

Eldon Dean Bills, 1931-2018

The specialty of orthodontics has never had in its midst a more dedicated advocate and careful practitioner than Eldon Dean Bills. He was a perfectionist in every endeavor, yet his practice of the specialty was always influenced by the art as well as the science of orthodontics.

Eldon Bills was born and raised on a farm in Iowa. He attended public schools in Iowa and received his DDS degree in 1956 from the State University of Iowa. By the end of 1957 he had received a Master degree in prosthodontics and had married Marilyn Peterson, a dental hygienist. He served 2 years (1957-1959) with the U.S. Navy as a dentist for the United States Marines at Camp Pendleton, California. After his Navy duty he and Marilyn moved back to Iowa for specialty orthodontic education. Upon receiving his certification in orthodontics, he and Marilyn moved to Flagstaff, Arizona, where he practiced for more than 40 years. He continued to serve as a U.S. Navy Reserve dental officer until he retired as a Captain.

Eldon was a member of the Arizona State Orthodontic Society and the Southwest Component of the Edward H. Angle Society (which he served as President). He was a founding member of the Arizona Orthodontic Study Group and held many leadership positions there. He served as President of the Vienna Study Group, an interdisciplinary study club that benefitted from Eldon's knowledge about both prosthodontics and orthodontics. He was appointed to the Arizona Board of Dental Examiners and served as its President in 1974. In 1994 he received the Arizona State Dental Association's Distinguished Leadership and Service Award. He served on numerous committees of the American Association of Orthodontists as well as both the Pacific Coast Society of Orthodontists and the Rocky Mountain Society of Orthodontists. He was President of the Rocky Mountain Society of Orthodontists in 1990-1991. In 1991 he became a director of the American Board of Orthodontics and served as its President in 1997-1998. While serving there, he was very active with its Legal and By-laws Committee, served as a site visitor for the Commission on Dental Accreditation, and was a member of the Orthodontic Review Committee for the Commission on Dental Accreditation.



Eldon D. Bills

Eldon made many presentations to state orthodontic societies, local dental societies, the Edward H. Angle Society, and various AAO constituent organizations over the course of his professional lifetime. He was known as an articulate and thought-provoking "orthodontist's orthodontist."

Eldon's personal life was equally busy and interesting. He helped found the Malpais Kiwanis Club of Flagstaff while he was president of the Flagstaff Kiwanis Club. He was a member of and a Sunday school teacher for the Federated Community Church (Methodist) of Flagstaff. During his retirement years, he was a member of the First Baptist Church of Camp Verde. He served the Boy Scouts of America in various capacities and was President of the Raymond Educational Foundation for 15 years. He and Marilyn established a scholarship fund at the University of Sioux Falls to help students pursuing a health profession; the scholarship is named in honor of one of his own teachers, Dr Frank Weaver. Eldon's family and friends have continued to increase the corpus of this fund as a memorial tribute to this kind and generous man. Eldon's service to his fellow man, like his service to orthodontics and to dentistry, was truly exemplary.

Eldon had many other passions in his life. He was a multiengine instrument-rated pilot, a hunting and

fishing enthusiast, a runner, an extensive traveler, a world class photographer, a renowned tier of flies, and an avid fly fisherman. He crammed 28 hours into each 24-hour day!

Human interest stories about Eldon abound. He worked his way through college as a meat cutter in a butcher shop. His certified meat cutter skills allowed him to attend college and dental school without borrowing money, but he had to start work every morning at 5:00 A.M. It was cold hard work!

Another human interest story is the love that he shared with his wife Marilyn. He hired Marilyn, a dental hygiene student, to help him in his part-time private practice after he graduated from dental school. At that time Marilyn was already engaged to be married—to someone other than Eldon. After working with Eldon for 6 months, Marilyn made a change in her life's plan. She broke off her engagement, cancelled her large planned wedding, and married Eldon—all within a month's time! Happily married for 61 years, they raised 3 fine sons who are wonderful contributors to society.

Eldon made notes about everything in his life: tying flies for his fly fishing hobby, reloading shells for his hunting hobby, travel notes, fishing "spot" notes, etc. Those who served with Eldon on the American Board

of Orthodontics were always amazed at the copious notes he made on each case report that was presented by the candidates assigned to him. Eldon kept all of these notes in very neat folders. He could look back at these notes years later and summarize what he thought about each case report he had studied at the examination. Copious notes from all facets of his life are merely a reflection of the meticulous personality of Eldon Bills.

Eldon D. Bills contributed a great deal to the specialty of orthodontics, to the profession of dentistry, to his community, and to his fellow man. He is survived by his wife, Marilyn, their 3 sons, 10 grandchildren, and 5 great-grandchildren. This Iowa farm country-raised, energetic, intelligent, and professional man will be greatly missed by all who knew and loved him. He gently touched the lives of the many people with whom he interacted throughout his long and illustrious career. This world is a better place because of Eldon D. Bills.

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