

Paul D. Lewis

Paul Donovan Lewis, a pioneer in the field of orthodontics, has died. He was 96 years old.

Paul was born June 4, 1896 to Weson and Carrie Lewis in Bucoda, Washington, the third of four children. Paul's mother died in 1903. Being a single father was difficult and some friends offered to adopt the children. Paul's father had been raised by foster parents and hardly ever saw his brother and sister, so he was especially determined to keep his own family together. Somehow they managed, with each family member doing his or her part. Paul did chores, delivered papers and worked in a salmon cannery to help make ends meet. He even saved enough money to buy a cow, then sold the milk to bring in more money. Somehow, they managed to get by.

In tough economic times, education can seem like a luxury, but in the Lewis family it was an essential. Paul's father, a lumber mill foreman with less than a year of schooling, had become an avid reader and a firm believer in education for his children. He convinced each of them to pursue an education no matter what it took.

When Paul finished high school in 1916, he enrolled in the North Pacific College of Dentistry and Pharmacy. He worked nights, weekends and vacations, and borrowed what he could, to finish school. He succeeded, and began a dental practice in Monroe, Washington around 1920. After a few years, he decided to learn more about the budding field of orthodontics. He began his studies at the Dewey School of Orthodontics in New York. At the time, the course of study took only a few months to complete. Those few months changed Lewis's life personally as well as professionally, for it was in New York that he met a young nurse, Virginia Thrall. They fell in love and were married August 25, 1925 in Everett, Washington.



Years later, Paul liked to recall how he greeted Virginia when she came across the country for their wedding. Instead of waiting for her train to pull into Everett, Paul took a bus to Monroe and boarded the train there. He walked through the cars, searching for his bride's face. When he finally found her, Virginia was so surprised, she scarcely recognized him. The caring passion which began back then was a lasting part of their life together. Their marriage lasted for more than 66 years, until Virginia's death this past April. They had one son, Paul Lewis Jr.

Dr. Lewis was a pioneer in the field of orthodontics. He began studying orthodontics when many people didn't even know what it was. His career was a signal contribution to his profession and much of his work is still cited and used by orthodontists today. He was a frequent instructor in the Tweed Foundation courses in the 1930s, '40s and '50s. In 1948, he became a founding faculty member of the Department of Orthodontics at the University of Washington, where he taught and mentored students until 1985. He won many awards for his work, including the prestigious Ketcham Award, presented by the American Association of Orthodontists in 1986. He invented the Lewis bracket.

He had a passion for his work which came from his intellectual commitment and the satisfaction he got from helping his patients. He also found great satisfaction in the relationships he formed with his professional associates and partners. One partner, Dr. Robert Kemp, became like an adopted son to the Lewises and practiced orthodontics with Paul until Paul's retirement.

Paul was a quiet, gentle man with a sense of dignity and honor. He was well-known for his sense of humor. In fact, his orthodontic office became a clearinghouse for the latest jokes among his teenage patients. At the University, he would gently kid his colleagues and students, in a way which would always build them up, not tear them down.

Growing up in difficult circumstances gives some people a hard edge. That never happened to Paul. He was always a gentle, kind, caring person whom people would instinctively appreciate and trust. He will surely be missed.