

Biography of Dr. Walter Engel

I come from a long line of Dentists. My Grandfather started a practice in Brooklyn, NY., sometime in the 1870s, and my father and uncle joined him in the early years of the twentieth century. Dentistry has always been an important part of my life. By the time I was halfway through high school and had taken courses in biology, chemistry and physics, I knew that I wanted to be a dentist. After 2½ academic years at Wesleyan University, I entered Columbia University, School of Dental and Oral Surgery, and received my DDS degree in 1948.

After a six month sort of internship at the Guggenheim Dental Clinic (children) on the East side of NYC, I applied for a Commission in the US Public Health Service, was accepted, and had the good fortune to be assigned to the US Merchant Marine Academy at Kings Point, LI, NY. While at Kings Point, I learned a lot of practical dentistry under the tutelage of Melvin Cutler, DDS, my Commanding Officer, a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania Dental School and he became a lifelong friend. While stationed at Kings Point, I also was married to my wife Clitheroe (Clue) Hathaway. In fact, we just celebrated our 55th wedding anniversary. . . When I was transferred from Kings Point to the Manhattan Beach Maritime Training Station, we decided it was time to try private practice.

After several weekend trips around NY State, we decided on Poughkeepsie. With the great help and advice of Dr. Arnold Langwick, Orthodontist, the then President of the Dutchess County Dental Society, we found an available 2-room office in the only professional building in Poughkeepsie. By luck, it was right across the hall from Dr. Walter Stevens. I recall many an instance I would cross the hall to ask Walt for advice about how to do this and how to do that. He willingly shared his knowledge with anyone who sought him out. On November 2nd, 1953, along with the help of Clue as my Dental Assistant, Dr. Stevens, and Dr. Alan Cary, I opened my office at 54 Noxon Street. I also received much assistance from Dudley Van Kleek of B. D. Van Kleek Dental Supply.

Within a month or two, I was elected to membership in the Dutchess County Dental Society and have been a member, ever since. Our Society was rather small in those days and by 1967, I was elected Treasurer, followed by Vice President in 1969, and then President in 1970.

In 1957, the first of our 2 sons, Jean, was born, so Clue was no longer able to give much time to the office. Two years later, our second son, Peter, joined the clan. In April of 1958, Dr. Stuart Fischler, the Pediatrician for the Poughkeepsie Children's Home, asked me to take over the Dental Service. For the next 35 years, I was the dentist for the ever-changing population of the Home. I was able to watch over the ever-improving condition of the children's oral health, undoubtedly aided by the addition of fluoridation to the City of Poughkeepsie water supply. It was about this time that I joined the Dental Staff of the Vassar Brother's Hospital and have served on it to this day.

In case it looks like dentistry has been my whole life, Clue and I have been very active members of our church, the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Poughkeepsie. In addition, I am the Treasurer of the June and Aaron Gillespie Forum and am on the Board of the Mid Hudson Memorial Society. We also have a strong interest in Classical Music and have supported the Hudson Valley Philharmonic since its start as the Dutchess County Symphony Orchestra. In addition, my interest in jazz piano, led me to bring the great Barbara Carroll to Poughkeepsie, for a concert at the Bardavon, a number of years ago.

Dentistry and Music...a combination for me that is hard to beat.

Walter