

## Chapter 8

# Building a Practice

Maishele was not what one would term a “handy” man. Simple repairs were beyond him, and for special occasions Rosaleh tied his ties. But in his profession, he learned the mechanics of dentistry so well that he quickly gained a reputation for being an excellent dentist, careful and caring. We used to say that every toothache hurt him more than it hurt the patient, and his ability as an exodontist became well known.

At that time, every dentist did his own technical work, but as his practice grew, the young Dr. Dunn hired a Spanish-speaking young man and taught him to make prosthetic devices. Later, he encouraged Hernando to establish his own laboratory, and he kept a close relationship with him for many years of professional association. Hernando had come to this country with a wave of Spanish-speaking immigrants in the early years of this century, and he became an interpreter for many of the early patients.

By the time Hernando left his employ, Dr. Dunn recognized the value of having an interpreter available, since it built his clientele and made the actual work more comfortable for him and for his patients as well. With the succeeding waves of immigrants coming into the town, as world conditions changed, he hired a young Polish girl and trained her to be his chair assistant.



With the advent of each new device which would prove helpful in the practice of dentistry, Father became very excited and enthusiastic. One of his patients, a middle-aged woman, had a severely cleft palate. Father learned that at the University of Maryland, his Alma Mater, they were fitting special prostheses for cleft palates. Consequently, he drove his pa-



Dr. Dunn at work in his office.

tient to Baltimore, stayed with her until the device was safely attached in her mouth, and then drove her back. Upon his return home, he described with great excitement how much the closing of the palate had meant to his patient, who had been able to eat normally on their return journey, for the first time in her life.

Despite his tendency to turn green with motion sickness even when he looked at a picture of water flowing, Morris committed himself to flying to Boston to take refresher courses in dentistry from year to year. Once, the course was instruction in a new method of injecting Novocain, an improvement which moved him to great admiration for the researcher who had perfected it.

As a young doctor, he bought one of the first X-ray machines to come into the town and learned to operate it himself. The results were a source of real wonder and amazement for him. I was still a small child, but I remember a trip

to his office when he explained to me very carefully what the machine was able to do, and how it helped him to do an extraction. I remember his sense of wonder when I see the tremendous advances of the science of imaging which have been put to use in my own day.



When I was a child, it was not possible to buy a radio, for they were not yet in production. It was, however, possible to buy the components, and broadcasts were being made from various key points. Father bought the components, Hernando put them together, and we had a radio in our home at a very early stage of its development. Night after night, Mother called to him, “Maishele, it is late, come to bed”, but he was fascinated by the voices coming over the ether, without wires. It was after midnight one night, when we heard him calling, “Rosaleh, Liebele, come quick.” Frightened, Mother and I jumped out of bed, and in a very shamefaced way, he admitted that he had reached a station in Baltimore for a few minutes, and had wanted to share the experience with us!



During these exciting years, while his practice in dentistry was growing, Morris was also working hard on community affairs. He was a natural leader with the rare gift of making friends with his patients, his colleagues, and the general public. His dedication to Zionism, and to every other aspect of Jewish communal life, required endless meetings, engendered hundreds of arguments which he usually managed to defuse, and required many trips around the State of Connecticut.

He did not neglect the local general community, however. For many years, he was a member of the New Britain Board of Health. A hostile question about the need for special slaughtering of kosher meat was brought to the attention of the Board, and they turned to him for information and explanation. In those years, without the electrical refrigeration which we take for granted today, all meat was

slaughtered locally, on a daily basis, and often there was friction between the Jewish *shochet* (ritual slaughterer) and the other workers in the slaughter house.

Dr. Dunn researched the historical reasons for *kashrut*, noting the Biblical injunction and the long history of martyrdom of Jews for the sake of the freedom to continue the proscribed rituals. However, he also went on to study and report the advantages of the careful overseeing of the process for reasons of health, and for the humaneness of the process.

It was at this time, too, that he began his long association with the Klingberg Children's Home—an orphanage in New Britain—and the Nunnery of St. Mary's Church. He repaired the teeth of the children and did the same for the nuns of St. Mary's, without accepting fees. At a much later time, when he was in the hospital, the nuns whom he had treated took turns visiting him, and they assured him that their prayers for his health were said twice daily.



Morris was a moving force behind every effort to improve the situation of his fellow Jews. By this time, the Jewish community had a Hebrew Ladies Aid Society, which visited the sick and provided services for the indigent, and there was also a Free Loan Society for businessmen who needed a stake to get a business started. Whenever necessary, Morris joined a few of his friends in collecting money for these organizations to function.

He was also instrumental in having his brother Max attend the University of Maryland Dental School, and then he took him into his practice as a partner. Later, he convinced his nephews, the sons of Meyer, Edward, and Max, that they in turn should attend Maryland Dental School, so there were three dentists named Dr. Albert Dunn. At his suggestion, his good friend, Mr. Aisenberg, also sent his son, Myron, to the same school, and Dr. Myron Aisenberg became Dean of the University of Maryland Dental School, a position which he held for many years.



Father's office was the clearing house for the problems and worries of his patients, many of whom were immigrants who found the New World a difficult place. He placed some in jobs, introduced others to government services they needed, and advised all of them to go to night school and learn to read and write English so that they could become American citizens.

Although his practice was very busy, many of the people did not yet have the money to pay him, and occasionally he would receive gifts of fruit or vegetables instead of cash. He always had a large backlog of patients who were paying him on a weekly basis, when they were able to spare the money. Even during the Great Depression, when we needed the money and urged him to attempt to collect on the backlog of debts owed him, he refused, and claimed that the people would pay him eventually, "when they could." It seems entirely likely that most of his patients eventually did pay him, "when they could."



In a beautiful tribute to a *chaver* (friend) upon the occasion of a testimonial dinner, Morris wrote and delivered the following words which characterize his own ideals and activities as well as those of the honoree. He said,

Abe pours into the work his heart and his soul. He thinks that some people ought to give more than they do. Some resent it, and some insult him and threaten him, but Abe says, "That insult is for me. Now give. Give for the UJA, give for the National Fund. Give for everything worthwhile in Jewish life." Abe, this beautiful evening, this gathering of your friends and community leaders who have come here to honor you, is ample proof of the honorable place you occupy among us. But, there are also the invisible guests,



A formal sitting  
for Maishe, circa  
1920.

multitudes of children and refugees who have found a home in Israel. Yes, a poor home with very little to eat, very few bottles of milk to give to the children. But they live as free men on their own soil, and die gracefully in their own homes. The spirits of these people are represented here, and they thank the good Lord that there are Abe Gorfains who run around to collect National Fund boxes, collect rags, collect clothing for Hadassah, collect paper and junk. Collect for the UJA, always devise some ways to collect some money to make their lot easier. Abe, we love you for your sincerity and devotion.