

It was an autumn day. First term of second year undergrad at the University of Detroit was underway. While having lunch with a friend Frank, he asked if I would like to accompany him on a personal tour of the Dental School Campus with his cousin Tom that Friday afternoon, followed by some adult beverages. Not having anything else scheduled for that day, and the allure of the beverages, I said "sure," having no idea of what was to come. Friday arrived, and we headed out to the then School of Dentistry down on Jefferson Avenue in Detroit.

I certainly was not impressed by the curb appeal of the facility, but what happened over the next couple of hours was truly transformational. Up until this time the biology major led pre med/pre dent program I was enrolled in was essentially leading me to a career in medicine. I had recently secured a coop job at Hutzel Hospital as a lab tech performing blood draws. Several weeks into that position, however, it was becoming apparent to me that the hospital environment was not one for which I cared. Perhaps this was in the back of my mind as the tour proceeded. Tom, a fourth year student, was terrific. We spent time in the pre-clinical labs and on the clinic floor, with him going over the basics of the dental program and what he did on a daily basis. As the afternoon went on, I literally had fireworks going off in my head. This, dentistry, was what I wanted to do! We wrapped up the tour and went for that beverage.

Over the next few weeks, my enthusiasm for my new found career path did not wane. I actively began focusing my energies on entering dental school, to the point where I decided to attempt early admission. At this particular time, there was no Seven Year Program, but as long as your core requirements, grade point average, DAT score, and other criterion aligned, you could apply and be considered for the University's dental program. As it turns out, the refocusing and hard work paid off. Without a bachelor's degree, I was accepted into the Class of 1986.

This was the second time the University of Detroit, today's Detroit Mercy, had extended me a fantastic opportunity. Senior year in high school, I had applied for and was fortunate to receive an Insignis Scholarship that covered my undergraduate tuition. While unable to use the remaining year of the scholarship toward dental school, the student loan program, University grant monies, and ongoing employment covered what was even then the high cost of a dental education. That investment by both the University and me, however, has more than paid in off in the education that the University of Detroit Mercy provided and the dental career it has allowed me to practice these past 35 years.

An appreciation for the opportunity that the University of Detroit Mercy afforded me starting over 40 years ago has led to a long term desire to "give back" to the school that is responsible for setting me up to be professionally successful. I can barely imagine working in any other field, and with my love of the dental profession and God's will, I plan on many more years of serving the needs of the patient community and our Alma Matter. I would like to encourage you to do the same.

John D. Dinka, D.D.S. '86

Alumni Board President