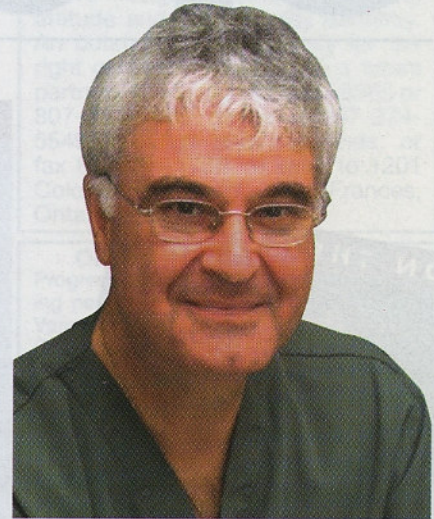


# Our Teachers, Our Mentors: Where Would We Be Without Them?

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Last month as I celebrated the festival of Sukkot with my family I recalled, as is the custom, the memories of all the teachers who have opened the doors of learning for me.

When my son asked family members seated in the sukkah (booth) the names of these imaginary guests, my list was long and full of sweet memories. Two men immediately came to mind who eventually became role models. To this day, my handwriting imitates the style of my trigonometry teacher, Mr. Rey. My letters b, d and p are shaped like musical notes, a copy of his blackboard printing. Perhaps these musical letters served as a liaison with my music teacher, Mr. Charlie Foster, an incredibly talented jazz pianist as well as a gifted teacher. I never pick up a pen or listen to the classics without fond memories of these two men. To me they were the ultimate, teachers who demonstrated patience, an ability to nurture and a desire to instill a lifelong love of learning in their students.

As an undergraduate in dentistry, I found the class sizes were too large and impersonal. Dentistry 6T6 boasted 125 students. Teachers only remember the good and the bad while the rest fall off around the edges. It was not until I entered the anaesthesia program that individual teachers impacted on my life. Who can forget Dr. Robert Locke, the chairperson of anaesthesia at the time? Also names like Dover, Saunders, McDowell and Munroe jump into my mind nearly every-

day as I deliver anaesthetics in my practice. Like most of the associates at the dental school, their task was to impart clinical knowledge — a daunting task when you think about it. To teach anaesthesia surely meant allowing me to drift into trouble and then guiding the case back into calm waters. Never once do I remember any of them losing their composure no matter how far off course I wandered. How fortunate I was! Yet rarely do I ever acknowledge publicly their sacrifice, care and devotion.

For the 15 years between 1970 and 1985 I needed a different type of mentoring; a less formal more hands on guided approach. Two individuals stand out: Dr. Danny Lipman and Dr. Jimmy Cutler. I worked as an associate for Danny in the late sixties and early seventies. He was the consummate mentor; always making time, motivating me to reach higher and consequently making my dental life richer. As my interest in prosthodontics grew, Jimmy was there to nurture me further to gently guide but not to allow me to treat beyond my ability.

My journey through the prosthodontic program was different from my first graduate exposure in anaesthesia. I now had four children in tow and nineteen years of experience in general practice. The education process was more a teacher-mentor marriage artfully blended with a respectful interaction of peers. It was for me the ultimate academic/clinical experience, one-on-one clinical instruction

mixed with very small seminar groups. I was privileged to study with Dr. Blake McAdam without the fear of failure that was ever being present during my undergraduate years. I learned that the specialty of prosthodontics was as much a people-management service as it was one of advanced restorative dentistry. Returning once more to practice, through mentors like Dr. George Scott, I began to appreciate the necessity of community involvement.

My teachers and mentors, whom I invited that evening to join my family for dinner, will be missed but their teachings will live on forever. As Dr. Randy Lang emphasized in his September editorial, we are in desperate need of devoted university teachers. While we all work toward the solution of this shortfall, be sure to open the doors of learning to your colleagues, especially the new grads who need your mentoring to maintain the high professional standards that our community demands and deserves. OH