

Biography of Dr. Vincent Joseph Catalano

When I was growing up as the child of Italian immigrants in Queens, N.Y., I never dreamed that I would one day become a dentist. My father owned his own glass and mirror business and my three brothers and I thought we would all continue the business together. However, in high school, a good friend was being treated by an orthodontist. He was fascinated by the whole process and thought he would like to be a dentist. His enthusiasm soon inspired me and I decided I would like to be a dentist also. We both attended Long Island University as pre-dental majors. After graduation I was accepted at Georgetown University School of Dentistry in Washington, D.C. and my friend went to New York University School of Dentistry. Our friendship continues to this day.

After earning my D.D.S. in 1956, I decided to specialize in oral surgery. I was accepted as an intern in the oral surgery program at Coney Island Hospital in Brooklyn, N.Y.. Immediately after completing my internship, on June 5, 1957, I married my wife Frances and we celebrated fifty happy years together in 2007.

While I was studying dentistry the Cold War was ongoing and there was a mandatory draft. I was able to get deferments for college and dental school and was granted one more year for my internship. Shortly after getting married, I went into the United States Air Force. I was stationed at Keesler Air Force Base in Biloxi, Mississippi, where for two years I served as one of the two oral surgeons on the base. Kessler was the second largest Air Force base in the country and was an air evacuation center (equivalent to today's trauma center). Our base covered the southeast section of the United States, treating all military personnel in the region, not only Air Force personnel. Needless to say, the experience was invaluable.

On my discharge from the service in 1959, I returned to school for the mandatory didactic oral surgery requirements. I attended New York University College of Dentistry's postgraduate course in oral surgery, completing it in 1960. A year later I finished my residency at Grasslands Hospital (now called Westchester Medical Center).

While working on my residency, I learned there was a need for an oral surgeon in Dutchess County. I established my practice in Poughkeepsie, N.Y. in 1960 in an office building at 45 Market Street. It was at this time that I was introduced to Dr. Walter Stevens. He had a general dental practice and I was immediately

impressed by his knowledge of oral surgery. After I got to know him, he showed me various techniques he had devised for treating fractured jaws. I was amazed at the instruments he designed and used with great success. Sometimes Dr. Stevens would call me over to his office, which was two blocks away on Noxon Street, and we would have long talks about dentistry and oral surgery. He encouraged me to have compassion for my patients and to make sure they left my office feeling cared for. This is not always easy to convey when you are removing four impacted third molars. In all my years of training no one had ever stressed the importance of empathy. It was one of the best and most important lessons I ever learned.

In 1965 I became board certified by the American Board of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery. I have since become a member of the American Board of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons and the New York State Society of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery. I was on the active staff at Vassar Brothers Hospital and Saint Francis Hospital and on the consulting staff of Northern Dutchess and Highland Hospital.

Around this time, Dr. Stevens asked me to serve on call, in his place at Hudson River State Psychiatric Hospital and the Castle Point VA Hospital. This was in the mid 1960s before automobiles had safety features such as safety belts, air bags or padded dashboards or padded steering wheels. Because I was on call at all the above hospitals, my weekends and evenings were not only difficult for me but for my wife and children as well.

I have held the following positions throughout the years: President of the Dutchess County Dental Society, Head of the Dental Department at Vassar Brothers Hospital and Head of the Dental Department at Saint Francis Hospital. I have also served on the Credentials Committees of Vassar Hospital and Saint Francis Hospital, the Operating Room Committee at Saint Francis Hospital and I still serve on a committee at Saint Francis Hospital.

My leisure time is spend doing wood working, mainly making Shaker type furniture, which has proved to be a very rewarding hobby. I also take pleasure in listening to classical music and playing golf. Since my wife paints, we love going to museums for both the art and the furniture. Several years ago we traveled to Europe on an art history tour while my wife completed her degree in art history.

Mostly, my wife and I enjoy our family of four children and their families. We are blessed to have wonderful children and seven grandchildren. During the summer it is great fun for all of us to be together at our camp on a lake in the Adirondacks.

Our son, Vincent, Jr., is an attorney in Poughkeepsie. Our daughter, Laura, is a free lance writer on Pennsylvania. Our third child, Robert (Bobby), was born with Down's Syndrome and despite very dire predictions when he was born, has proven to be bright, funny and an absolute joy. Our daughter, Clare Marie, is a first grade teacher in Connecticut.

Finally, I would like to say that having been honored by Vassar Hospital at their Diamond Gala – the first dentist to be so recognized – and by Saint Francis Hospital for my years of service to them, I am most privileged to receive from my fellow dentists the Walter Wallace Stevens Award for Meritorious and Distinguished Service. I am grateful to you all for your support your trust and your confidence in me in treating your patients.

Vince