

The Mulder Dynasty: Four Generations of Dentists

By Franziska Schoenfeld, DDS
Contributing Editor

The age-old question — is it heredity or is it the environment? — will probably never be completely answered. However, after meeting the Mulder family of Grand Rapids I am tempted to ponder that question again. Dentistry has passed down in this family through four generations.

Their story begins in the Netherlands, where grandfather Edward Mulder was born. Like so many Dutch people seeking a better life, he immigrated to Grand Rapids in the late 1800s.

Edward's first goal was to obtain a bachelor of science degree from the University of Michigan. After teaching a few years at Hope College, he decided that dentistry would be a more satisfying career. He chose the University of Michigan School of Dentistry, graduated, and began practice in Grand Rapids. According to Edward's grandson, he enjoyed every minute of dental school and absolutely loved the practice of dentistry.

Later, when Edward built his home, he converted the basement into an elaborate dental laboratory and encour-

aged his son, Jerry, to observe him at work and learn. Since prosthetics was his main interest, young Jerry learned to wax and process dentures at an early age.

Since Edward enjoyed passing down his skills and knowledge, it was no surprise when his son decided to become a dentist and also chose the University of Michigan. Jerry graduated in 1949 and joined his father in practice in the Medical Arts Building in downtown Grand Rapids.

When Jerry's sons, Jerry Jr. and Steven, came along, the family indoctrination continued, and again the formula worked. Jerry Jr. says, "When my brother and I were around 5 and 6 years old, Mom put us on a bus that dropped us off at the office. We spent the day there and often came back to the office with him on weekends. He showed us all sorts of things and I could tell he enjoyed what he did.

"Dad took impressions of our hands and we poured them in plaster and trimmed them on the model trimmer. Fun things like that. That's become a family tradition that actually my grandfather began."

Jerry Jr. and brother Steven continued the family tradition and turned to the University of Michigan for their dental degrees. They joined their father and grandfather in Grand Rapids, and formed a three-generation dental association that lasted 10 years. Later, the brothers established their own joint practice.

Early in his marriage Jerry Jr. and his wife, Connie, moved into grandfather Edward's home, where that superb basement dental lab then became the training ground for their children: Allyson, Michelle and Brennan — the fourth Mulder generation.

When Allyson began working for her father in high school her first thoughts were, "I am not going to do what everyone in the family has done!" But gradually, she capitulated. She says, "Not only did I enjoy the procedures we were doing, but seeing how much Dad still loved dentistry after 25 years made me think this was for me. The great thing about this career is the variety of procedures we do. It keeps work fun and fresh and I'm looking forward to my next 25 years in dentistry."



Jerry Mulder Jr. and daughter Allyson Mulder.

Jerry Jr. adds, "Allyson worked for me a couple of summers so she knew what she was getting into. Dentistry has been good to our family. It's allowed us to spend time with our kids, travel with them, and enjoy cottage life. For years, all our weekends were with the girls and their tennis. They both became state tennis champions. Now we accompany our son, who plays lacrosse. I think this is a reason Allyson likes dentistry. The profession works well with a family."

Michelle broke the family mold by deciding on a career in medicine. She studies at Wayne State University School of Medicine and the family is proud of her. Allyson also broke the family mold, but in a different way. Her bachelor's degree came from U of M but she chose Tufts University School of Dental Medicine in Boston to earn her dental degree. "I love that school," she says. "They have the latest technology and keep up with everything new."

When I interviewed Allyson and her father, Allyson had just graduated from Tufts and had been working one week in the office. "Dad and I have always gotten along really well, so I'm excited to work with him," she says. "Having someone you know whom you can bounce ideas off of is a big advantage."



Grandfather Edward Mulder in his dental office.

Jerry Jr. adds, "I hope I can pass on a fraction of what my Dad passed on to me. The best years of my professional life were working with him. I loved him. Allyson and I have the same personalities. We'll get along great."

The story isn't over yet. Jerry's son Brennan is considering engineering and, yes . . . perhaps dentistry.

Update: Allyson's dental life has expanded since the last time we talked. Though she still works part time with her Dad, she had an opportunity to buy a practice from a dentist who was retiring. She is enthusiastic about both opportunities. Her sister, Michelle, is in her third year of medical studies at Wayne State University School of Medicine. Brennan shifted his sights toward medicine and is a second-year pre-med student. ♦



Jerry Jr. (right) and the late Jerry Mulder hit the links.

About the Author

Dr. Franziska Schoenfeld, contributing editor, is a retired general dentist in Oakland County. She has written a series of profiles for the *MDA Journal* for the past 19 years. She currently serves as managing editor for the *Oakland County Dental Review*, and formerly served as editor of that publication.



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