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IN MEMORIAM

A tribute to Dr. Henry Greenwell: A southern gentleman and periodontal legend



1952–2023

On June 1, 2023, periodontology lost a man who helped shape what our specialty has become. A passing without fanfare, without accolades or entitlement, and without knowledge of his ailment by most in our community—and that is exactly the way he wanted it.

Henry Greenwell was born in Shelbyville, Kentucky. He began his college education at Tulane University, but soon his "old Kentucky home" came calling and he finished at the University of Louisville (UofL). It was at UofL where Henry earned his dental degree while also attending UofL's law school, obtaining both DMD and JD degrees. He was a veteran of the U.S. Air Force and practiced general dentistry for a short time. I remember Henry telling us how, in general practice, he was amazed with how periodontists treated patients and the level of health they could obtain. It was this infatuation with how periodontists achieved outcomes and a thirst for knowledge that led him to pursue specialty training at Case Western Reserve University (CWRU) under Dr. Nabil Bissada. After his training, he stayed on at CWRU as a faculty member where his microbiological clinical research dispelled the Keyes technique, returning science and biology to the forefront of non-surgical periodontal therapy in the mid-1980s. He left CWRU for his alma mater where he established the graduate periodontal residency program at UofL, serving as Director of Graduate Periodontics for nearly 30 years. During many of those years he served as both Program Director and Department Chair. In the 1990s and beyond, his research shifted to hard and soft tissue augmentation in guided bone regeneration, implant, and mucogingival therapies, always remaining clinical in nature. His intellect was incredible, and his knowledge of the literature could almost be considered ChatGPT-ish before there was such a thing as artificial intelligence. At his core, Henry was a clinician whose passion for excellence was distilled into each and every resident he shaped.

His legacy to periodontology and dental implant surgery is daunting and awesome. He was Board certified; a contributor to multiple American Academy of Periodontology (AAP) World Workshops; lead or co-author of more than 100 papers in the peer-reviewed literature; a lead expert and author on the new classification of periodontal and peri-implant diseases; a director and past President of the American Board of Periodontology (ABP); chairman and member of numerous AAP committees over three decades; a sought-after speaker at multiple AAP annual meetings; developer of the Periodontal Literature Reviews Database for resident training; the 2013 recipient of the AAP's Distinguished Service Award; and the 2021 William J. Gies Award recipient, to name a few. Ironically, Henry never wanted any recognition nor was he comfortable taking credit for all that he had contributed whether to the AAP, ABP, UofL, or the dental profession at large. Rather, his comfort, inspiration, passion, and pride came from seeing his students flourish with the tools that he had a role in developing within them. Every graduate student was his masterpiece and if that masterpiece was not yet ready for prime time, it would not be released. His legacies to the profession are

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numerous, but it is the impact on his residents and dental students whom he guided over three decades that will have the most lasting influence.

Henry is survived by his wife of more than 45 years, Dr. Ann Greenwell of Taylorsville, KY; his two daughters, Lucy Ann (husband Mark) and Dollie Jane (husband Devin); and his two grandchildren (Annabel Lucy and Henry Gunner).

The following are some personal tributes from two students of Dr. Greenwell's teaching and mentorship.

Dr. George A. Mandelaris:

My most vivid memories of Henry were his kind and mild manner which, as a resident, you could never mistake for being soft. His fatherly nature was incredibly comforting, but that sureness and gentle disposition quickly turned opposite when the door shut closed for weekly lit review and there was no place to run or hide if you did not know your article assignments inside and out. At the time, the workload he placed on us seemed onerous and downright impossible. There were no exceptions or excuses tolerated for anything short of giving 150%. His goal was to produce impeccably competent, Board-certified periodontal surgeons who understood the literature, used sound science with critical thinking skills to make decisions, and were able to obtain world-class outcomes for patient care. He had 36 months to yield his vision with varying levels of personality, ability, culture, and background in each resident … and the clock was ticking when you arrived in Louisville. In classic Greenwell fashion, he brought strong discipline and expected unwavering commitment to learning the fundamentals of specialty periodontics during our three years under his tutelage, yet he always found time and just the right moment to break for a Goose Island beer (his favorite) or a smooth Kentucky bourbon where he would express how proud he was of his residents and remind us of what our future would hold in practice. He would always reinforce to me that "results matter," but those results were not to decorate the UofL as a premier periodontal graduate program or gain him a higher rank within the school. Rather, he was dedicated to producing excellent periodontists who consistently represented the best of what this specialty is about. You knew he was invested in your development and success, and he demanded that you contribute the same effort, if not more. The expectations were clear and non-negotiable when you interviewed at his program: (1) clinical excellence in periodontics; (2) complete a master thesis and submit it for publication; (3) become Board certified. Henry would tactfully remind us in his own way that our training wasn't *really* complete without Board certification from the ABP and he would entice us with a coveted, engraved UofL ABP "Board Certified" mint julep cup that would be yours once you passed Parts 1 and 2. I look at my mint julep cup with more mature eyes today and am reminded of an incredibly generous man who was tough, disciplined, accomplished, intelligent, humble, generous, selfless, hardworking, and unequivocally committed. A spectacular human being whom I was fortunate to be trained by and learn from. For me in 1996, the teacher appeared when the student was ready. I am blessed that that teacher was Dr. Henry Greenwell. I will miss my Program Director and friend.

Dr. Hom-Lay Wang:

Dr. Henry Greenwell was an exceptional individual who left an indelible mark as an esteemed educator and leader in the field of periodontology. I am forever grateful for the impact he had on my life, particularly during my time at Case Western Reserve University from 1985 to 1988. As a young individual from the Far East with limited knowledge, Dr. Greenwell unhesitatingly extended his unwavering support in every aspect, profoundly shaping both my professional and personal growth. His guidance in periodontics, surgical skills, knowledge, and critical thinking not only benefited me at the time but also continue to resonate with me to this day. I owe a great debt of gratitude to Dr. Greenwell for his instrumental role in shaping the person I have become. On a personal level, Dr. Greenwell had a profound impact on my personal growth by equipping me with invaluable skills that have greatly enhanced my professional development. Through his guidance, I acquired expertise in various areas such as professional writing, computer proficiency, interpersonal communication, and essential knowledge tailored specifically for a foreign-trained dentist. One particular memory that remains etched in my mind is his assistance in navigating the process of early graduation, a procedure that would have otherwise required an additional year before obtaining my U.S. DDS degree. With great patience, he guided me through every step, generously offering his time and expertise. I spent numerous weekends at his home, where I not only learned computer skills and worked on my thesis but also had the privilege of getting to know his personal story. Without his unwavering support, I would not have achieved the level of success I enjoy today. Dr. Greenwell's dedication to the profession, coupled with his genuine care for his students, continues to inspire me as I strive to carry forward his legacy by educating the next generation of periodontists. Although our professional paths diverged after I graduated from CWRU, our friendship remained strong. The trust and bond we cultivated over the years were truly invaluable.

For more than three decades, I had the honor of knowing Dr. Greenwell as both a mentor and dear friend. His wisdom, guidance, and unwavering support played a pivotal role in shaping my own professional journey. His ability

JOURNAL OF Periodontology

to instill confidence and ignite a passion for periodontology in his students was truly remarkable, propelling us to pursue excellence in our work. Driven by his commitment to his patients and his dedication to advancing the field, he left an indelible mark on everything he did. The loss of this true giant in our profession weighs heavily upon us, and I will forever credit Dr. Greenwell for his instrumental role in helping me achieve my own success. It is because of him that I am able to savor the little accomplishments I have attained today.

Dr. Greenwell's legacy will endure in the hearts of those he touched, and his contributions to the field of periodontology will continue to inspire generations to come. May his memory be a guiding light in your lives, reminding you of his remarkable achievements and the love he shared for his profession, residents, colleagues, and family.

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