

Portrait of a professional:

Dr. Richard A. Riedel

It is once again my responsibility to interview and profile the life of a respected and deserving figure in Pacific Northwest orthodontics. What a pleasure it is for me on this occasion to honor one of my mentors—Dick Riedel. The following interview is divided into two parts. The first is a brief biographical sketch intended to highlight some of the interesting and less known events in Riedel's life and career. In the second part, I have asked Dick to respond to questions of academic and clinical importance to orthodontists. To help with this humbling endeavor, I have solicited comments from many of his past students and colleagues. You will find these comments interspersed throughout the text. I hope you find as much pleasure reading about Dick Riedel as I found compiling this portrait of a great professional.

—VGK

Early years

Dick Riedel was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin in 1922. As we visited, he reflected happily upon his early years. Riedel's father's family were longtime inhabitants of Milwaukee. In fact they were responsible for bringing the first surveying instruments into Wisconsin. Dick's father had several brothers with varying occupations (lawyer, milkman, physician, dentist, and inventor), who all lived in the Milwaukee area. According to Dick, he was influenced most by his uncle in dentistry, and this relationship cultivated Riedel's eventual interest in a dental career. Dick used to work at his uncle's office on Saturdays, scrubbing floors and cleaning the lab.

Riedel was an outstanding athlete in high school. He played guard on the varsity basketball team, quarterback in football (he was the best passer in the school), and pitcher on the school softball team. Dick's father was an avid baseball fan and wanted his only son to be a professional baseball player. So Dick played softball for the school team during the



Dick Riedel

Dr. Riedel is a loyal and dear friend. He has one of the finest analytical minds in orthodontics.

—Reed A. Holdaway

week and then pitched for an American Legion baseball team on Sundays. Riedel was a great pitcher and held an American Legion record for twenty-seven strikeouts in one game. (Riedel laughed and told me that their team actually lost that game—the catcher was afraid of the ball and closed his eyes each time the ball was pitched, allowing the runners to steal bases.) He loved baseball and nearly turned professional, but he developed a sore arm from constant pitching and had to give up the sport. But he fondly remembers playing against great athletes like Kenny Keltner, who eventually played for the Cleveland Indians and was inducted into baseball's Hall of Fame.

Off to college

Dick's early interest in dentistry did not waiver, and he enrolled at Marquette University following high school graduation. At that time, predental training consisted of two years of college prerequisites followed by two years of dental school. (Riedel was the first person from his high school to go on to college.) During the first two years of college Dick was very busy. In addition to studying, he joined the Marquette debate club and played trombone in the college orchestra. Riedel smiled as he told me about his first debating experience as a freshman. The topic was railroading and he was so nervous he absolutely could not memo-

Dick is the leveler and often distaining of those who placed too much emphasis on one or two degrees, millimeters, or grams of force. His greatest teaching is of moderation in orthodontics.

—Roland M. Anderson

rize his material and had to read everything from note cards. He remembered that his debate coach had told him to think of the audience as heads of cabbage to avoid the anxiety.

After two predental years Riedel entered Marquette School of Dentistry. At that time, the war in Europe was increasing and President Roosevelt had initiated the draft. So Riedel joined the Navy when he started dental school and worked part-time in the Hospital Volunteer Service during the next two years of dental training. He had fond memories of dental school, but one of the most interesting involved the Marquette basketball team. Since predental and premedical training were only two years in length, the dental and medical students were eligible to play varsity athletics. At that time, Marquette's varsity basketball team consisted of four dental students and one medical student. In order to help the four dental students and give them more time to practice, Riedel did their crown and bridge lab work during the basketball season.

Of course Dick is a brilliant teacher and clinician—but he has always had a wondrous irreverence for the Establishment and the current “philosophies” and cookbooks we orthodontists so often get hung up on.

—Alfred T. Baum

While in dental school Dick met his lovely wife Marie, who was in the dental hygiene program at Marquette. They were married just before graduation in 1945.

Naval duty

After dental school Riedel went on active duty in the Navy. He was initially stationed at the Great Lakes Naval Base, which at that time was one of the largest bases in the United States. Dick was one of 490 dental officers at the base. Initially he worked on the new recruits, but as the war came to an end he was responsible for charting the dental health of those that were being discharged from the service. It was extremely busy, and Riedel recalls examining and charting 300 people an hour during the peak of the discharge period. Those charting records were used by the government to determine the dental needs and benefits of the veterans.

Since he was also soon to be discharged from the Navy, Riedel applied for and was accepted to the orthodontic program at Northwestern University. However, he had six months to wait until school started so he signed an extension to

A cherished friend and superb clinician, Dick Riedel has always stimulated excellence through his quiet example.

—Donald R. Joondeph



Dick loved baseball as a child (circa 1932).

Dick Riedel was the strongest single influence on my development as a clinical orthodontist—I always hoped I would get good enough to treat cases the way he did.

—Bill Proffit

remain in the Navy until then. Unfortunately the Navy had different plans, and Riedel was shipped to China and was stationed with the marine battalion that had invaded Iwo Jima and Saipan. At that time the battered battalion had only four officers remaining from an original number of forty, so Riedel had to assume double duty. From 8:00 A.M. until noon he practiced dentistry on the troops in Tientsen; in the afternoon he performed petty officer's duties. Riedel recalled that the dental equipment was very crude. He used a dental handpiece powered by a footpedal (Dick hired a young Chinese boy to pedal the handpiece for \$2.00/month). The cuspidor was made from a funnel with a hole cut in the side.

Riedel kept very busy while in China. He was sports editor of the *North China News* (a Marine newspaper with a distribution of 60,000). This allowed him to travel around China to observe the armed forces sporting events and report on them. He also coached two Navy basketball teams and played on one of them. Dick had many interesting experiences in China, but one of the most memorable was when he would help deliver the payroll. You see, the commanding officer had to travel regularly by train to Sing Tau to pay the troops. Riedel had been

I view Dick Riedel's personal and academic honesty as his most outstanding characteristic. He is the antithesis of the clinical and academic leaders who collect "groupies" and encourage the development of cults. Dick's candid, forthright approach to his profession and to life in general simply leaves no room for such things.

—R.W. McNeill

befriended by the commanding officer and would accompany him to act as a guard while they were carrying the money (literally thousands of dollars). Riedel recalled that he carried a carbine rifle over his shoulder and a .45 caliber pistol to protect the money. But he laughed and admitted that he didn't even know how to fire either of the weapons.

Orthodontic training

Riedel was finally discharged from the service in the spring of 1947 and subsequently began his orthodontic training at Northwestern University. Jack Thompson was chairman of the department at that time. Thompson had trained under Brodie at Illinois and had modelled the Northwestern program after that taught at Illinois. Riedel spoke fondly of some of his instructors at Northwestern. One of the most noted was Harry Sicher.

Everything he says has a 100% practical approach. I regret that we did not tape-record his lectures. If somebody asked me whom I would like to see treat my own children the answer would be Dr. Richard Riedel.

—Lennart Wieslander

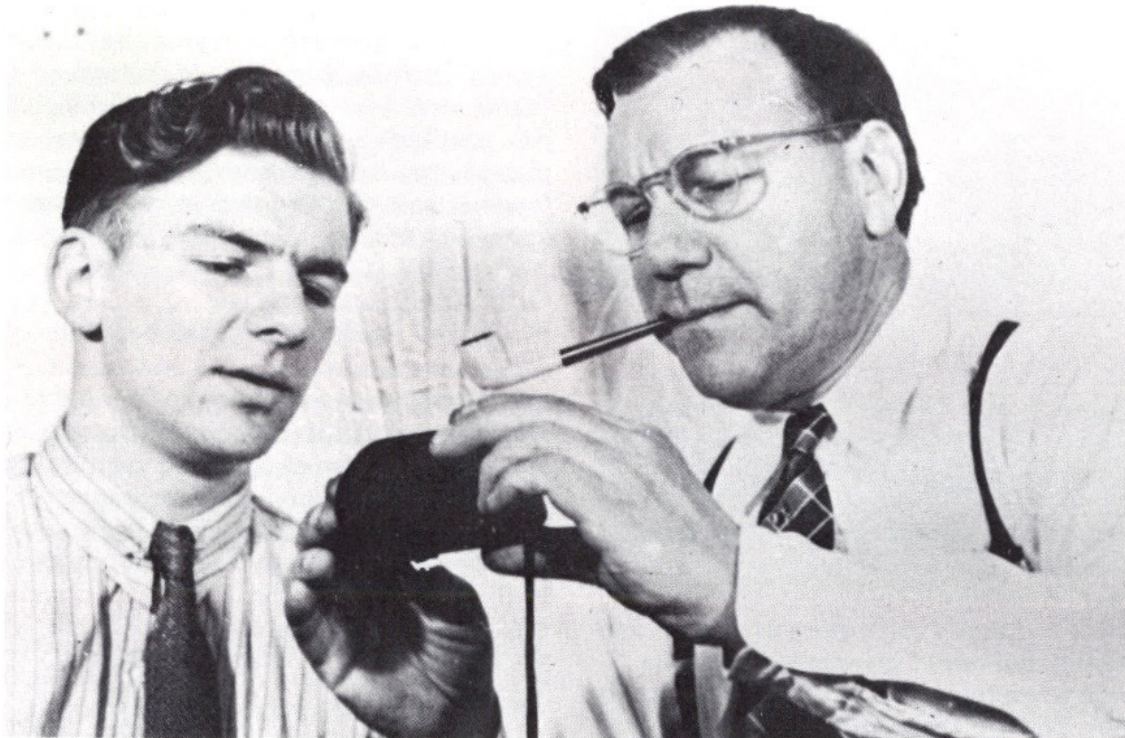
According to Riedel, he was the *best* teacher he has ever had. He recalled how Sicher would go on speaking trips carrying only a box of colored chalk. He was evidently quite a speaker and artist and

Dr. Riedel is certainly one of the outstanding men in orthodontics today.

—Paul Lewis

could draw detailed anatomical diagrams with both hands simultaneously.

After his orthodontic residency, Riedel worked half-time in Jack Thompson's office and taught half-time at Northwestern. His salary was \$100.00/month at the school and \$250.00/month from the practice. Dick shook his head when he remembered once having only eighteen cents with two days remaining in the



Dick Riedel and his father at home in Minneapolis.

Dr. Riedel is a prolific writer and his many fine contributions to the orthodontic literature are well documented.

—Richard M. Railsback

month. But he and Marie survived and enjoyed those days very much. It was at this time that Riedel met Al Moore. Moore was also working in Thompson's office part-time and teaching at Illinois. This was the beginning of a friendship that would endure for many, many years.

On to Seattle

Riedel really didn't like Chicago. He wanted to practice orthodontics in California. In fact he had travelled fifty-eight hours (one way) on the train from Chicago to Los Angeles to take the California state board examination. But there were no opportunities available in California. Then Al Moore, who had assumed the chairmanship at Washington, wrote to Riedel and asked him to come to teach in Seattle. Although Dick admits that he never intended to stay in Seattle, he figured that it was at least closer to California, where he really wanted to settle. So Riedel arrived at the University of Washington in April 1949. The first orthodontic class had just started in March 1949, and Riedel remembered being younger than some of those first graduate students.

Dick and Marie had two children at that time and had to move into the student

Dick is one of the quickest and clearest thinkers I've ever known. In answer to a question about new technics he would say, "If it's that good, how come I'm not using it?"

—Kenneth S. Kahn



Lieutenant R.A. Riedel in 1945.

We have all heard the phrase on television, "When E.F. Hut-ton talks everybody listens." To me this description fits Dick Riedel to a tee. Quiet, unas-suming, always listening—but when all have spoken Dick has a way of summarizing all that has been said and coming up with the right solution.

—John S. Rathbone

housing area since Riedel was only earning \$4,500.00/year at the school. In fact they didn't own a car in Seattle for several years. In 1950 Dick established a private practice in downtown Seattle. At that time banks did not loan money without any collateral (Riedel told the banker that his only collateral were his three children). So Dick borrowed money from Sears and a local dental supply company to set up the office. Gradually, for economic reasons, Riedel worked up to a full-time private practice but remained on the clinical faculty at Washington one day/week. Dick practiced full-time for the next ten years. During that time he had many memorable experiences. One involved his prowess as a golfer. While in practice Dick had more time to golf, so he worked at and developed his game. In fact, in 1958 he shot a seventy-eight and won the Washington State Dental Association tournament (what hasn't this man done??).

Then in 1964, Al Moore accepted the position of associate dean of the dental

His innate ability to critique and separate the wheat from the chaff is a unique characteristic few teachers possess. On many occasions he has kept me intellectually honest by playing the devil's advocate, forcing me to look on the other side of the coin.

—Alton W. Moore

school. He went to Dick Riedel, his friend and colleague, and asked him to assume the chairmanship of the department. Riedel's children were nearly grown, and he therefore accepted the challenge and came back to the school full-time. He directed the orthodontic department for the next ten years and was in great part responsible for the excellence in research and clinical training that the department has achieved.

Golden years

Riedel relinquished the chairmanship of the orthodontic department in 1974 to allow new ideas to come into the program and to give himself more time for research. Since that time he has still kept busy. Dick Riedel has truly done it all. He has been a star athlete, an excellent clinician, department chairman, dental school dean, member and director of the American Board of Orthodontics, speaker, author, editor, researcher, father, and husband. He has worn many hats and has worn them all with vitality, honesty, and integrity. It is his absolute

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"Idonow—tryit." How can a man with so much theoretical and clinical knowledge so often answer, "Idonow"? Because it is his way of teaching! You never learn more than by your own mistakes.

—Jean-Pierre Joho

honesty that has earned this man the respect of so many people throughout the world. You see, I know—I was one of his students. And I can truly say that Dick Riedel was the best teacher I ever had.

—Vincent G. Kokich, DDS, MSD

How has graduate orthodontic education today changed since you trained at Northwestern?

Basic science instruction is more relevant and taught in greater depth. Cephalometrics is *much* more sophisticated and useful. There is more emphasis on surgical-orthodontic procedures and level of perfection. There is some improvement in knowledge of occlusion.

Who, in your opinion, has had the greatest effect upon the way orthodontics is practiced during your years in the profession?

Charlie Tweed certainly influenced my attitude toward ortho treatment along with Holdaway et al. Begg has certainly had a strong influence on many orthodontists.

He often sees problems in a way that makes the solution easier or better.

—Ben Moffett



Dick Riedel along with several other orthodontists taking the Tweed Orthodontic course in Tucson, Arizona in 1954.

You have always been interested in the relapse of mandibular incisor irregularity following orthodontic treatment. Are we any closer today to understanding why incisor irregularity recurs?

We can be quite sure that mandibular arch length is a continually decreasing



Dick and his son Tom kayaking in the early sixties.

quantity, that, in general, mandibular expansion is unlikely to be maintained, but why—who knows? Some mandibular incisor irregularity is probably the norm for our society.

What advice would you give to the newly trained orthodontist?

Advice to the new orthodontist—enjoy your practice and your patients (most are very grateful). Keep good records. Try to do your best in light of current information. Don't expect new mechanical devices to be the salvation of orthodontics; our problems are *not how*, but *when*, *where* and *why*. Be a constant student.

You have always felt strongly about the importance of research in education. How can the practicing clinician play a role in furthering orthodontic research?

The basis for research on a clinical level lies in obtaining and storing complete (and well done) records—models, photos, cephalometric films, intra-oral X-rays, etc.

You spent several years on the American Board of Orthodontics. Do you feel that all orthodontists should be required to pass the American Board? Why?

I believe that the present arrangements are reasonable. Not everyone wishes, nor should be required, to be Board certified. Board eligible is probably enough. Board certification requires a considerable amount of extra effort.

You have travelled extensively and have observed and visited with orthodontists throughout the world. How does orthodontics in the United States compare to that practiced in other countries?

US orthodontics emphasizes details and ideal occlusion—that's fine, for those who can afford it. Many countries can (and do) benefit from less emphasis on perfection and more attention to prevention, gross malocclusion reduction, etc. In other words, I believe that US orthodontists are generally pretty good at *what* they do, but they don't do enough for the population in general and their efforts would be almost irrelevant in third world countries.

Dr. Richard Riedel is one of the finest individuals I've ever known; his skills as a clinician and teacher are exceptional and are only surpassed by his values, integrity, ethics, and interpersonal skills. He is "the standard" for orthodontists.

—Arthur Dugoni

One of your greatest contributions to orthodontic education has been in the area of relapse. How can the practicing orthodontist gain an appreciation for the relapse potential of various types of treatment?

I would rather not be considered an expert in relapse, only somewhat knowledgeable about posttreatment change. Any orthodontist who reads the literature should ask himself: how long after treatment and retention have records been taken, before he/she follows the procedures suggested?

You have always been regarded by your students as a "great wire bender." How do you feel about the new straight-wire concept of orthodontic treatment?

The straight wire concept is okay; however, I still expect certain cases and situations to require wire adjustment.

How do you feel about the current new surge of emphasis on functional appliances? Can we really make mandibles grow longer? Why?

Functional appliances probably *have* a place in ortho treatment, but nobody

I consider Dr. Riedel an extremely gifted clinician. He is the most rational and no-nonsense orthodontist I have ever met. I learned more clinical orthodontics from him than from anybody else.

—Frans van der Linden



Al Moore and Dick Riedel on a camping trip in 1961.

seems to know when, where, and how much. The basic question of "stimulating mandibular growth" is also open to question; witness the controversial literature on that subject. ■