

In Memoriam

D. Tucker is a man with a documented CV more than four pages long. Add to that the countless honors and awards he has received over the years, and you could write a book! I want to take this opportunity to encourage you all to take a more personal look at this great man.

Dr Richard Vaughn Tucker was born in Orofino, Idaho, on November 25, 1922. He attended the University of Washington from 1940 to 1942, where he met Elaine, whom he described to me as “the love of my life.” They continued on to St Louis, Missouri, where Dick attended the Washington University School of Dentistry, and they were married in 1944. Dick served in the US Navy from 1946 to 1948. After his Naval service, he practiced briefly in Seattle, but he told me not long ago that Seattle was too big and busy for his liking. When one of his patients told him of Ferndale, a small farming community of 500, north of Bellingham, that was in need of a dentist, he investigated. He found it was exactly the kind of town where he wanted to practice, and Elaine thought it was a perfect place to raise a family. Dick would practice there until he retired at age 91. Dick and Elaine were married for 71 years and had 4 children: Ann Marie, Dick Jr, Victoria, and Martha. Dr Tucker’s passion for dentistry was so contagious that Vickie and Dick Jr became dentists, and Vickie also married a dentist, as did her sister Anne Marie. Can you imagine sitting around the dinner table at Christmas or Thanksgiving in the Tucker family home?

It was in Ferndale, WA, that Dr Tucker would meet his dentist, first mentor, and the man who would become his good friend, Dr George Ellsperman. George was a large man, both in stature and operative reputation. It was from George that Dick coined the phrase “Don’t go chippy on yourself.” Dr Ellsperman was also one of the 12 original members mentored by “The Father of Gold Foil,” Dr W. I. Ferrier.

Dr Ellsperman restored Dick’s mouth in gold, one inlay at a time. Until the day he retired, Dick would gladly have any dentist inspect the beautiful work that George had done, none of which had failed in more than 60 years.

Dr Tucker was so impressed by the quality of Dr Ellsperman’s work that he wanted to show George



some of his own best work. After completing four quadrants of beautifully carved and polished alloys on one of his patients, he paid the man a whopping five dollars to travel to Dr Ellsperman’s office for inspection. George said nothing to Dick about the quality of the work. His only comment to him was that he was wasting his talent doing alloys, and if he wanted his work to last, he should start doing gold castings. Dr Ellsperman encouraged Dick to start doing gold foil restorations. However, George was so impressed with the quality of Dr Tucker’s restorations that when a position became available in the Vancouver Ferrier Gold Foil Study Club, mentored by Dr Gerry Stibbs, George presented Dick as their newest member, without audition. In those days, the Ferrier Study Clubs were among the most elite, and membership was based on operative ability. Acceptance of a new member was based on the quality of your operation during your audition.

Despite the tremendous pressure he must have felt, Dick flourished in this new environment.

Over the years, Dick recognized that he shared the same fundamental values as Dr Gerry Stibbs, and they became the very best of friends.

During this period, Dr Tucker continued to perfect his gold casting technique. Recognizing that the finest margin was that of a gold foil, he strived to achieve that in his casting and finishing techniques.

Over time, as Dr Tucker would bring his patients to the Gold Foil Study Club, many members would take note of and comment on the beautiful gold cast restorations that they could see next to his excellent foils. A fellow study club member known for his excellent gold castings, Dr Joe Zokol, was so impressed with the fit and finish of Dr Tucker's beautiful castings that he encouraged him to mentor a Cast Gold Study Club in his Vancouver office. Joe and Dick agreed that they would imitate the format of the Ferrier Study Clubs: monthly lectures and operations, followed by critiques and a dinner with refreshments, but they would use the guidelines of armamentarium, preparation design, and finishing techniques developed by Dr Tucker. Dick's artistic genius was clearly evident in his unique preparation designs and his extremely efficient use of a minimal number of burs and hand instruments.

On January 8, 1976, the R. V. Tucker Academy was born in the office of Drs Joe and son, Ron, Zokol. By good fortune, my long-time friend, Dr Laurie Vanzella, and I were invited to be members of this new study club. We had no idea at the time, that we had literally won the Power Ball Lottery of operative dentistry! We were at the start of the most amazing and fulfilling journey of our professional careers.

On that day, Dr Tucker gave two demonstrations. In the morning, he prepared five gold inlays, took impressions, and temporized the quadrant in less than 2.5 hours. After lunch, he seated, finished, and polished a second quadrant of four gold inlays in less than two hours. No one could believe how fast he was able to prepare and finish these two cases, especially when the finished afternoon case was the most beautifully finished work we'd ever seen. He made it look effortless. When we asked him how he was able to operate with such speed, he explained that each operation was a series of steps. The key was to do each step as perfectly as possible before moving on to the next step, eliminating the need to

go back. He told us over and over that the key to success was to focus on learning to cut the preparations as perfectly as possible, and over time, with repetition, the speed would come. Perfection first, speed second. Over the years, we found that this Tucker philosophy applied to all aspects of dentistry and would enable us to become much better operators in other fields of dentistry.

Dr Tucker felt that the social aspect of our study club was vitally important. Our appreciation for excellence in dentistry was matched by our appreciation for fine dining. It was at these dinners where our friendships grew, and we felt comfortable to speak frankly about other issues related to dentistry. At Christmas time, we would dress up in our tuxedos and have a grand dinner and fine wines; this was one of Dr Tucker's favorite traditions.

Our annual Whistler ski weekend was another tradition unique to our group. Apre ski consisted of great dinners, lots of great wine, games of bridge, and Dick's favorite, Honest Farmer, which he never seemed to lose at. Dick's "fireside chat" on investment principles and strategies was a part of the weekend we always looked forward to. We nicknamed him "the Warren Buffett of dentistry."

As his techniques gained notoriety and the demand for him to lecture at various universities and dental meetings grew, he inspired other young dentists to start Tucker Study Clubs of their own. The R. V. Tucker Academy was gaining worldwide recognition. In 1986, Dr Tucker introduced the idea of an associated meeting for all existing study clubs to gather once a year. The first meeting was held in the Olympic Hotel in Seattle and at that time consisted of lectures and social activities only. Two years later, club 1 hosted the Tucker Associated meeting in Vancouver, BC, Canada, and it was at that meeting where the George Ellsperman lecture and clinical operations were added to the programs structure. When the demand for study clubs in Italy and Germany arose, Dick decided it was time to have some of his founding members help mentor these new groups. Dr Tucker took club 1 to Italy and later club 3 to Germany to present a Tucker Technique program and assist in mentoring. It was a very special time for us, as we really recognized how much Dick had taught us and how much of that knowledge we could share with our new friends in Europe. Over the years, club 1 and club 3 made other trips back to Italy and Germany to mentor and established lifelong friendships with the Italian and German study clubs. It was Dick's idea that

whenever club 1 mentored in Italy or Hawaii, we should spend a few days together socially after our mentoring duties were over. This really enriched our experience and confirmed to all that Dr Tucker practiced what he preached in all aspects of his life.

With the help of Dr Dennis Miya, Dick developed the Tucker Institute. This was a 1-week summer program held at the University of Washington, modeled after the program that Dick started years earlier at the University of British Columbia, where dentists were introduced to the Tucker Technique through lectures and operations. As dentists were exposed to these techniques, the demand for new study clubs grew exponentially. Dr Tucker developed a new protocol whereby members of the six founding study clubs would have the opportunity to mentor a new study club. Dr Tucker's schedule was more demanding than ever, yet he still found time to attend the first meeting of a newly formed study club to lecture and often operate. He kept up this schedule until 2007, when he, in his own words, "started to slack off," only continuing to mentor the Vancouver Ferrier Gold Foil club plus three Tucker Study clubs thereafter. I've calculated a rough estimate of how many hours he dedicated to study club mentoring and lecturing, and it is in excess of 12,000 hours, which was close to six years of his life between 1976 and 2013. This was on top of maintaining a full-time dental practice in Ferndale. During the last decade, he began to limit his study club activities further to be home with Elaine each night.

In September 2009, the R.V. Tucker Associated meeting was held in Vancouver, BC, Canada. Dr Tucker was presented with a hand-carved Squamish Nation "talking stick." The Squamish elders use the talking stick to teach the young people how to interact in a respectful manner with others. In their culture, they teach never look up or down at someone but to look across at them, as everyone is equal. This made the talking stick such a meaningful gift for Dick, as it really symbolized his own teaching and mentoring style. I believe this is truly the cornerstone of Dr Tucker's genius. As Dick's well-deserved reputation continued to grow, he remained always humble, gracious, and approachable. He never looked down on anyone. Regardless of a dentist's educational or operative background, Dick had a magical ability to encourage the very best in us. His gentle way, how he would ask permission to show you something that would help, and his quiet strength inspired us not only to do our very best in dentistry, but also in our lives.

On May 6, 2011, Dr Tucker gave his last presentation on conservative cast gold restorations at the University of British Columbia. His instructions to me were simple: tuition should be just enough to cover the costs so that as many dentists as possible could attend, and he refused to take an honorarium. Because this would be his last lecture, he would bring his entire staff and asked me if I would be so kind as to introduce each one of them in my opening remarks as a way of honoring their contribution to his success. The program sold out. When Dr Tucker concluded his presentation, the audience gave him a standing ovation.

In November 2012, more than 200 of Dr Tucker's family, friends, fellow academy members, and staff attended a surprise party for his 90th birthday in Bellingham, WA. Dick knew only of a presentation from the Hawaiian clubs 44 and 50 to club 1, and Dr Tucker was honoring their longstanding relationship as the first mentors for the Hawaiians. They presented Dr Tucker and all members of club 1 with a silver goblet that they would all drink together with the Hawaiians whenever they met to toast this special friendship. Then into the next room for lunch and—SURPRISE! It was a night to remember. We all thought he might just live forever. However, over the next year when he would travel to Vancouver to mentor club 1, he would often remark that it was time to retire as "no one should see a dentist over 90 years of age!"

As his health began to decline, Dick finally retired. He rallied enough to attend the R. V. Tucker Associated meeting in Honolulu in August 2014 due to the gracious care of his laboratory technician and personal assistant Luba. She would stay on with Dr Tucker as his personal assistant until his last breath. She is a true angel, and we are so grateful that she cared for him like her own father.

Some of you may know how much Dick loved to sail. He treasured time out on their beautiful sailboat, Line Angle. He had so many happy memories related to family and friends out on the water sailing with him. I've never seen him look happier or more at peace than when he was sailing the Line Angle in a good wind. On June 1, 2015, the wind was taken from his sails when his beloved Elaine passed away.

He never truly recovered from this.

On December 23, 2015, Nancy and I met Dick Jr, Luba, and Dick Sr at his favorite Italian restaurant in Bellingham Bay for a Christmas lunch. He graciously signed four of the club 1 Tucker

anthology books as gifts for the founding members of the Italian study clubs: still thinking of others and making a contribution. This would be the very last time I would see my dearest friend and mentor before he went to be with his Elaine. On the morning of January 12, 2016, at age 93, Dr Richard Vaughn Tucker passed away peacefully.

All the years that Dr Tucker practiced in Ferndale, a plaque hung in his main operatory that said "It's not what you think that counts, It's not what you believe that counts, It's not what you say that counts, It's what you do that counts!" Winston

Churchill once said that a man's wealth and life is not measured by what he gets, but by what he gives. For me, Dr Tucker was the wealthiest man I have ever met. I will miss him beyond measure. In the words from our dear Hawaiian friends, written on his goblet, which will now be turned over to read "Pau Hana," the work is done, it's time to rest, we've done our best.

Respectfully submitted,

Terry McKay

January 17, 2015