
Introduction of Dr. David F. Striffler, Third Recipient of the John W. Knutson Distinguished Service Award in Dental Public Health

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It is my pleasure for a number of reasons to be here tonight. In the first place I had decided not to attend this meeting, but when Stan Heifetz called to ask me to make this presentation, it did not take me very long, as he will testify, to change my mind. The chance to honor someone I admire and to do it under these circumstances was just too much to resist. Another part of this invitation also seemed special to me—I was told that the award was a deep dark secret and I knew a week or so before the awardee did!

Secondly, I think I am breaking new ground since, unless I am mistaken, I am the first nondentist to make this presentation. This is both a constraint and an opportunity. The constraint is that I cannot talk intelligently about David Striffler's contribution to dental public health. I can, on the other hand, talk with considerable authority and assurance, if not necessarily intelligence, about his contribution to professional education in public health and to public health in general.

And, finally, my friendship with Johnny Knutson makes it a real delight to be here. He was in the final year of his doctorate program during my first year as a young instructor at the Johns Hopkins School of Hygiene and Public Health. We both learned much that year. I don't know how many of you knew John Knutson, but his ready smile, the quickness with which he could laugh at adversity or good fortune, and his ability to look at all sides of a problem were impressive. I got to know him even better later when we were both on the governing council of the American Public Health Association. There, one of the ways he distinguished himself, in my view, was in never defending turf. Johnny was interested in everyone's welfare. He demonstrated

something that has been brought home to me repeatedly over the years: that dentists, and I'm not laying it on, are among the broadest and most community-minded of any of the health professionals. John Knutson carried his strengths and his breadth of view through his years as chief dental officer of the Public Health Service and later through his career at UCLA after he retired from the PHS. John Knutson had an enormous influence on public health.

Just as John Knutson was a man who looked at dental public health in its broadest terms, Dave Striffler, whom I am proud to know more intimately, has approached public health on an equally comprehensive scale. I have to confess that I haven't the foggiest idea why Dr. Heifetz and his committee chose Dr. Striffler for this award, but I shall be so bold as to tell you why I think they should have chosen him.

In the first place, let me go back a bit to Dave's history. I won't bore you with a curriculum vitae because you can find that in biographical volumes, or I'll be happy to provide you with a mimeographed version, which will include his long list of publications. Dave is a true Michigander who was born and bred in Pontiac and attended the University of Michigan, where he spent his final undergraduate years and his early years in dental school during the trying war period when teachers and materials were in such short supply that more depended upon the student's ability and eagerness to learn than on the teacher.

It was at this time that Dave had to face another kind of obstacle. Many of you know that his studies were interrupted by a bout with tuberculosis. He reminded me again tonight that his roommate in the hospital was Dave Sencer, now health officer of New York City. Incidentally, both of them cured their tuberculosis, if you'll forgive me for imitating John Houseman, "in the old-fashioned way." There weren't any antibiotics then, they had to

fight the disease through and lick it by themselves. Oh, there were little things like a phrenic crush but I'm not sure how much good it did. A person who had to face up to tuberculosis in those days had some recompense in learning things that lasted the rest of his or her life. Don't get me wrong—I would not want to return to those days of therapeutic impotence. Those that did make it through, however, earned extra benefits for their toughness.

Following dental school, Dave did some private practice and then, after receiving his Master of Public Health degree from our school, became director of school health in Dearborn—note my specific words—director of school health, not director of dental health in schools. He had the whole responsibility, a combination I find quite logical.

At this point I must deviate to talk of another person who is not on this program but whose influence on it is very strong. During dental school, Dave had fallen, like so many others, under the spell of someone you all knew or know of—Kenneth A. Easlick. I came to know Ken Easlick quite well, in part because he was my host on behalf of the Dean's Search Committee in early 1960. I found Ken Easlick a delightful gentleman, and anyone could see why generations of people around the world thought so warmly of him. I promptly joined the legion of his admirers and later, as I visited various countries, benefited from the friendship. Ken Easlick and his university—Michigan—were known all over, in Europe, in Latin America, in the Far East, and any colleague of his was warmly welcomed. Everywhere there were public health dentists, they knew and, it is not too much to say, practically worshipped Ken Easlick. It was, of course, Ken who had led Dave to do his

MPH and to make public health his career. Thus, it was quite logical, after Dave had escaped to New Mexico for awhile, for him to agree promptly when Ken told him he ought to come back to Ann Arbor.

It was not too many months after I came to The University of Michigan that Ken informed me that he was facing retirement and that he had just the person to fill his shoes. Most of you probably know that university tradition forbids the person retiring to pick his or her successor. That kind of tradition never deterred Ken Easlick. When he knew he had a sound idea, he acted on it.

Obviously, Dave went through the university's procedures—the Academic Rank Committee, the Appointments Committee, the Executive Committee, and the Board of Regents—with flying colors, but Ken could have predicted all that and saved everyone a lot of trouble.

On arrival in Ann Arbor, Dave had more to do than he had bargained for because I had talked Ken into being the first chairman of a new department, established some months after I came. The Department of Health Development brought together several aspects of public health training primarily related to human development: maternal and child health, mental health, nutrition, health education, and dental health. Ken Easlick, I don't have to tell this audience, effectively welded these disparate elements into a cohesive partnership, but it meant that Dave had greater responsibility for the dental public health end. In fact, he discharged his academic responsibilities with such admirable efficiency that his promotion to full professor some years later sailed right through.

Let me go back a bit. Ken Easlick retired in 1973, and in doing so made a difference in my budget—I



Dr. Caswell Evans, Jr., Chair, Dental Health Section, APHA; Dr. David Ast, Knutson awardee, 1982; Dr. James Dunning, Knutson awardee, 1983; Dr. David Striffler, Knutson awardee, 1984; Dr. Myron Wegman, Introducer of Dr. Striffler; and Dr. Robert J. McCune, Johnson & Johnson Dental Products Company, sponsor of the award.

did not have to pay him anymore—but not in his work schedule. He came in every day, worked the same hours, and used up as much paper as ever, but he never interfered. Dave took over completely at that point and really tore into his task. He leaned on Ken for advice occasionally but always made his own decisions.

In another respect Dave followed Ken's footsteps because he later had responsibility for chairing a larger department. Dave is currently chairing a department called Community Health Programs and worries as much about the other units as he does about dental public health. He does this so well that I sometimes accuse him, jokingly, of leaning over backwards so that his own people suffer. He would not admit it and it's really not true! I tossed it out just to underline the scope of Dave's interests.

Over the years Dave has not only set high standards for himself but has communicated the concept of high standards to all who came in contact with him. Dave is strong-minded; I guess some people would call him headstrong. Some brave souls might even call him stubborn, but I hesitate to go that far, in public. In practical terms, however, this means that Dave Striffler simply will not compromise with quality. If a job is to be done, the job is to be done right. But no one is ever held to a higher standard than Dave would hold himself to.

Maintaining such standards was a key factor in helping Dave become a true teacher. He threw himself wholeheartedly into improving at teaching, writing, and editing. On that point, however, I'm sure there are lots of people in this room who would say that from Striffler's standpoint there is no difference between teaching and editing. That tough editing is an integral part of teaching is one of the things he learned from Ken Easlick, but Dave was an apt and dedicated pupil.

Perhaps one of the main reasons I am fond of Dave is that I admire people who love words and love to see them used properly. This indeed is not so unusual among public health people, and I can't resist telling you about one. When I saw Dave Ast of New York State, the first Knutson awardee, here tonight, I was reminded of a story about Edward S. Godfrey, the late great director of the New York State Health Department, one of the dominant figures in public health and president of the American Public Health Association in 1940. I never actually saw the famous Executive Order that Ted Godfrey sent to his staff, but many people have vouched for its one-sentence text: "In the NY State Health Department 'contact' will not be used as a transitive verb." You see that seeking semantic precision is not unique to Michigan.

There are many things I could tell you about Dave Striffler's editing. Most of you know already that he has personally contributed more to the financial welfare of companies manufacturing green pens than any single person in the history of mankind. I might add that, as a new computer buff, I

gave my machine the problem of trying to find out how many miles would be covered if all the green pens Dave Striffler had used up were laid end to end, but the computer broke down. It just couldn't solve the problem.

I don't want to gloss over the fact that there are many people who aren't entirely happy with Dave as an editor. They insist that he mistakenly equates a person's stylistic preferences with grammatical correctness and that, these critics say, is nothing more than the "Gospel according to St. Dave." To some extent I'm on their side, for I piously believe that Dave Striffler is not always right. I won't go into all his quirks but shall only mention that I do like my *technique* and prefer this *technique* to anyone else's *technic*.

The other day I went into his office to see what kind of books he was using as authority for his editorial criticism and found, to my dismay, that he did not have a copy of Fowler's *Modern English Usage*. In case you have any doubt, Fowler is my own authority.

To show you why and to offer you a bit of gratuitous advice, I'll quote Fowler on just one item, the split infinitive, something most of Dave's graduates know that he does not like. Listen to Fowler, verbatim:

The English speaking world may be divided into (1) those who neither know nor care what a split infinitive is; (2) those who do not know but care very much; (3) those who know and condemn; (4) those who know and approve; and (5) those who know and distinguish.

Those who neither know nor care are the vast majority and are a happy folk, to be envied by most of their minority classes. "To really understand" comes readier to their lips and pens than "really to understand"; they see no reason why they should not say it (small blame to them, seeing that reasons are not their critics' strong point) and they do say it, to the discomfort of some among us, but not to their own.

Fowler's comments go on for several pages but the only other point I'll note is that he describes class 2 as people who would "as soon be caught putting knives in their mouths as splitting infinitives." If you want to learn better English usage and have a laugh at the same time, Fowler is the book for you.

Let me conclude on a more serious note by saying that among the reasons I would have given David Striffler the John W. Knutson Award are things like the warmth of his personality, his generosity in spending time with students, his enormous devotion to students, and his ability, reported by so many, to raise Cain about what he considers inadequacies but to do it in a way that makes the student think for himself.

The job of the true teacher is, in my view, to establish a role model that helps others do better. The greatest glory of the teacher is for a student to go out and do better than the teacher has done, to stand on the teacher's shoulders, if you will, and see farther. That's the real delight, that's the real

pride of the teacher, and that's the sort of thing I think Dave has done superlatively. Just tonight, for example, I heard of how he went out to Aberdeen, South Dakota, to help one of his former students achieve approval of a residency in dental public health out in what some would call the boondocks, not your usual academic institution.

Today, Dave still gets an enormous number of telephone calls and letters from people all over the world because, when they need help and advice, it seems only natural to them to turn to Dr. Striffler. That must be a source of great satisfaction to him, as it is to the rest of us.

People have characterized Dave as having an iron hand in a velvet glove. In fact, it ought to be other way around, because Dave Striffler is basically a softie—everyone knows he's a soft touch. He is intensely loyal, stands up for people, and is always ready to help. The kinds of things he has accomplished bring credit to The University of Michigan School of Public Health, to the dental profession, to the Dental Health Section of APHA, to all of us here, and in the last analysis to Dave Striffler, himself.

I ask you to join me in saluting this year's John W. Knutson awardee, Dr. David Frank Striffler.

Response to Receiving the John W. Knutson Distinguished Service Award in Dental Public Health

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Thank you Dean Wegman, and thank you Dr. McCune, and a special thanks to the officers and members of the Dental Health Section of the American Public Health Association, including you Michigan alums. In preparing for this session, I first searched my memory and then old volumes of the *American Journal of Public Health* to help me remember just when it was I first became conscious, if you will, that there was an American Public Health Association and that there was a Dental Health Section. Oddly enough, my bound volumes of the *Journal*, my personal volumes, go back to 1954—exactly three decades. Prior to that, I can remember attending a meeting of the Michigan Public Health Association in Grand Rapids, Michigan, in 1952, when I also visited the water treatment plant there to see how this fluoridation business worked. At the same visit to Grand Rapids, I attended my first meeting of a group of antifluoridationists, which a local chiropractor had organized. I thought I had sneaked into the meeting unobtrusively and was surprised to feel a tap on my shoulder and turned around to see the waterworks engineer from Grand Rapids, with whom I had just visited that day. We were both there to find out what this new group of "antis" was all about.

My first American Public Health Association meeting was almost 30 years ago in Kansas City in 1955. To give you a notion of how long ago that

was, the best single room at the headquarters hotel, The Muehlebach, was \$13.00—you could get by for \$6.50 at the same hotel, but I couldn't afford to stay there because per diem in the state of New Mexico was \$7.00. I had hitchhiked a ride in from Santa Fe, New Mexico, with a health educator colleague from the state tuberculosis association. We had saved money by driving straight through, alternating driving. The outstanding memory of that meeting was the opportunity to hear Harry Truman give the keynote address at the Lasker Awards presentations in the Music Hall. ("Give-'em-hell Harry" by that time had retired to nearby Independence, Missouri.) It was a standing-room-only crowd.

I went to that APHA meeting, I suspect, simply because I had been invited to be a discussant at one of the sessions. Why I went certainly provides a hint to those of you trying to increase the membership in this section. I remember well having the good fortune of being invited to Phil Blackerby's hotel room—Phil then was the dental director of the W. K. Kellogg Foundation—to discuss a project in New Mexico I had written him about. Little did I know that Frederick S. McKay and John Knutson would be there in the same room sipping some Tennessee mash squeezings and branch water. I was truly impressed by Dr. McKay, a fine distinguished gentleman who just three years previously with Trendley Dean had been awarded the coveted