

Alton Moore

The Right Man in the Right Place at the Right Time

By John Moore

The University of Washington Orthodontic Program has been universally recognized as one of the best in the world for the last 65 years. This success can be attributed to the hard work and dedication of a great many individuals that include faculty, staff and students. But it all started with one man, Alton W. Moore, the first chairman of the department. Looking back on this early history, it is quite clear that Alton Moore had a profound effect on the UW Orthodontic Department and the profession of orthodontics for that matter. Imagine though how different things may have been had Alton Moore not come to Seattle to become the first chairman of the Orthodontic Department. As his son, I think I am in an especially unique position to relate a serendipitous history of Al Moore's entry into the profession and how the UW Program flourished using the presumption that he was the right man in the right place at the right time. Those of you who knew him remember that he was a supreme storyteller. His ability to recall historical detail and tie it into his close personal associations with the great names in orthodontics was uncanny. It was always insightful and instructive and it was the reason Vince Kokich thought that Al Moore's seminars were some of the most interesting he had ever attended. It made the history of orthodontics a living experience.

Al Moore was in the right place at several critical junctures in his life. His connection with Alan Brodie was paramount. Alan Brodie was the most influential and important person in orthodontics during the 30's and 40's. A tremendous number of graduates from his program went on to chair departments all around the country and the world. One of them was Al Moore, who came into orthodontics partly by chance. It was 1943 and WWII was raging, but due to a childhood illness that left him deaf in one ear, he was declared exempt from military service. This provided a great opportunity for him to further his career in academics and higher education. He knew very little about orthodontics, but he did have a keen interest in occlusion, which was then thought to be the etiology of periodontal disease. So he was interviewing in Chicago for enrollment in the graduate periodontics program at the University of Illinois. But because his main interest was occlusion, he was told that he might want to consider orthodontics instead of periodontics. So he was sent upstairs to talk to Allan Brodie. That was all it took. Dr. Moore entered the orthodontic program the following year, graduated in 1945 and remained on the faculty for 3 more years while simultaneously earning a Master of Science degree.

The 4 years that Al Moore spent at the University of Illinois were intensely formative. He had many mentors. Dr. Brodie's influence was significant of course. My dad would say, "Dr. Brodie put the fear of God in you, similar to the effect that Angle must have had". Underneath his gruff exterior though, my dad said he was really very compassionate and that he was like the father that he never had growing up. However, there were two individuals whom my father considered most influential in his early training, so much so that I was named after them. They were John Thompson and William Downs, both graduates of Brodie's program and both revered for their contributions to orthodontic research and education. Jack had become the chairman of Northwestern's Orthodontic program. My father worked part time in Jack's office; they guest lectured in each other's program and became very close friends. In a way, Jack may have had the most significant influence on my father's future and mine for that matter, because Jack and his wife Emily arranged the meeting between my father and mother in 1944.

And then there was Bill Downs. He had become the principle faculty member after Brodie became dean and was responsible for the resident's clinical training. Very critical to Moore's future was his close contact with Downs while he developed his cephalometric analysis, the classic "Down's Analysis". Cephalometrics was only first introduced in 1931 by Holly Broadbent and until 1950 was used only by research institutions and a few universities. And now Downs was providing the first practical way to assess a headfilm and apply it as a diagnostic tool in clinical treatment. So cephalometrics was a very important part of Moore's education at a time when very few orthodontic programs were utilizing it and even fewer orthodontists understood it. Moore was on the cutting edge of this, even helping to find "normal subjects" for the study.

The next critical juncture was in 1947 when Al Moore was invited to speak at the National Angle Society Meeting in Santa Barbara. Bill Downs gave his first formal presentation of the "Down's Analysis" and Moore spoke on class II treatment. Sitting in the audience were five, very impressed Seattle orthodontists who spoke with Moore afterward. This led to an interview and an offer to become the chairman of the Orthodontic Department at the newly created University of Washington School of Dentistry. Moore accepted the offer and moved the growing family to Seattle in August of 1948. And so began the next chapter in his career.

Historically, this had to have been the most exciting time in the specialty of orthodontics. There were only 1500 orthodontic specialists and only 18 university orthodontic programs in the United States. Within a few years the numbers would escalate along with the post war baby boom and the tremendous economic surge that the country was experiencing. The public's interest in orthodontics was expanding, as was the interest of graduating dentists who wanted to become orthodontists. It was the beginning of what would be known as the "Golden Age of Orthodontics" that lasted into the 70's.

The opportunity presented was tremendous. The dental school was brand new and

the facilities were state of the art. Here was a blank slate with no histories. You could hire your own faculty and staff, you could design your own curriculum and you had the “cream of the crop” of candidates applying to the program. You also had the stimulating influence of fellow faculty from all the different dental specialties. They had so much in common having endured the depression and the Second World War and were now eager to get started with their lives and careers. It seems they were all young (early to mid 30's), they all had young families, and they all lived the first year in university-subsidized family housing that they called the “fertile valley”. My personal recollection was that they became very close friends and got along extremely well. They worked hard, played hard and were very proud of what they were accomplishing. There was a common goal and it quickly put the UW Dental School on the map.

Another very important part of the success of the department was the addition of Dick Riedel to the faculty in 1949. Jack Thompson was once again involved. Dick had just finished his training under Thompson and came highly recommended but had intentions of practicing in California. He accepted the position with the stipulation that it would be for no more than one year. Fortunately for everyone involved, Dick never made it to California. He and my father became best friends. Their inter-personal chemistry and a common interest in cephalometrics were just what the developing program needed to make a name for itself. Dick had recently completed a master thesis, which introduced one of the most widely accepted diagnostic cephalometric measurements, the ANB angle. Combined with Moore's training and close association with the “Downs Analysis”, this gave them the credibility and experience to offer the first ever course on cephalometrics for the practitioner. The demand was tremendous and it was very well received. Orthodontists from all over the nation attended including Cecile Steiner and Wendell Wylie who each later developed their own analyses. The course ran for three years from 1949 to 1951.

Also helping to provide recognition for this fledgling program was the July 1950 issue of *The Angle Orthodontist*, which recognized and featured the U of W Orthodontic Department. It includes an interesting article written by Moore explaining how he patterned the organization and philosophy of the U of W program after Brodie, Downs, Thompson and Wylie at the Universities of Illinois, Northwestern and California. He also writes “The Department's staff has been augmented by several visiting lecturers during the past year. These men were all outstanding orthodontic educators and each presented seminars to the graduate students during their stay”. The list included Allan Brodie, Harry Sicher, George Hahn, C.W. Carey and Arnie Bjork.

This was an auspicious beginning. In the course of two years the stature of the program had been supercharged and was recognized worldwide. Ultimately, though, the future success of a program would be measured in the contributions that it would make to the profession. Recruiting the right faculty and students was a very important part of this process. The clinical staff included four very highly

respected local orthodontists who were superb clinicians. Not only were they very devoted to the program, but they were also demanding of excellence. The same could be said about Dr. Riedel and together they set the standard for clinical excellence that became a hallmark of the program. The academic staff would eventually include a basic scientist in a full time department position, clearly demonstrating Al's commitment to a strong research program and another hallmark of the program. Al initially hired Bert Krause, a geneticist and later Ben Moffett, an anatomist with a particular interest in the temporomandibular joint.

Finding the right candidate for acceptance to the program was not easy because there were several hundred at the "top of their class" to choose from and it took a great deal of time and effort to review all the applications. My father, a very thorough person and a good judge of people, was up to the task. I still recall the boxes of applications that he would bring home to review for the several weeks leading up to "selection night". There were 10 students in a class back then, one was always from a foreign country and virtually no one was admitted immediately out of dental school. They felt that at least two years of experience in the military or in a residency program would create a more mature student with perhaps loftier goals. Everyone was expected to write a masters thesis and very few didn't because that would have meant disappointing "the Chief". Continued learning and achievement was strongly emphasized in the form of ABO certification, membership in the Angle Society and involvement in teaching and research.

Certainly the crowning achievement and the greatest contribution made by my father was demonstrated in the accomplishments of their graduates and later their faculty. But this couldn't have been done without Dick Riedel. Together they created an atmosphere that inspired these students to give their best efforts and to give back to the profession. I think it wasn't so much a pre-planned strategy, but a fortunate consequence of the blending of two unique personalities. There was a synergy between these two that I can distinctly remember from my childhood, a confident swagger. They were at the top of their game. Al and Dick treated the residents with respect and as colleagues; they insisted that everyone be on a first name basis. More than 20 former students have gone on to chair orthodontic departments all over the world. Many more have participated in teaching and research and several have served as editors of our journals. The early to mid 60's were one of the most productive eras in terms of future "Academic Orthodontic Hall of Famers". In the course of four years there were Lennart Wieslander, Frans VanDerLinden, Bill Proffit, Art Dugoni, Bill McNeill and Dave Turpin. Al Moore further enhanced this track record when he arranged for the department to receive a grant from the NIH to begin a teacher-training fellowship for orthodontists who were interested in academics. It was incredibly successful. There were five graduates over five years, all continuing to teach throughout their careers. Four spent more than half their time in academics, three became department chairs and three contributed tremendously to orthodontic research. When that grant ran out another program was developed to train students in both orthodontics and pediatric dentistry for a future in academics. This produced five graduates, all of

whom devoted more than half their careers to teaching, with four as department chairs.

An important key in the continued success of the UW Orthodontic Program was the retention of its core faculty members over the last 40 years. This could be attributed, at least in part, to Al Moore who was responsible for arranging half time, tenure track faculty positions within the department, which allowed its faculty to combine academic careers with private orthodontic practice. Initially this produced Bill McNeill and later Don Joondeph, Bob Little, Vince Kokich and Peter Shapiro, all extremely effective, very productive, incredibly dedicated and tireless, not unlike Dick Riedel and Al Moore to whom they give credit. The other factor was the department's collegial atmosphere, which McNeill described so well. "The close personal relationship that Al Moore and Dick Riedel fostered among students, faculty members and professional colleagues were central to the department's success and its far-reaching impact on the dental specialty. Graduate students and junior faculty members were given the freedom to pursue their own interest in a non-competitive, non-hierarchical and mutually supportive environment." Don Joondeph said "It's not so much what Al did as how he did it. He always treated his students with respect and kindness and trusted us with responsibility...we always went the extra mile for Al- not because he demanded it, but because we didn't want to disappoint him."

Al Moore continued as department chair until 1966 when Dick Riedel took over. He served many administrative positions during his academic tenure at the University of Washington, including Acting Dean, Associate Dean for Planning, Associate Dean for Dentistry, and the Dean of Dental School from 1977-1980. He retired in 1980 and became Dean Emeritus of the School of Dentistry and Professor Emeritus of its Department of Orthodontics.

Dr. Moore's professional career led to worldwide lecture tours and international recognition of his academic accomplishments. He lectured throughout South America, Australia, Europe, Russia, the Far East, and South Africa.

Dr. Moore was also active in dental and orthodontic organizations and served as Secretary of the American Board of Orthodontics from 1960 until 1965 and as President in 1966. He also served as the secretary for the National Edward Angle Society for 20 years

Al received the AAO's First Research Award in 1949, now known as the Milo Helman Award, for his master's thesis. The Board bestowed its highest honor, the Albert H. Ketchum Memorial Award, on Dr. Moore in 1973. During a sabbatical year, he was Senior International Fellow of the Fogarty International Center of the National Institutes of Health at the University of Nijmegen, Netherlands. Dr. Moore has been honored as the founder of the Angle Society of Europe and received the Louse Ada Jarabak Memorial Teachers and Research Award from the American Association of Orthodontics Foundation in 1999.

My father was an academic at heart and loved teaching. He had certain qualities and characteristics that made him especially good at this and I was fortunate to have experienced them first hand. He was a critical thinker with an inquisitive mind and I can think of a number of times when he wouldn't give me the answer to a question, but instead coaxed me to discover it for myself. He had a special way of getting his point across, which was well thought out, logical, comprehensive and sometimes entertaining. He was genuinely interested in your learning. He never was demeaning and he didn't talk down to you and didn't make assumptions. Growing up, there were always projects around the house that I was expected to help with. Some of it was fetching and cleaning up after him. But most of the time I spent was in quiet observation, which taught me diligence and perseverance in striving for perfection. He had a kind, gentle nature, but was very demanding and could be strict at times, as my older sister could attest. What may stand out most was how thoughtful and considerate he was, always remembering every occasion with a card that he personalized in some creative and artistic way.

It was a fortunate combination of events, circumstances and personalities intersecting at the most opportune times that has lead the department and it's graduates to where we are today. But just try to imagine how different things might have been had Al Moore not been the right man, in the right place at the right time.

