

Biography, Michael Joseph Schwartz, DDS  
For Walter Wallace Stevens Award  
Hall of Fame  
The Dutchess County Dental Society

Life has been interesting, so far. Becoming a Dentist was not my first occupational desire. At 4 years of age, I used to hide in the curbside garbage can, when I heard the NYC garbage men approach, hoping that my beloved heroes would pick me up and put me in their truck. But I gave the ruse away by giggling, and was quickly discovered. Oh, well, who ever heard of a Jewish garbage kid, anyways?

Started after-school piano lessons in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade at P. S. 49, in Middle Village, Queens. Eventually got accepted to the High School of Music and Art, in 1952, this being one of NYC's specialized schools. I thought I was a good musician, but on encountering those with really exceptional talent, it was a rude, but fortuitous awakening. Began the required secondary instrument, the trombone, at M&A and realized that I had a potential career ahead of me, if I chose it. I was offered a full 4-year Music scholarship at Oberlin College, but I would have to be Music major. I decided on Dentistry, instead. But, I did have many incredible musical experiences, from studying piano at Julliard, and trombone at the Mannes College of Music, where I played in Brass Ensembles and their Faculty Orchestra, alongside professionals from the NY Philharmonic and the Metropolitan Opera. Can still recall Leonard Bernstein conducting the M&A Sr. Symphony Orchestra. My love for Classical Music lingers, to this day, with my real passion for the Baroque Era.

My choice of Dentistry was a curious one. Had a good family friend who was a Dentist, and I sort of liked what he did. But my parents insisted that I take an aptitude test. The interview, and tests showed that I was good in Math, but was introverted, so they recommended Accounting (obviously one cannot be extroverted working with numbers). So, I ignored that, and instead, started looking into Mining Engineering (go figure). That led me to the Montana School of Mines and the Minnesota School of Mines. I didn't really have a clue what that field entailed, so I decided on Medicine. But my old Family Doctor sat me down and told me to become a Dentist, instead. Better hours. So the choice was made, since he was the final authority.

Attended NYU (College of Arts and Sciences) at University Heights, from 1956-9. Got early acceptance to School of Dental and Oral Surgery at Columbia University, in 1959. I guess that qualified me to be a college drop out. While at NYU, I played baseball, incessantly, pitching through team tryouts, and practices. That potential

sports career evaporated as the NYU first baseman continually hit my “fastball” over the wall into the windows of Gould Hall. My academic choices at NYU were to major in Philosophy, minor in Music and English (obviously preparatory for Dentistry). The real fun part of college was singing in the Glee Club, being a Brother for APO (the service fraternity), being Editor of the freshman newspaper (Scope '60), and political activism for change. My editorials made people take notice. It was sort of exhilarating.

At Columbia, the emphasis was on Basic Sciences and Medicine, since we shared much of the same faculty as the Medical School, Physicians and Surgeons. But the Dental courses were not neglected. The faculty largely treated us as equals, and considered it their responsibility to prepare their potential colleagues, as best as possible, to enter the profession. My class graduated 33 Dentists, and to this day, we keep in touch. In one sense, I believe that NYU prepared its graduates better, technically, but Columbia provided a more balance education, in a better atmosphere.

Took an Internship at Grassland Hospital, in Valhalla, NY, in 1963-4. We largely formed our own program, and were one and the same, in terms of call, with the Physicians. We covered the ER, (any injuries, since we were able to suture), Anesthesia, Obstetrics, Psychiatry and Pediatrics. There are babies (adults, now) who were delivered by me, and the scrub nurse, during night call. In my rotation through Anesthesia, I liked that so much that I inquired back to Columbia for acceptance to the Medical School. I wanted to join the junior class, but they offered one year only. So, instead, I stayed on in the rotation for 2 more months, and then went back to the Dental Service. All in all, a wonderful experience.

Worked for a L.I, Dentist for a year while I put together a practice in Fishkill. I learned a bit about running a practice, from him. Opened in March '65 and eventually moved in 1988 to my present office, having more space and a better facility.

Married a local girl (Clarice Roy) in 1966, and we raised 5 wonderful daughters. They have all become accomplished women. My oldest, Amy, is a Sr. Domestic Violence Attorney, Julie is my Dental Hygienist, Dr. Nancy became the Anesthesiologist I looked into, Becky is a High School Special Education Teacher, and Allison works as Consultant for Economic Development, to NGO's in the DC area. I raised my daughters to believe that they could accomplish anything they want, with focus and effort. And, my reward has been seeing them develop their careers and lives, as well as giving me 7 gorgeous grandchildren, so far.

Had a transition in my life and got remarried in 1999 to my best friend, and wonderful Edie. We share our loves for travel, music, theater, hiking and beauty. Edie has taught me to pause and listen to the wind and breathe in the essence of nature.

Over the years of practice, I have been involved with the Vassar Brothers Medical Center Dental Staff as Director and have served the Hospital on many committees. I have always chosen to give back my good fortune to the community. With several others (Irv, Barry and Monroe), I formed the Southern Dutchess Dental Study Group. We met in each other's offices, and did presentations to each other. Eventually, we got too large and disbanded, with most choosing to become active in the DCDS. To this day, the leadership of the DCDS shows the strong presence of the old study group. I have served on the DCDS Board for many years, including 2 as President. It has been an exceptional privilege to lead this group and I have gained much in the way of friends and knowledge. I have dealt with the Ninth District and NYSDA, on many levels, and realize that I am only one of many who sacrifice considerable time and effort for Dentistry and our colleagues.

Dental practice has undergone many changes, since I first began in 1965. Most of what we know, today, did not exist, at that time. But, I will tell you that this has been a wonderful choice of careers. Certainly, there are rough times, but being a Dentist is a great way to spend one's day. The creativity, the personal contacts, the immediate gratification with task completion, the partnership with staff, and the continuous quest for knowledge, all have made me glad I was both a crummy pitcher, and was unable to hide in the garbage can, without laughing.

To those who are entering the profession, you picked a good one. I hope it lasts, for this is an exciting time to be a Dentist. My best advice is to get involved with the workings of the profession. If you wish to observe change, you must be part of that change. Be patient, but do not let the goal get out of sight. And do not forget to pause and enjoy the journey, all along the path.