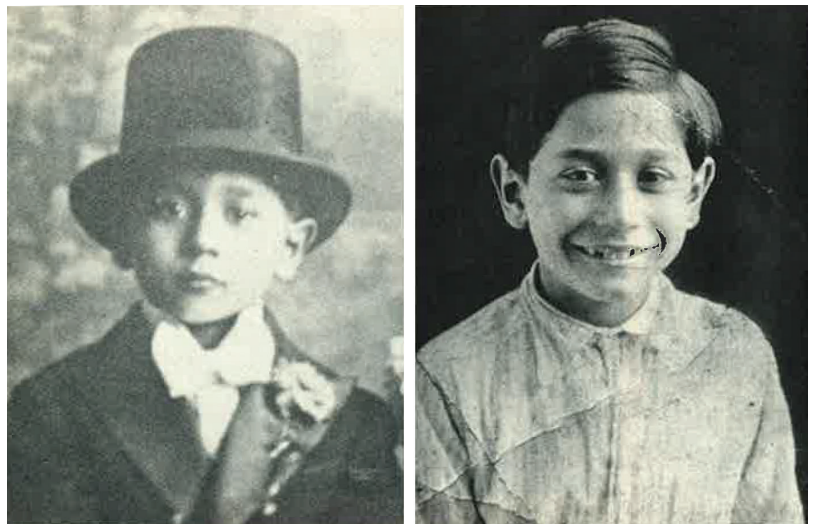
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## Abstract

For years in dental school settings, the teaching of dental history was extolled and emphasized as to the roots of the dental profession. Many colleagues can probably cite the names of those who contributed to this achievement within their academic environments. Most of these academicians were also clinicians who valued the role of history in the progression of dentistry as a respected profession. One such individual was Dr. Edward F. Leone who passionately imbued the historical values of our profession into each student. This article is dedicated to the memory of Dr. Leone and tribute to his legacy that he provided to hundreds of dental professionals for almost 50 years at the Marquette University School of Dentistry.

## Introduction

Dr. Edward F. Leone was born and raised (Fig. 1) into a family of nine children in Union, New Jersey, where his parents had immigrated to, from



**Figure 1:** Ed Leone at age 4 (left) and age 5 (right).

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Calabria, Italy. There was just one word to describe his childhood, “poverty”. The family was so poor they could not afford to pay the electric bills, let alone buy a radio. According to Leone, *“the only way I got to listen to the radio was by pressing my ear to the floorboards to hear into the apartment below,”*<sup>1</sup> he recalled without bitterness. The apartment they lived in had five bedrooms, and that was all it had, just bedrooms and a kitchen. Leone’s sister had to sleep in a closet. He began working at age nine shining shoes, but the income was insufficient to allow him to go to college or for that matter attend dental school. It was the family’s dentist who encouraged him to go to dental school, said Leone, recalling how the kindly old man would even give him his old shoes to wear. *\*They were a size 10 and I wore a size seven, but they were better than the pair I kept relining with cardboard,”* he said adding, *“I’ll bet my family still owes him money for dental services.”*<sup>1</sup>

Ed was a good student in high school and college. He attended Seton Hall University in New Jersey and then transferred to Washington



**Figure 2:** The dental graduate - Dr. Edward F. Leone, 1947.

University in St. Louis. As recognition for his hard work (and luck as he would claim), he received a variety of scholarships. The one he finally accepted that included both tuition and textbooks was from Marquette University. His motive for coming to Wisconsin was not only the scholarship, but that New Jersey did not have a dental school at that time. He earned his dental degree from Marquette University School of Dentistry (MUSOD) in 1947 (Fig. 2).

He acclimated to Wisconsin well and opted to stay, marrying a Milwaukee girl, Beverly Abrams and raising 5 children (Fig. 3). In 1947 he opened his dental practice and began teaching part-time at Marquette in 1956, initially in the clinic and ultimately embracing the teaching of dental history (Table 1). Ed was devoted to the preservation to the history of dentistry and had a passion for teaching the presently orphaned area of contemporary dentistry.



**Figure 3:** Beverly and Ed Leone enjoying the finer things in life, May 1986.

### **Table 1: Dr. Leone’s Listing of Lectures in Dental History**

- Dentistry in Prehistoric Times
- Dentistry in Early Greece and Rome
- Dentistry from Medieval Europe to Modern Times
- Evolution of Dentistry in the United States
- History of Anesthetics and Dental Hygiene
- History of Dental Legislation and Dental Education
- History of Organized Dentistry
- Special Relations of the Dentist

## Dr. Leone's Course Syllabus Stated His Philosophy

*"The hallmark of a true professional is that subtle sense of belonging to a group whose primary purpose is to serve humanity. Historically, dentistry reveals itself to be such a group, solidly built on this cornerstone of service. All young people need a continuing identification with an honest and unselfish tradition of service to mankind. Without this, dental students become merely skilled technical tradesmen. To know something about dentistry's past, of its record of accomplishment, as well as its failures, helps to develop future generations of dentists with a firmer sense of their participation and responsibility in their own profession."* (Fig. 4)

Ed had a unique teaching style. His lectures were laced with humor and often with readings of his poetry (Fig. 5). As a poet, Leone had had published a book titled "Seasons of Love." (Fig. 6A & B) As a sculptor, he enjoyed working with castings - bronze and gold. He would also display and discuss antique dental equipment from his own extensive collection (Fig. 7). One of my classmates compared him to a standup comedian. Yes, while there was humor, it was Ed's way of getting our attention and imparting



**Figure 4:** Dr. Leone the gentleman scholar.

knowledge. His lectures and his personality were a welcome respite from the many other significant demands of dental school (Fig. 8).

Ed was the inspiration for the creation of a dental museum at MUSOD (Fig. 9). Over the years the museum grew from a small space in the old dental school building to a considerably larger and impressive space in the new dental school building. The original museum contained many items that were donated by Ed. The dental school moved to the new school in 2002. In the planning stages for the new building, Ed's efforts at preserving dental history were incorporated into the new school's museum in the large, highly visible display areas of the atrium.

Dr. Leone had many interests and talents. He was a practicing dentist, a dental school professor, a poet, an author, an award-winning photographer, an automobile collector, and a certified parliamentarian. Dr. Leone's photographic talents have been recognized internationally. He is a three-time winner in the international snapshot contest sponsored by Kodak. Locally, he has been a winner in The Milwaukee Journal's annual photo contest five times. He won The Journal's grand prize three times. Many of his photographs have appeared

### REACH

*Reach with your eyes  
To see the need.*

*Reach with your ears  
To hear one plead.*

*Reach with your mind  
To comprehend.*

*Reach with your hand  
To help a friend.*

*Reach with your voice  
To ask what's wrong.*

*Reach with your heart  
To aid those who long.*

*Reach with your soul  
To seek only good.*

*Reach with your wealth  
To help brotherhood.*

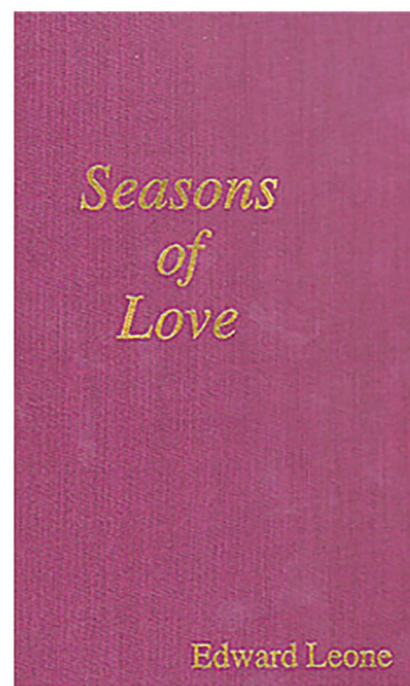
Edward F. Leone

**Figure 5:** One of Dr. Leone's Famous Poems that he shared with the students (Courtesy Dr. Duane C. Grummons) from his book "Seasons of Love", p. 29.





A



B

**Figure 6:** A. Dr. Leone autographing his Book for Dr. James L. Gutmann, April 2000; B. *Seasons of Love* by Edward F. Leone, Hallberg Pub Corp, Delavan, WI, 1992.



**Figure 7:** Exploring the riches of our history in museum artifacts.

in professional journals and in exhibitions. The Italian Times was proud to have Dr. Leone as its chief photographer. He supplied his services to the publication for over seven years. Finally, let it not be forgotten that Dr. Leone was also a director of the American Bowling Congress, which boasted a membership of over four million.

Ed was very involved in organized dentistry and community affairs. He served on the Board



**Figure 8:** Exemplifying Ed's jovial, laid-back mood (Courtesy of Dr. Duane C. Grummons).





**Figure 9:** Some images of the artifacts in Museum Showcases at MUSOD (Courtesy of Dr. Mark Mandel).



**Figure 10:** Captain Leone, Dental Surgeon.

of Directors of the Greater Milwaukee Dental Association from 1964-1967 and held the term as President in 1965. He was a member of the Wisconsin Dental Association's House of Delegates for 30 years, serving as the organization's President for two years. In addition, he served as Speaker of the House of Delegates for 12 years and Vice

Speaker for 7 years. To our benefit he was also actively involved in the Academy of the History of Dentistry, serving as its President in 1981. In 1977 he received the Wisconsin Dental Association's Distinguished Service Award. In 1986 he was awarded the Distinguished Alumnus of the Year by Marquette University School of Dentistry. Out of all the awards he had received in his prestigious career, the one he most valued was being named the Alumnus of the Year. *"I'm very proud of this one because its very unique, he said. They choose one winner a year, and when you look at all the graduates from the School of Dentistry over the years, they have thousands to choose from. I graduated 40 years ago and since then at least 5,000 or more must have graduated. To be singled out is a great honor."*<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Leone also served his country during world conflicts, including the Korean war and was awarded the Voice of Democracy Award from the Veterans of Foreign Wars, earning 11 military decorations from the US Army, serving as a captain in charge of providing dental services to combat personnel (Fig. 10).

In an interview with the Italian Times in 1982, Dr. Leone *"felt that he is among the lucky ones. Not for reasons of wealth, professional success, or unexpected good fortune, but mainly because he felt he had been blessed with 'good health, imagination and a sense of humor.'"*<sup>1</sup> He also claimed to be a "do-it-yourself" kind of guy, who delved into books to learn so much about life and what it had to offer.



**Figure 11:** A tribute to Dr. Edward F. Leone, encompassing his personal life and his contributions to dentistry and MUSOD (Courtesy of Dr. Mark Mandel).

Ed's beloved wife, Beverly passed away in December of 2019 at the age of 93, having been blessed with 5 children, 8 grandchildren and 7 great-grandchildren. A tribute to Dr. Edward F. Leone, truly a “Renaissance Man” hangs in the lobby of MUSOD (Fig. 11).

### **Reflections from Dr. Peter H. Jacobsohn DDS, MUSOD 1962 (Fig. 12)**

Ed was the inspiration for the creation of a dental museum at MUSOD. Over the years the museum grew from a small space in the old dental school building to a considerably larger and impressive space in the new dental school building. The original museum contained many items that were donated by Ed. The dental school moved to the new school in 2002. In the planning stages for the new building, we were able to incorporate large highly visible display areas for the new museum.



**Figure 12:** Drs. Edward F. Leone, Peter H. Jacobsohn and Andrew Christopher - Presidents of the American Academy of the History of Dentistry, 1981-82, 1994-95 and 1995-96, respectively.

Ed had expressed to me on several occasions how pleased he was that this museum expansion had taken place. He was also very happy that the teaching of dental history was still in place even after his retirement. Unfortunately, the hours that Ed devoted to teaching dental history has been considerably reduced. Nevertheless, the students still receive an introduction to our heritage.

Now 60 years after my graduation from MUSOD, as I converse with my colleagues and former classmates, Ed Leone's name always evokes a smile and good memories. Other faculty may be long forgotten but Ed's legacy lives on. His gift to me was to awaken an interest in history. When I lecture to various organizations, I find myself emulating his style. I display items from my collections to enhance the presentation. He was a true mentor.

Years ago, I encountered Ed at a local ethnic festival held every year in Milwaukee—Festa Italiana. He was wheeling a grocery cart full of cameras through the grounds. I asked him if he was selling the cameras. “Oh, no,” he said. “Each camera has a different type of film in it to allow for use in any conditions.” It was a glimpse into the way he was committed to all that he did.

### **Reflections from Dr. Duane C. Grummons, DDS, MUSOD 1970 (Fig. 13)**

How do we spend our “Dash” in life? You know, the dash is the time between birthdate and eternally passing on and represents all the time spent alive. Do we ever ponder what that little dash is worth? What



**Figure 13:** 7-Dr. Edward F. Leone with two members of the Class of 1970; Dr. James L. Gutmann, left and Dr. Duane C. Grummons, right, in 2000.



matters is how we live and spend our dash. We must love and respect the people in our lives, and more often wear a smile while remembering this special dash might only last a little while. When Dr. Leone's legacy is remembered, and his life's meaningful actions and valued contributions recalled, all can feel uplifted about how he spent his dash.

When we count our Blessings, we honor and count Dr. Edward Leone twice. He wrote the poems: "The Rose" and "Reach" that encouraged us to reach with our hand, heart, voice, soul, and wealth to help others.

Dental History was made interesting and a class that every student favored. Dr. Leone announced as the class began: "Everyone gets an A, unless you miss a class and then you get a B." Dr. Leone saw the possibilities in us before we could see this in ourselves. He held out no favorites - each student was his personal favorite. Dr. Leone proclaimed that the MU Dental Class of '70 was the best ever. He attended our reunion class party, in his classy gold suit, and entertained with side-splitting one-liners and heartfelt remembrances. Absolutely the crowd favorite every time.

Dr. Leone's emphasis was upon serving others with faith, being the example, teaching and sharing with an abundance of humor. He knew that laughter is good for each heart, soul, and mind, and it reveals our true selves and nature. The life lessons he showed exemplified that good thoughts and actions can never bring bad results; and bad thoughts and actions can never bring good outcomes. Generosity matters - we make a living by what we get; we make a life by what we give. Oh my, Dr. Leone was a kind, genuine, enthusiastic giver, without expecting

anything in return. He showed us that we could be our real selves with genuine humility toward people and patients, and not put on some front because we have the title doctor. Dr. Leone was exceptionally positive and an authentic example that the sky has no limit when your heart and God are in it... Reflections with respect and love.

### **Reflections from Dr. Lou Boyrc, DDS, MUSOD 1973**

Dr. Leone was a performer ahead of his times rather than just a competent lecturer. In his silk suits lecturing before dental students in the 1970's, he would take "selfies", unknown at the time, with a manual film flash camera. He set the tone of his classes by being innovative, engaging, and interesting. He used his theatrics to draw his students into the history of our profession. His passion for passing the torch of our lineage never diminished.

### **Acknowledgements**

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