

MDA President's Award 2012

*Presented at the MDA House of Delegates meeting
on September 22, 2012*

Introduction by President Mike Zakula:

Each year the MDA President is afforded the opportunity to recognize an individual who has distinguished him or herself by their outstanding service to the MDA.

There are many very deserving individuals who have gone above and beyond the call of duty for their peers and their profession – so choosing the recipient of the President's Award can be extremely challenging and difficult.

But when an individual contributes to the MDA constantly for over 10 years the choice becomes quite easy.

I have had the pleasure of knowing this individual for over 39 years – and although his hair is a bit “thinner” and skin a bit more wrinkled he still has that bright twinkle in his eye and a kind and pleasant greeting for everyone he meets.

Dr. Jack Churchill, whose contribution to the Northwest Dentistry Journal over the course of his ten-year run as Chair of the MDA's Committee on Ethics, Constitution and Bylaws has been unique, instantly recognizable, and consistently connected to the issues in which his readers were engaged every day of their professional and personal lives.

Jack's personal writing in our journal touched each of us in a unique and wonderful way.

So who is this guy?

- *Jack is a storyteller. He loves people and always has passion for their stories.*
- *Jack was not a niche writer. People always “read him,” looked for him, turned to him, and remembered him...even when they may not have found the message comfortable. People talked to him and about him, continuing the dialogue the profession needed.*
- *Jack understood dentists; who they were, what they did, and the underlying “why” of choices they made and battles they fought. He always included himself in the fray.*
- *Jack was always engaged. Even as he was fearless in defining a challenge, he always moved to the positive and active. He always moved from theory to application, from philosophy to reality.*

- *Jack shared our journey on a sea of change even as he allowed his personal compass to offer thoughtful guidance. He did all this with a generosity of spirit that kept his readers looking for “what’s next” issue by issue – not only of the journal, but in their lives.*

One thing that we all know for sure is that Jack would never give up on any of us.

Jack Kennedy once stated, “Change is the Law of Life.” Well, the more things change the more we need people like Jack to get us to look at all sides of an issue and not be afraid to be decisive and move forward.

It is with great pride that I am able to award my friend and mentor, Dr. Jack Churchill, the 2012 President’s Award in recognition of his service to the profession of dentistry.

Acceptance speech by Dr. Jack Churchill:

Wow! What a thrill to receive this award.

Thank you everyone for this honor. It is humbling to be standing in front of all of you - you who not only do dentistry but live it and represent our profession so well.

Thank you.

You know, I’ve known Mike Zakula for a long time – since dormitory days at Pioneer Hall in the mid 1970’s. He hasn’t changed one bit - enthusiastic from sunrise to sunset. During a committee meeting earlier this year we were looking at his schedule. He had countless trips scheduled to Minneapolis from Hibbing and district meetings all over the state – unbelievable! He is definitely an ALL-IN guy.

Dentistry in Minnesota is undoubtedly better off today because of Mike. His leadership is inspirational and during these difficult times of transition at the MDA has been exemplary. He’s been an absolutely terrific president for the MDA this past year so I’d like to give Mike a personal round of applause. (Applause)

I’d like to thank Sue Miller, managing editor at Northwest Dentistry, for her honest appraisal of my articles and her perpetual encouragement. Sue has been a constant friend. She’s always been there when I needed her.

Thank you to the Publications Committee for your support all these past 10 years.

I’d like to give a shout out and thank you to staff at the MDA office for their graciousness, patience and of course....for what they do for all of us day in and day out.

Thank you to my readers for their feedback and nice comments. You know, it’s heartening to see how well-read Northwest Dentistry is.

Thank you to my wife Lori – love of my life, mother of my two sons, and resident computer expert. I probably should embarrass her and have her stand up. (Lori stands...applause) I'd be living out of a box if it wasn't for her.

As was said...I served 10 years as Chair of the Constitution, By-Laws, and Ethics Committee and 10 years writing a column in Northwest Dentistry entitled "*What's a Dentist to Do?*"

I enjoyed every moment of it. To be able to serve a profession I love and people I respect and admire is an absolute privilege. I was never much of a parliamentarian or committee director (Mike Kurkowski is taking over as Chair and is now the columnist for "*What's a Dentist to Do?*" and we all know how amazingly capable Mike is), but I think I do know how to write. Of course after 10 years of doing anything one should get good at it. Many of you may not be familiar with my column, but it was always written from the heart. I tried to get to the core of what it is to be a dentist. How we think. What we feel. What makes us tick so to speak. Of course, it is an ethics column and what drives ethics is perspective. So I tried to expand and broaden our perspective. I eliminated case studies. I asked my readers to take off their loops and look at the human heart, the human condition. For example, I asked my readers to think about the concept of perfection. We were taught in dental school that perfection is the Great Motivator helping us to strive for excellence. But as we gained practice experience, we found perfection lurking around every corner as the Great Tormentor sometimes leaving us broken and feeling insufficient when we inevitably fell short. But I wrote how it's okay to be less than what we aspire to. There is no shame in that as long as we get up after each fall and try harder. I remember conversations with Pat Foy several months ago and how he said dentistry grants us mulligans. That is, if something doesn't work out, we can re-do it. A healthy outlook.

I wrote about foolish pride, negativity, the art of discernment, choosing joy in dentistry, the power of presence, shame, and fighting the good fight. I wrote of a friend who committed suicide and one who inspired us. Dentistry is full of things to write about. There is no shortage of subject matter.

As many of you may have noticed, one common thread in my column was my faith. I believe our Creator, however you may see Him, loves us and accepts us as we are. In that simple fact there is great hope. I've tried to sprinkle that message throughout my articles because I believe if we are to expand our scope, if we are to broaden our view, we must include God.

You know, the great cathedrals of Europe were built by men who were largely unknown. They labored day after day offering personal sacrifice, building something they would

probably never see finished. Their names would never be on the building they built. They took no credit. They are now in essence invisible, but their work remains.

There is one story of a builder carving a bird inside a beam that would be covered by a roof. Someone asked him, "Why do you spend so much time on something no one will ever see?"

He replied, "I do it because God sees it."

We too often work invisibly at great sacrifice – arriving early before staff to prepare for a day's work, spending extra time on a tooth preparation that we know won't really pay us any more, discounting someone's fee without anyone noticing, attending alone countless CE courses, giving away our time and services to people in need, volunteering at Give Kids a Smile, Project Homeless Connect or Mission of Mercy. We do these things not because we want to be seen, but because God sees everything.

When we do these things, God says, "I see you. You are not invisible to me. No sacrifice is too small for me to notice. I see what you did for that patient. I see you coming early and staying late. I see you at Mankato at Mission of Mercy. I see your disappointments, your struggles, your failures. I see your hard work. I see your victories.

This invisibility may sometimes seem unfair, even like an affliction, but it's not. It is a cure for the disease of our self-centeredness, an antidote to our own pride.

I think it's okay people don't see. I think it's okay that they don't know. Because really, if we broaden our perspective, if we truly understand, we don't do these things for our patients. We do them for Him.

Just remember...you, in your own way, are building a great cathedral.

So thank you again for acknowledging my work and for this kind award.

** Great Cathedrals concept taken from Nicole Johnson's "The Invisible Woman" on Youtube*