

GUMLINE

75th Anniversary Edition

THE WESTERN SOCIETY OF PERIODONTOLOGY



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A LEGACY OF FRIENDSHIP, SERVICE, & SCIENTIFIC INTEGRITY

Dr. Gerald Drury & The Enduring Mission of the Western Society of Periodontology

*Celebrating 75 Years of WSP
Historical Reflections—Part One*

Nearly Five Decades of Friendship & Professional Respect

As the Western Society of Periodontology (WSP) approaches its 75th anniversary in 2027, we have an extraordinary opportunity to reflect not only upon the accomplishments of our organization, but also upon the individuals whose dedication and vision have helped shape its history. During nearly five decades in periodontology, I have had the privilege of meeting and working alongside some remarkable individuals. Many have distinguished themselves through scientific contributions, clinical accomplishments, academic leadership, and service to our profession. A smaller number have influenced my professional life in ways that extend well beyond their accomplishments. Gerald “Jerry” Drury is one of those individuals.

I have known Jerry for nearly 50 years. During that time, our professional relationship developed into an enduring friendship built upon mutual respect, shared experiences, and a common belief in the importance of periodontal education.

What has always impressed me about Jerry is not simply what he has accomplished, but how he has approached his responsibilities. I have never known him to seek the spotlight or pursue recognition for his contributions. Instead, I have watched him quietly and consistently devote his time, knowledge, and energy to making our profession better. Year after year, meeting after meeting, and journal after journal, Jerry has remained committed to WSP.

There is something particularly meaningful about observing a colleague for nearly half a century. You see how individuals respond to change, how they treat their colleagues, and whether their commitment to service endures after the initial enthusiasm has passed. In Jerry’s case, that commitment has been remarkably consistent.

As I began planning a series of historical interviews commemorating WSP’s 75th anniversary, I knew immediately whom I wanted to interview first. Not simply because Jerry has served as editor of *Periodontal Abstracts* for 27 years, but because I believe his professional life embodies much of what our society was originally established to accomplish.

On October 7, 2026, Jerry and I spent nearly an hour reflecting upon our professional experiences, the individuals who shaped WSP, and the challenges and opportunities facing the next generation of periodontists. What began as an interview about organizational history became something considerably more meaningful: a conversation between two longtime friends about the profession to which we have devoted our lives.



The Early Years: From Florida to California

Jerry’s professional journey included several years of practicing general dentistry in Florida. Following a residency at a state hospital, he spent four years practicing in Fort Myers Beach. Eventually, his desire to teach and pursue additional professional challenges led him to Louisiana State University, where he completed his specialty training in periodontics in 1979. After graduation, Jerry returned briefly to Florida before making the decision to move west.

He ultimately joined the faculty at the University of Southern California, where he encountered several individuals who would influence his involvement with WSP. Among them were Drs. Robert Reeves, Gordon Pattison, and Roger Stambaugh. These were not simply distinguished academicians and clinicians. They were individuals who believed strongly in organized periodontology and the importance of sharing knowledge with the broader dental profession.

Jerry recalled that his exposure to these leaders gradually introduced him to WSP. He joined the organization around 1980, initially as a relatively inactive member. At the time, he could not have imagined that his association with WSP would develop into a commitment spanning more than four decades. This says something important about professional organizations: involvement often begins with new relationships with colleagues. A respected mentor, an encouraging fellow member, or an invitation to contribute can initiate a lifetime of service.

The Early WSP: Education, Fellowship, and a Shared Purpose

Founded in 1952, the Western Society of Periodontology emerged during an era when opportunities for advanced periodontal education were far more limited than they are today. Jerry recalled hearing about the contributions of early leaders, including Drs. Arnold Ariaudo and Robert Reeves, who helped establish and develop the organization. Although Jerry did not directly experience the first quarter century of WSP, he appreciated their mission of educating the dental community about the discipline of periodontology.

WSP periodontists sought to improve the understanding of periodontal disease among general dentists, dental hygienists, and other dental professionals. The objective was not merely to demonstrate surgical procedures, but to explain the biological principles, diagnostic considerations, and clinical value of periodontal treatment.

Jerry remembers a time when WSP meetings were considerably smaller and more intimate than many contemporary scientific conferences. A meeting might feature a single lecturer presenting for several hours, allowing attendees to explore a subject in considerable depth. Meetings were often held in memorable locations, including resorts and destinations associated with skiing, fishing, and other recreational activities. There was ample opportunity for professional discussion of the presentations, informal conversation, and the development of friendships which could last for decades.

Jerry also recalled hearing that WSP membership had once exceeded 1,000 individuals, reflecting the society’s broad geographic reach and influence. That historical figure deserves further investigation as we assemble a more complete account of WSP’s early years.

Twenty-Seven Years at the Helm of Periodontal Abstracts

Perhaps Jerry’s most enduring contribution to WSP has been his extraordinary stewardship of Periodontal Abstracts, the society’s award-winning, internationally recognized scientific journal. His involvement began when Dr. Thomas Sims invited him to assist in gathering and reviewing scientific literature. In 1999 Dr. Richard Nagy approached Jerry asking him to take over his position of journal editor, because he recognized the difficulty of simultaneously fulfilling his other leadership responsibilities and simultaneously overseeing the journal. Jerry accepted the invitation, became a certified dental editor, and embarked upon another opportunity to contribute to the profession—one that has continued for 27 years.

During that period Jerry became a certified dental editor and worked to preserve the scientific character of what has become an award-winning publication that occupies a distinctive place in scientific literature. *Periodontal Abstracts* provides summaries of current scientific research while also publishing articles, clinical discussions, and editorials. For Jerry, the journal has never been merely a collection of scientific summaries. It has been a vehicle for critical thinking, professional dialogue, and a unique source for members to apply scientific evidence to patient care.

The Work Behind Every Issue

Today, electronic databases and online access to scientific journals have made literature searches significantly easier. But Jerry remembers a very different process. During the earlier years of his editorship, abstracts submitted by periodontal residents frequently required extensive review and correction. When questions arose concerning methodology, results, or conclusions, he often went directly to the USC library to locate the original articles.

He personally checked the material, corrected inaccuracies, and worked with proofreaders and publishing personnel to prepare each issue. This was demanding, detailed work. It required considerable time, a thorough understanding of scientific literature, and the willingness to perform tasks that often go unnoticed by readers.

Over time, the journal developed a network of contributors that included periodontal residents and faculty associated with USC, LSU, and the West Los Angeles Veterans Affairs Hospital periodontal training programs. At the VA, reviewing and abstracting current literature and contributing abstracts to the journal was already in place. He knew LSU residents were abstracting current periodontal literature, so he brought them on board as contributors as well. Finally, since he was director of the current literature course at USC, he incorporated abstract preparation into the residents’ educational responsibilities.

The result was a win-win situation. Residents learned to critically evaluate research, while WSP members received concise summaries of contemporary scientific findings. This arrangement represented an important connection between graduate periodontal education and organized periodontology. It also reflected Jerry’s belief that education, research, and clinical practice should reinforce one another.

Fifty Years and Fifty Pearls: Translating Science Into Clinical Wisdom

During our conversation, I reminded Jerry of one of his most memorable editorials. Coinciding with WSP’s 50th anniversary, he published an article entitled “50 Years and 50 Pearls”. I told him that it remains one of the finest reviews I have encountered and that many of its lessons have stayed with me over the years. Jerry explained that the article grew out of his experience reviewing scientific literature and his desire to make important research findings accessible to practicing clinicians. Rather than producing an exhaustive review, he selected meaningful observations and distilled them into concise clinical lessons. It was an excellent example of translating scientific knowledge into practical wisdom.

With our 75th anniversary approaching, I suggested that perhaps the time had come for another collection of pearls. Jerry seemed intrigued. He could include developments and clinical lessons of the past quarter-century. The result could be “75 Years and 75 Pearls”. What better way to connect WSP’s history with the future of periodontal practice? I hope Jerry will give this idea serious consideration.

A Shared Philosophy: Education Before Promotion

Over the nearly five decades that Jerry and I have known one another, we have had countless conversations about periodontology, our professional responsibilities, and the purpose of the Western Society of Periodontology. Two concerns repeatedly came up.

The first concern was the fundamental reason WSP was established. Both Jerry and I have long believed that one of our society’s greatest responsibilities is to provide the periodontal education that general dentists and dental hygienists may not have received sufficient depth during their formal training. This additional education should contribute to understanding the requirements for successfully administering and monitoring periodontal therapy. Jerry and I agree our responsibility is not simply to demonstrate how to perform a particular procedure. It is to explain why periodontal disease develops, how it affects the long-term prognosis of the dentition, when treatment is indicated, and how periodontists, general dentists, and dental hygienists can work together to achieve better outcomes for patients.

The second concern has been equally important to both of us: the scientific integrity of the education we provide. Jerry and I have discussed this issue many times over the years. We believe that when dental professionals attend a WSP educational program, they should have confidence that the information presented is scientifically objective, evidence-based, and free from inappropriate commercial influence. They should come away with a better understanding of periodontal science—not simply greater familiarity with a manufacturer’s product or a commercially promoted procedure. There is an important distinction between educating clinicians about a treatment modality and promoting that modality because of a financial relationship.

This does not mean that manufacturers and industry have no place in advancing periodontal care. They have contributed enormously to the development of new materials, instruments, and technologies. Commercial support, however, should never determine the scientific conclusions presented to our members. The importance of preserving scientific integrity and protecting periodontal education from inappropriate commercial influence has been a recurring theme in my conversations with Jerry for decades. Innovation is essential, but must be coupled with scientific scrutiny.

They also help explain why I have always held him in such high regards. Our friendship has been strengthened not only by the years we have known one another, but by the professional values we share. As we approach WSP’s 75th anniversary, I believe these principles deserve renewed attention. They represent more than an appreciation of our history. They should help define our future.

Scientific Integrity: The Responsibility to Question

One of the most interesting aspects of our discussion concerned Jerry’s philosophy of scientific publishing. He recalled that Periodontal Abstracts provided opportunities for thoughtful, sometimes provocative commentary on developments within dentistry. Among the subjects addressed were periodontal lasers, nonsurgical treatment approaches, and the relationship between scientific evidence and commercial claims. He valued the journal’s ability to question prevailing assumptions and challenge claims that were not adequately supported by research. This willingness to examine controversial subjects is particularly important in a profession where new technologies, materials, and treatment techniques are introduced with increasing frequency.

Jerry’s editorial philosophy has consistently emphasized the distinction between what is possible, what is popular, and what has been demonstrated to benefit patients. He also discussed the challenge of maintaining the journal’s scientific independence while addressing the financial realities of publication. Originally, the journal did not accept advertising. Eventually, financial considerations made some advertising necessary. Jerry approached that transition cautiously, recognizing the importance of preventing commercial interests from compromising scientific credibility.

Our conversation also addressed the changing economics of publishing and the movement toward digital distribution. Although Jerry recognizes the convenience and potential cost savings of electronic publication, he remains an advocate for preserving access to printed scientific journals. His concern is not simply nostalgia. He worries that important scientific material may be overlooked amid the enormous volume of electronic information competing for our attention. It is a worthwhile observation as professional organizations consider how best to communicate with their members.

Three Professional Roles, One Common Purpose

When I asked Jerry what had motivated him to devote so much time to WSP and the journal, his response was particularly revealing.

He described the relationship among three major components of his professional life: teaching, searching out and evaluating scientific evidence, and private practice. Each strengthened the others.

His responsibility for teaching current periodontal literature required him to remain familiar with emerging research, his editorial work provided another opportunity to critically evaluate those scientific findings and his private practice allowed him to apply that knowledge to the treatment of patients. He explained that when challenging clinical situations arose, he could draw upon the literature to support his treatment recommendations and communicate more effectively with patients. He regarded these activities not as competing obligations but as complementary responsibilities.

I found this particularly meaningful. Too often, we separate academic dentistry from private practice, as though they represent fundamentally different professional pursuits. Jerry’s career illustrates how years of clinical experience, combined with reading, evaluating, and teaching scientific literature, can strengthen clinical judgment. When discussing his professional life, Jerry repeatedly returned to the satisfaction he derived from learning, teaching, and caring for patients. Those activities, rather than titles or recognition, seemed to define his professional identity.



Dr. Drury accepts an award from the International College of Dentists recognizing his work as editor of *Periodontal Abstracts*—one of three such honors he has received for the journal.

The Measure of a Colleague

One of the privileges of spending an entire professional career in the same specialty is the opportunity to observe the character of colleagues over time. I have seen Jerry in many different professional settings over the years. Whether participating in a WSP meeting, discussing the scientific literature, or sharing his thoughts about the direction of our specialty, he has consistently demonstrated the same qualities: intellectual curiosity, professional integrity, and a willingness to contribute. What I admire most is that his dedication has never appeared conditional upon holding an office or receiving recognition.



As anyone who has served in a professional organization understands, there is an enormous amount of work that takes place behind the scenes. It is not glamorous. It rarely attracts attention. Yet without individuals willing to perform that work, organizations cannot fulfill their missions. Jerry has been one of those individuals. The true measure of leadership is not simply what an individual accomplishes during a term of office, but the contributions they continue to make long after that term has ended. By that measure, Jerry's contributions are extraordinary. Perhaps that is one of the reasons our friendship has endured for so many years. We share a fundamental belief that the privilege of belonging to a profession carries with it a responsibility to contribute to its future.

Rediscovering WSP's Original Mission

Of all the subjects we discussed, one stood out as particularly important.

I asked Jerry to reflect upon the moments in WSP's history that best illustrated the organization's value to periodontists and the broader dental community. His response was thoughtful, candid, and, in my opinion, deserving serious consideration by our current and future leadership.

Jerry believes that WSP's greatest contribution has always been in-depth education and not simply teaching dentists and hygienists techniques to perform periodontal procedures. What is important is helping dental professionals understand the value or lack of value of these procedures in promoting long-term periodontal health. When the need arises, dental professionals and their patients can benefit greatly from collaboration with periodontists.

He recalled a period when WSP began offering educational programs that included teaching general dentists simply "how to" perform certain periodontal surgical procedures. In some instances, periodontists visited general dental practices to demonstrate procedures such as free gingival grafts. Although these programs were undoubtedly developed with educational intentions, Jerry questioned whether they were consistent with society's original purpose.

He believed that emphasizing learning surgical techniques alone risked obscuring the more important educational objectives: understanding periodontal disease, recognizing the indications and contraindications for such treatments, and appreciating the complexity of clinical decision-making. He also recalled that some periodontists became disenchanted with this direction and withdrew their involvement with WSP.

In Jerry's view, their concerns were not necessarily just about professional competition. Rather, they were concerned that complex procedures and treatment decisions might appear deceptively simple when presented primarily as techniques, which could translate into inappropriate treatment. His broader message was that periodontal education should emphasize the relationship between biological understanding, proper diagnosis and treatment planning, and long-term patient outcomes.

He believes that WSP has made progress in returning to a more collaborative educational model, bringing periodontists, restorative dentists, and dental hygienists together. But he also believes there is more work to be done. I continue to believe that.

Are we remaining faithful to the educational mission that inspired our founders, while adopting that mission to the needs of contemporary dentistry? This is not simply a historical question. It is a question about our future. Jerry's reflections suggest that collaborative periodontal education is not a departure from our heritage. It is, in many respects, a return to it.

Saving Natural Teeth: A Message for the Next Generation

As our conversation progressed, I asked Jerry what he most wanted younger periodontists to understand about WSP and their responsibilities to the profession. His answer moved beyond organizational history and addressed one of the most consequential issues facing contemporary periodontology: the preservation of natural teeth.

Jerry expressed concern that the availability and success of dental implant therapy may sometimes encourage clinicians to recommend extraction before fully considering the potential for successful periodontal treatment. He emphasized that appropriately selected teeth with significant periodontal involvement can often be maintained through effective treatment and long-term supportive care.

Of course, dental implants have transformed restorative dentistry and remain an invaluable treatment option. Neither Jerry nor I would suggest otherwise. However, the availability of implant therapy should not diminish our commitment to evaluating whether natural teeth can be predictably maintained. Jerry stressed the importance of communicating this message to referring general dentists and dental hygienists. That communication must be respectful, evidence-based, and centered on the patient's long-term interests.

He also reminded us that periodontal disease is a chronic condition requiring long-term management. Treatment decisions should therefore consider not merely the immediate clinical situation, but the patient's anticipated needs over many years. Implants, too, require ongoing maintenance and are susceptible to biological and technical complications. The goal should never be to preserve every tooth regardless of prognosis, nor to replace compromised teeth simply because implants are available. Rather, our responsibility is to make informed, individualized decisions based upon the available evidence, clinical experience, and patient preferences.

He feels there is a lack of understanding and confidence as to what evidence-based periodontal and peri-implant care can do to improve the prognosis for retaining natural teeth and treating ailing implants. Jerry believes that younger periodontists must have confidence in their specialty training and in the scientific literature supporting periodontal therapy. They must also be willing to communicate that knowledge effectively to their restorative colleagues.

I found this portion of our conversation especially meaningful because it reflects a philosophy that has guided much of my own clinical career. Our profession possesses extraordinary capabilities for treating periodontal disease and maintaining natural dentitions. We should never lose sight of those capabilities.

The successful preservation of a natural tooth can be every bit as significant an accomplishment as the successful placement of a dental implant. That principle deserves to remain central to periodontal education.

Remembering Those Who Built the Society

Another important objective of this interview was to identify individuals whose contributions should be documented as part of our 75th-anniversary celebration.

Jerry encouraged me to interview former WSP presidents and board members. His reasoning was straightforward. Those individuals participated directly in the organization's decisions, educational programs, financial challenges, and evolving priorities.

Their recollections could help us better understand how WSP responded to changing circumstances over the decades. Among the individuals discussed were Drs. Roger Stambaugh, Gordon Pattison, John Sottosanti, Paulo Camargo, Philip Melnick, and Richard Nagy. There are many others who have not only served WSP but also contributed to advancing our profession nationally and internationally. Jerry also reflected upon the contributions of several former WSP officers who are no longer with us.

Our conversation reminded me of the remarkable individuals I have encountered throughout my own involvement with WSP. I recalled early meetings, including one at the Hotel del Coronado, where a small number of speakers explored clinical subjects in considerable depth.

I also recall my own early professional experiences with Dr. Robert L. "Bob" Reeves, who served as Jerry's department chair at USC. Bob played an important role in organized periodontology, serving as President of the Western Society of Periodontology in 1955 and President of the American Academy of Periodontology in 1981. He also served as a Director of the American Board of Periodontology from 1966 to 1972, including service as its Secretary-Treasurer. As a young periodontist preparing for board certification, I remember being instructed by my mentor, Dr. Timothy O'Leary, to personally deliver my completed cases to Dr. Reeves rather than mailing them. That experience remains vivid nearly half a century later.

Such memories may seem like small details, but collectively they tell us something important about the professional culture in which our specialty developed. They also remind us of the importance of mentoring younger colleagues and preserving a sense of continuity between generations.

I hope that this interview series will preserve many of those recollections before they are lost. I would also encourage WSP members who possess historical photographs, meeting programs, correspondence, or other memorabilia to consider sharing them with the society. Our history exists not only in official records but also in the personal collections and memories of our members.

Looking Toward the Next 25 Years

The Western Society of Periodontology has experienced enormous changes since its establishment in 1952. Our understanding of periodontal disease has expanded dramatically. Diagnostic methods, regenerative procedures, implant therapy, and supportive periodontal care have advanced in ways that our founders could scarcely have imagined. The delivery of continuing education has also changed. We now have immediate access to scientific publications, online lectures, digital conferences, and educational resources from around the world.

Yet despite these advances, the fundamental need that inspired WSP's creation remains. Dental professionals must understand the importance of periodontal health and its relationship to comprehensive patient care.

General dentists, dental hygienists, and periodontists must communicate effectively, respect one another's expertise, and recognize the value of working together in the best interests of their patients.

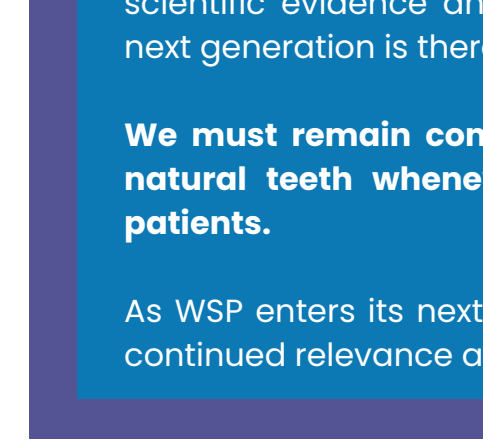
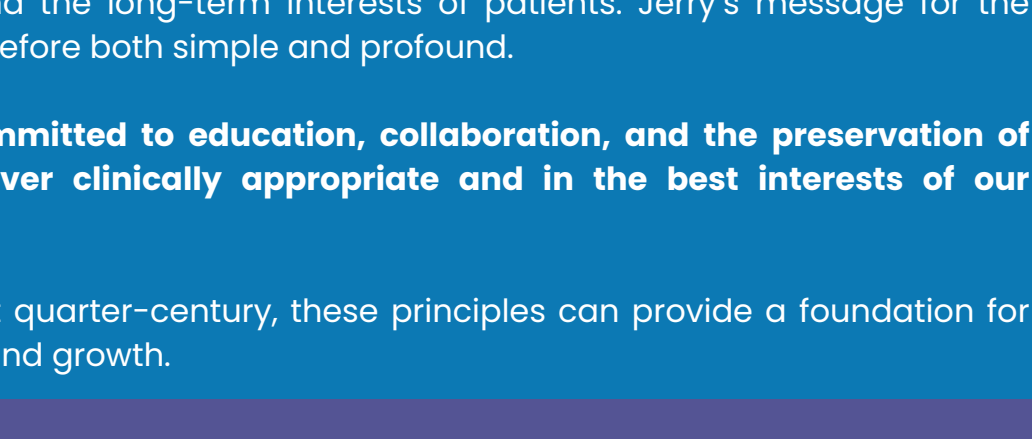
And perhaps there is no better organization than the Western Society of Periodontology to bring these three essential members of the dental team together. WSP provides a unique forum where general dentists, dental hygienists, and periodontists can come to the same table—not only to learn from one another, but to establish professional relationships built upon mutual trust, respect, and a shared commitment to patient care.

These relationships can last an entire professional lifetime, and ultimately, it is the patient who benefits most.

This is one of WSP's greatest strengths, and it is a responsibility we must continue to embrace as we look toward the future. Treatment decisions must remain grounded in scientific evidence and the long-term interests of patients. Jerry's message for the next generation is therefore both simple and profound.

We must remain committed to education, collaboration, and the preservation of natural teeth whenever clinically appropriate and in the best interests of our patients.

As WSP enters its next quarter-century, these principles can provide a foundation for continued relevance and growth.



A Friendship That Has Spanned Nearly Half a Century

As our interview approached its conclusion, I realized that we had spent nearly an hour doing something that Jerry and I have enjoyed for decades: talking about periodontology, recalling the people who influenced our careers, and considering what the future might hold for our profession.

We remembered colleagues who are no longer with us, meetings that brought us together, and experiences that helped shape our professional lives. There was laughter, nostalgia, and an unmistakable appreciation for the opportunities our profession has provided. But there was also something deeper. After nearly 50 years of knowing Jerry, I found myself appreciating his contributions even more than I had before our conversation.

I have always admired his commitment to WSP. What our interview reinforced was the remarkable consistency of that commitment and the genuine satisfaction he derives from serving others. Jerry never needed a title to make a difference. He has never needed an audience to demonstrate leadership. And he has never needed recognition to justify his willingness to serve. Those qualities are not easily taught. They are developed over a lifetime.

As we approach WSP’s 75th anniversary, I hope our members will recognize that the history of this organization is not simply a chronology of meetings, officers, and scientific programs. It is the collective story of individuals who believed that by sharing knowledge, supporting colleagues, and advancing periodontal education, they could improve the lives of patients.

Jerry Drury is an important part of that story. On a personal level, I am grateful not only for Jerry’s many contributions to our society but also for the friendship we have shared for nearly half a century. A long professional career brings many rewards, including scientific knowledge, clinical experience, and opportunities to serve our profession. Yet, as I reflect on nearly five decades in periodontology, I have come to appreciate that among the greatest rewards are the enduring friendships we develop along the way.

Jerry, thank you for nearly 50 years of friendship, for your unwavering dedication to the Western Society of Periodontology, and for reminding us through your example that meaningful service is one of the highest expressions of professional leadership. It has been a privilege to call you both a colleague and a friend. And I can think of no better individual with whom to begin our celebration of 75 years of the Western Society of Periodontology.

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Editor, *The Gum Line* – Western Society of Periodontology



Editor’s Note: This article is the first in a planned series of historical reflections commemorating the Western Society of Periodontology’s 75th anniversary in 2027. Future installments will feature conversations with past presidents, longtime members, and other individuals whose contributions have helped shape WSP. Members are encouraged to share historical photographs, documents, and suggestions for future interviews.



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