

# Earning the Wonderful Right To Be a ... Woman Dentist

T

his is such an exciting time for women. Never in the history of this country, or perhaps the world, have women had so many opportunities to follow their dreams. Women are doctors, lawyers, soldiers, politicians, longshore workers, professional athletes, and CEOs ... and they are still wives and mothers too. Young women today outnumber the young men in our universities. Women professionals are everywhere, and now women are even moving into leadership positions within the professions. We are so fortunate to be part of this cultural transformation.





*Dr. Lynn Jones practicing yoga.*

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It wasn't all that long ago when life was very different. The first time I realized that I was not free to pursue whatever career I wanted was in 1968. I was graduating from high school, with my mind on college and a career future.

I remember walking into my dentist's office. He was a kindly gentleman approaching retirement. I had been seeing him every six months from the time my first tooth erupted. With great excitement, I shared my big dream with him. I told him I was going to go to dental school. But I was stunned by his reaction — he started to laugh! Then suddenly he caught himself and in a genuine, caring manner informed me that girls didn't go to dental school. It was a career that was far too demanding for women who needed time to raise children. He kindly advised me to become a dental hygienist.

## Dr. Lynn Jones on BALANCE ...

- We are the most important role models for our children. I believe that if my children see that I enjoy my career, my family, and contributing to society, they, too, will enjoy their lives as contributing adults.
- We need to be very good at delegating. We need to be willing to give up some of the tasks we think we own in order to pursue our dreams.
- With our busy lifestyles, it is essential to remember to take care of ourselves. The only way I have been able to carry my busy load with family and work is to have great self-care.
- I also value my network of wonderful friends. They give me so much encouragement and support; they want me to do well. They congratulate me in my successes and love me through my failures.
- The bottom line, of course, is family and ultimately spirituality. This is the foundation for a successful life.

I couldn't believe what I was hearing so I went to my high school career counselor, who confirmed what my dentist had said. Never one to give up easily, I checked out this information with the dental school and was informed that they would not accept my application. I was advised to apply to hygiene, so I did as I was told without further question.

In 1972, I graduated from the University of Washington hygiene school with a BS degree in dental hygiene. While I was in college, busy with my studies, I failed to notice that although the equal rights amendment had not passed (much to my disappointment), something else of major significance for women did — Title IX. Basically, what Title IX says is that if a school program accepts federal money, it must give equal opportunities to women. Now, most people relate Title IX to athletic programs, but it applies to all programs, athletic and academic alike. I could hardly believe that the dental school was accepting female candidates. There were only 11 wom-

en dentists licensed in the state of Washington at the time, and they were either foreign-trained or World War II “Rosie the Riveters” who helped run the country when all the men were away. None of them had received their degree from the University of Washington School of Dentistry.

Out of the 100 students the dental school accepted that year, only 18 were women. There were also a couple of women who had been admitted in the previous two classes. The number was so small that I think they flew through “under the radar,” because by the time our class arrived, the school had still not made any adjustments for the female students. I don’t mean academic adjustments; I mean just basic amenities. We shared a locker room with the male students, and the ladies’ restroom was in the patient waiting area. We were also subjected to lectures in which the patient’s physical characteristics were referred to in terms of sexual desirability — all female patients, of course. And then there were instructors who refused to speak to us and even some of our male classmates who informed us that we did not belong there.

As a result, the women in my class banded together and became very close. We all felt a great responsibility to future women students to do well for fear that this privilege could be taken away at any time. Amazingly, all of the women in my class graduated in the top half of our class, and all went on either to graduate school or private practice. We have continued to get together over the years. I believe that our dental school experience was similar to an extended hazing. No wonder we became very close to one another, with most of us remaining close even to this day.

Fortunately, things have changed greatly since 1972. Young women know that they can do anything they want to if they are willing to do the work. The choice to have a career with or without a family is considered normal. The number of women dentists is growing by the hundreds every year, and we could soon represent half of the profession. (According to current enrollment, projections indicate a 50/50 balance within the next seven years.)

As women become a major segment of dentistry, we will begin to have more influence on the profession as a whole. One great change we are already seeing in business across the board is the feminization of management styles. Leading by relationships rather than hierarchical command has gained in popularity. Job sharing

and flex time have also gained favor as women juggle families and careers.

I believe that there are still some areas in dentistry that are underrepresented by women. For example, in the last few years, I have noticed that a large percentage of the newly accredited dentists at the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry are women, yet the number of women leading and teaching within the profession is still relatively small. To the credit of our Academy last year, women have been placed at every level of leadership. Hopefully, this is a sign of what is in store for the future.

There are a group of women who now feel as passionately about opening the doors to leadership in dentistry for women as my class felt about ensuring that women would continue to be allowed into the profession. My only female role model for many years has been Dr. Cheryl Sheets. Frankly, there were no others before now. I knew that if one woman could stand up and show the kind of leadership she did, then there could be others. Now we have a number of women who are taking charge and creating a pathway to leadership in the profession. Many of them — Dr. Joyce Bassett of Women Teaching Women; Dr. Susan Hollar, an AACD examiner; Dr. Lori Trost, *Woman Dentist Journal’s* editor; and others — have appeared in this journal, and they are making a difference!

I am grateful for my role models, and I want to give back to dentistry what my role models have given to me. I especially want to see women succeed. Because of my beliefs, I have developed a series of lectures and hands-on training courses. I formed the summit AACD affiliate chapter of cosmetic dentistry, where we combine high-quality lectures with hands-on experience and patient treatment for comprehensive care. I also teach microscope hands-on courses for dental meetings and for the Newport Coast Oral Facial Institute. I give lectures and publish articles about treatment planning, porcelain preparation design, advanced gingival contouring, laboratory communications, and provisional restorations. Besides teaching what I love, my goal is to see women get out on the circuit and start showing their excellent work and building their credibility within the profession. We need strong women leaders who will continue to make dentistry a prestigious and valued career, who will maintain value for our services and take dentistry to a new and better level where a woman dentist won’t need the adjective “woman.”

Another area where women can bring their

gifts is to volunteerism. We are sensitive to the needs of the community and realize the importance of special interests.

In 1991, when I was practicing in Everett, Wash., a new problem arose among underserved populations. Prior to this time, there were many clinics in neighboring King County providing dental care on a sliding scale to low-income patients, but none in Snohomish County. One by one the safety nets for this group were being removed through cuts in welfare spending and refusal by some of the King County clinics to accept out-of-county residents. Suddenly, there was a large public outcry in Everett due to lack of dental service for low-income families. I formed a committee with the Snohomish County Dental Society to raise money through a dinner auction. I secured office space that the community health subsidiary of the local hospital agreed to fund. Then, I negotiated grants from local dental insurers and reduced costs and equipment donations from dental suppliers to build Everett's first full-time, low-income dental clinic. Later, I found a group of dentist volunteers to help me run the four-chair clinic. The clinic opened in 1992, and I am proud to say has since hired a full-time, professional volunteer manager and has taken on a life of its own.

Like many women, I have always maintained a certain level of volunteerism and philanthropy as a way to give back to the community. Currently, I am serving on the Board of Trustees for the AACD Foundation. Our purpose has been to help restore the smiles and, therefore, the confidence of survivors of domestic abuse. Recently, we were also given a mandate to form a separate fund which provides relief to our AACD members who suffered losses in disasters like Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

Another thing that women add to our profession is balance. I have read lots of Venus and Mars literature about men and women. The one thing that I believe is true, just based on daily observations, is that men think like a narrow path and women think like a freeway exchange. While we are working we may be calling sick relatives between patients, reassuring our children, working on a fundraiser, or planning a party for a friend. We manage our businesses, then go home and run our households, change diapers, plan for a meeting with our banker or accountant, write up a couple of treatment plans, and plan for the family vacation. Because of this, women need to become very good at delegating. I think it is essential to have a great nanny for

our children and a housekeeper. We should also hire someone to take care of the yard unless you absolutely love doing it yourself. We need to be willing to give up some of the tasks we think we own in order to pursue our dreams.

I think that most career women with children feel the push and pull of a balancing act between parenting and time at the office. It is good to remember that we are the most important role models for our children. Because of this, I think one of the best things we can do for our children is to be happy. I believe that if my children see that I enjoy my career, my family, and contributing to society, they, too, will enjoy their lives as contributing adults.

With our busy lifestyles, it is essential to remember to take care of ourselves. The only way I have been able to carry my busy load with family and work is to have great self-care. I get up at 5 a.m. every morning to work out at the gym. My favorite time is in yoga. I can stretch out all of the kinks in my body from dentistry and build flexibility and strength, while encouraging peace of mind and inner harmony. I also value my network of wonderful friends. They give me so much encouragement and support; they want me to do well. They congratulate me in my successes and love me through my failures. They are also a great source of entertainment and fun.

The bottom line, of course, is family and ultimately spirituality. This is the foundation for a successful life. I love God, my family, my friends, and my profession. I have been blessed in so many ways, and I appreciate the honor that I can give back to women in our profession, dentistry in general, and the community at large. Dentistry is a wonderful profession — it's the perfect place for women. We have earned the wonderful right to have careers and to be professionals. We are lucky to live in a very special time for women in the history of the world. I hope we will strive to maintain the same privileges for our daughters and our granddaughters. ■

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