

A TRIBUTE

Dr. Brainerd F. Swain (1911-1999)

Barney Swain was the orthodontist's orthodontist. He devoted his life to us and our profession. For four years, following his completion of the graduate orthodontic course at Columbia in 1936, he taught orthodontics to undergraduates at the Columbia Dental School. I was one of those undergraduates, and I was privileged to begin a friendship with this great man that was to last nearly 60 years.

He was a model of integrity. I recall a time when he arrived at a meeting in New York without a slide he had promised to bring for one of the clinicians. Without a word, he left the meeting and drove back to his office in Morristown, New Jersey. Upon his return, he apologized for being late.

He was a model of humility. He and I happened to take our oral ABO exams on the same morning. Barney was the one who was nervous, despite being on at least the same level with his examiners.

His one major interest outside of orthodontics was railroading. At his home in Morristown, one far wall of an unusually large living room was dominated by the front end of a real locomotive that looked for all the world as if it had just crashed into the room. His study was the back end of a caboose. He appreciated no gift more than that of another book about trains,

although he was too much of a gentleman to tell you if he already owned it.

But his passion was how to improve orthodontic treatment, and how to convey that knowledge to generations of students. He was an outstanding clinical orthodontist. We always said that Barney could straighten teeth with a piece of baling wire. To him, the appliance was not the thing, even though he invented the Siamese bracket and became proficient with a number of appliances. To Barney, it was the understanding of what was wrong and how to improve or correct it. From the beginning, he held nothing back. He was a gifted teacher who elevated the careers of hundreds, perhaps thousands, of orthodontists around the world.

A good teacher teaches. A great teacher is also a tireless student. Barney took everyone's course, listened to every new idea, and distilled the sum of orthodontic knowledge into usable form for those who read his writings, attended his lectures, or were fortunate enough to be students at the various orthodontic departments in which he taught for most of the latter half of the 20th century.

Above all, he was a model human being. We are fortunate that the field he chose for his life's work was orthodontics.

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