

In Memory and Tribute to Prof. Daniel Laskin – 1924-2021, Academician Par Excellence and Hon. Editor-in-Chief of AMS

Prof. Daniel Laskin is a tall peer and doyen of maxillofacial surgery. The present generation of dentists and maxillofacial surgeons would have grown up in their professional career reading and studying his phenomenal works.

Prof Laskin was born in 1924 in New York City and grew up in Ellenville, New York, also called as the Borscht Belt. During his high school days, as Prof Laskin would reminisce later, he was more interested in athletics than studying. By the time

he got to the end of his junior high school, he realized the importance of academics, worked harder, such that he was accepted to the downtown campus of New York University. As a sportive 16 year old, he played basketball, baseball and soccer, and so he aspired to be a coach or a physical education teacher. His mother however wanted him to choose an alternative. In 1943, young Laskin offered to do a major in Physical Education and a minor in Business Administration; however, while at college, his mother intervened and registered him as a pre-med student. After graduation, he moved to Indiana University. There he was part of the Enlisted Reserves of War Activity, where students signed up to get



Figure 1: Prof. Daniel M Laskin receiving the “Distinguished Dental Editor Award” by ADA President-Elect, Jeffrey M Cole (left) and ADA President Joseph P Crowley (right)



Figure 2: The IAOMS established “The Daniel M. Laskin Legacy Society” to honour Prof. Laskin’s pioneering efforts, significant contributions and visionary leadership in Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery to support the next generation of OMS surgeons



Figure 3: Prof. Daniel Laskin receiving the “Lifetime Achievement Award” from Hon’ble Anil Gayan, Minister of Health, Republic of Mauritius in 2016. Also seen are Prof. Kenneth E. Salyer, Founding Chairman and Director, World Craniofacial Foundation (<https://worldcf.org/index.html>) and Dr. S.M. Balaji



Figure 4: University of Illinois Chicago, College of Dentistry establishes Prof. Daniel M. Laskin Faculty Fund in the Department of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery (OMFS), 2017



Figure 5: Prof. Daniel Laskin at Balaji Dental and Craniofacial Hospital along with Dr. Ramesh, Paediatric Anaesthesiologist and Dr. Preetha Balaji during the preconference surgical workshop at 10th World Cleft lip, Palate and Craniofacial congress



Figure 7: Prof. Daniel Laskin seen with Prof. S.M. Balaji at the 29th World Congress of the International College of Maxillofacial Surgery (ICMFS) held in Limassol, Cyprus, 2015

into the Armed Services, but were allowed to continue in school as long as their grades were good. Later, he applied to medical school, but he was not selected. A friend's father, a faculty at the medical school suggested dentistry. He readily applied and gained admission. In his second year, in 1945 he married his childhood sweetheart – a lifelong commitment. After completion, he joined the army and was selected to the course under the Army Specialized Training Program. After completion, he interned at the Jersey City Medical Center, later attended the Oral Surgery two-year master's program at the University of Illinois, Chicago and finished training at Cook County Hospital. Later, he was offered a teaching job at the College of Dentistry, University of Illinois where he spent the next 35 years of his life. Prof. Laskin succeeded Prof. Sarnat as Program Director and went on to advance the specialty. At one time, he was running the University of Illinois and Cook



Figure 6: Prof. Daniel Laskin at the Preconference surgical workshop conducted at Balaji Dental and Craniofacial Hospital, Chennai, at the 10th World Cleft Lip, Palate and Craniofacial Congress, held in Chennai, India, 2016



Figure 8: Prof. Daniel M. Laskin was honored with the "Distinguished Service Award" at the University of Illinois Chicago

County Hospital residency programs and had 22 residents. He then transferred to Medical College of Virginia at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) in 1984 where he continued to work as an educator, researcher and clinician till his last day. In 2002, he stepped down as Chair, but continued to be Professor Emeritus and affiliate faculty.

During his tenure as a student, intern, resident and young teacher, he was inspired by Prof. Dr. Bernard Sarnat, Prof. Adams. Prof. Milton Engel and Prof. Maynard Hine. It was Prof. Sarnat who inspired him to take up oral surgery seriously and embark on a path of innovation in connective tissue physiology, craniofacial growth, and temporomandibular joint (TMJ) pathology. Together with radiologist Prof. Seymour Yale, Prof. Laskin organized a TMJ Research Centre that was continuously funded for 23 years. The research collaboration yielded several landmark manuscripts that continued to be base research work for decades to come.

His legacy continued to grow over the years and he became synonymous with the Department of Oral & Maxillofacial Surgery, Virginia Commonwealth University. He was recently appointed a member of the VCU Health Honorary Medical Staff, recognizing his substantial contributions to the profession, his students, his colleagues, his community and to



Figure 9: Prof. Daniel Laskin at the World Heritage Town of Mahabalipuram near Chennai after the conclusion of the 10th World Cleft Lip, Palate and Craniofacial Congress. Also seen is Dr Aysegul M Tuzuner, Turkey and Dr. Roswitha Ritter, Frankfurt

the VCU Medical Center. Prof. Laskin was highly regarded within the specialty and will be remembered for his work along with his generosity in mentoring students and fellow surgeons. In 2012, in memory of his wife of 63 years, Mrs. Eve Pauline (Mohel) Laskin, he initiated a fund for students from an underrepresented population with a preference to a female dental student with excellent academic standing.

My personal interaction with Dan, as he liked to be addressed by friends, dates back to the early 2000s when I was doing TMJ research as part of my PhD. Over the course of time, there were numerous correspondences with him over the then nascent Indian Internet and email services. He was benevolent in teaching and refining my concepts, treatment methods and at times even surgical approaches. Our interactions grew more over the course of many conferences and workshops. I never missed any of his lectures and workshops. He was a friend, philosopher and guide.

When I started drafting my Textbook of Oral Surgery, I took a huge inspiration from this legend. I was thrilled to present him my version and experience as a textbook, for which he took a personal interest. He went through the book word by word and penned a letter with words of praise, critique and encouragement - all in one. Inspired by this, during the subsequent edition, addressing all concerns, I approached him for a foreword for the next edition. He was enthusiastic and cordially authored one for me. That letter is my prized possession thus far.

Throughout our interaction, he had been insistent upon upholding the highest surgical ethics – a virtue that made him organize and establish the Lectureship in Professional Ethics at Indiana University School of Dentistry in 2007 by way of his grant.

In late 2010, I approached him with a proposal to start a new journal for the specialty in this part of the world. He

encouraged me to take up the leadership while I wanted to work under him. At my insistence, he took up the post of Hon. Editor- In- Chief of the Annals of Maxillofacial Surgery and was magnanimous to pen its first, founding open editorial. He was in constant touch, providing guidance, occasional advice and encouragement, critique for certain research manuscripts and guided me through every process until last Thanksgiving eve. Over this decade, he slowly but steadily transferred his experience of 30 years as editor-in-chief of the Journal of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery to advance knowledge throughout the specialty and put it to best use for the Annals of Maxillofacial Surgery.

He also honoured me by being a keynote speaker at 10th World Cleft Lip, Palate & Craniofacial Congress that I organized in Chennai. At this meeting, he held centre-stage – he was surrounded by student-admirers, friends and long-time companions. He encouraged all of them, took photos with every one of the delegates and interacted with them.

Personally, with his passing, AMS and I have lost a great friend, well-wisher and source of inspiration. We will all miss him as an extraordinary human and OMS specialist.

May his force continue to live with us. His voluminous contributions with 900+ publications and 16 textbooks will guide us and continue to lead towards excellence. Our heartfelt condolences go out to his family and close friends.

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