

Guest Editorial

Sheldon Peck (1941-2021) *Secretary of the EHASO, 1995-2009*

William Northway



Figure 1: Dr. Sheldon Peck

When Sheldon Peck passed away on April 18, 2021, the world lost an incredible human being and the specialty of orthodontics lost one of its premier leaders. He was brilliant, empathetic, compassionate, generous and had an insatiable curiosity. He was a truly gifted and entertaining speaker who lectured extensively around the world. Sheldon was the perfect vessel for a fusion of science and art.

He was born in New York City to Max Pekarsky and Sylvia Specht on September 12, 1941, and the family moved to Durham, North Carolina when he was 3 years old. They opened Peck's Bakery which developed a reputation for being a respectable family-run

business with unique high-quality products, not the least of which was a rice-flour based bread. Sheldon spent his free time helping out in the bakery with his older brother Harvey. Sadly, their father died when Sheldon was just 13. Accordingly, he blazed through his studies and earned his undergraduate degree in 3 years. He also obtained his D.D.S. at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. From there he earned his M.Sc.D., as well as his Certificate of Advanced Graduate Studies (C.A.G.S.), in orthodontics, at the Boston University Medical Center with Herbert Margolis as his chair. He engaged in the private practice of orthodontics with his brother, Harvey, and taught orthodontics part-time at Boston University from 1968 to 1989. Subsequently, he served as a clinical professor of developmental biology at the Harvard University School of Dental Medicine, as well as being an assistant clinical professor. In more recent years, he served as an adjunct professor of orthodontics at the University of North Carolina. Over the duration of his career, he wrote or assisted in the publication of more than 100 scientific articles or chapters.

Sheldon often boasted of his good fortune, especially in terms of working relationships. Early in his career, while he partnered with brother Harvey in practice, they authored a series of papers that launched a meaningful exploration of the human face, especially as it applies to orthodontics, and then initiated the exploration of subjects such as tooth size, shape and proportions, culminating in meaningful examinations of the impact of extractions, and correlating that with the aging face, often doing so from an anthropological perspective. Regrettably, we lost Harvey in 1981, and nearly a decade passed with nary a publication from Sheldon.

In 1973, Sheldon attended the Third International Orthodontic Congress in London as a Congress speaker. There, he was introduced to Leena Kataja, a young orthodontist from Finland. Captivated by her sophistication and elegance, Sheldon invited Leena to attend the Congress banquet with him. Charmed by his wit and eloquence, Leena took Sheldon up on the offer. By the end of the night, they were completing each other's sentences. With this unforgettable introduction

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imprinted in their memories, Sheldon and Leena returned to their separate lives following the Congress. In serendipitous fashion, they met again in 1985 and, six months later, Leena and Sheldon were married in Boston. Eventually, they had two incredible children, Mark and Anya, and the family lived a cosmopolitan life between Europe and the USA that emphasized the importance of seeking knowledge and living with compassion.

With a new partner in his life, Sheldon re-entered the realm of orthodontic exploration. They practiced together but also studied and published on the subjects of facial asymmetry, soft tissue profiles, the gingival smile line, dental transposition and transmigration, palatally displaced canines, selected aspects of the art and science of facial esthetics, adequacy of arch widths, site specificity of dental development, heritable patterns, agenesis associated with aberrant displacement, genetics and anomalies. It is fun to imagine how much more progress could have been made if the genome had been more adequately unraveled earlier in Sheldon's realm.

More recently, perhaps because he sensed the end was coming, he really dug into the legacy of Edward Hartley Angle, the father of modern orthodontics. He assembled a nearly complete collection of Angle's writings (1887-1913) and edited a monumental four-volume publication on, not only Angle's correspondence, but his patents as well.

His educational degrees would paint him to be a dentist, orthodontist, scientist, educator, but deep inside we all knew him to be an artist. He was especially enamored by the works of Rembrandt. "Many can draw beautiful pictures," Sheldon used to say, "but only he could render a line with such drama and dead-on accuracy." Mention of Rembrandt's drawing of a line highlights Sheldon's firm grasp of the concept of nuance. When exploring a painting or drawing with you he would point out the progressive "haziness of the summer day, the stillness of the water, or the way in which every element contributed to the 'emotional context'". Just as Rembrandt would research the construction, vintage and design of the boats that he was revealing, Sheldon would do that in representing the nuances in life, just as he would when exploring the interplay that tooth size, shape and mass would have on the impact of facial profile, projection and the beauty of a face. And, by the way, he hated "upper first premolar extraction"!

The Pecks have been incredibly generous in so many ways. Together, Sheldon and Leena donated 163 rare books to the UNC Health Sciences Library to establish *The Sheldon Peck Collection on the History of Orthodontics and Dental Medicine*. Beyond that, they also established *The Sheldon Peck Rare Books*



Figure 2: Drs. Sheldon and Leena Peck

Fund for Orthodontics and Dental Medicine, hoping that the collection could continue to grow. The endowment thoughtfully allows for digitization of some of the rare volumes in the collection, making them available electronically to readers anywhere in the world.

Together they provided the Ackland Art Museum of the University of North Carolina with what is reported to have been the museum's largest gift in the form of art. Their donation, a much-loved collection of forty years' gathering, included 134 extraordinary 17th century depictions of mostly Dutch and Flemish master drawings, as well as seven remarkable sketches by Rembrandt and the funds for stewardship and curation. They are on a rotating display called "Focus on the Peck Collection". At the time of their donation, Leena and Sheldon commented that the visual discrimination skills that they cultivated in diagnosing and solving problems in clinical orthodontics helped them immeasurably in the hunt for and authentication of rare works by the European masters.

In 2005, the Pecks teamed up with Dr. Robert and Delores Isaacson to begin funding the Angle Heritage Campaign which would be invested by the E.H. Angle Education and Research Foundation, Inc. to assist ultimately in the perpetual publication of *The Angle Orthodontist*. Their benevolent initial funding stimulated the Angle Society membership to contribute to reaching the ultimate goal of \$2M. That goal was achieved this past year along with interest earned to bring the fund currently to \$2.2M under the management of treasurer, Dr. Phillip Campbell. The Angle Heritage Campaign has enabled the E.H. Angle Education and Research Foundation, Inc. to promote orthodontic education and research, as well as provide free online

access to *The Angle Orthodontist* and support other media for that purpose.

Especially aided by Leena's loving tutelage, Sheldon became completely enamored by Finland. Initially, they purchased a summer home in a small village outside of Helsinki. During the past 15 years, they rebuilt a Grande log cabin home on a beautiful parcel tucked into a hardwood forest with lakefront property and a 100-year-old sauna at the edge of the lake. Sheldon was proud that his son Mark engineered ultra-high technology into their home on a remote peninsula. It is equipped with a full-house generator system powered by a V8 Ford engine and a separate outbuilding to contain it. Independence! Everything that Sheldon ever did, however large or small, was done to perfection and with a view toward the future; that was Sheldon's way. As Gary Baughman, who with his wife Carol visited the Pecks, told me, "he had a grace about him that was compelling." Gary went on to say that "Sheldon excelled in the finest of detail and preparation" and "his knowledge of Father Angle was better than any other human I have met." Sheldon was intensely involved in so many of the facets of our society and how they have evolved that, "in many ways, his knowledge and detail would make you think that he was one of Angle's original students!"

Dr. Peck served as the Executive Secretary for the Edward H. Angle Society of Orthodontists for almost a quarter century. In his career, he received the Research Award from the Tweed Foundation, from the Angle Society, the Harvey Peck Award and the Distinguished Service Award by Angle East, the Hayden-Harris Award from the American Academy of the History of Dentistry, the Frederick Moynihan Award from the Massachusetts Association of Orthodontists, as well as the Merit Award by the Orthodontic Education and Research Foundation, and he has been

the Memorial Lecturer for Strang, Horowitz and the Angle Lectures for both the American Association of Orthodontists and the Angle Society. Most recently, he was awarded the Albert H. Ketcham Memorial Award, the highest award provided by the American Board of Orthodontists. In between all of those, it is said that he once found the time to take a breath.

Of his late brother, Harvey, Sheldon said: "The game of life was the pursuit of excellence; he brought to this pursuit an unbounded vision and enthusiasm. He was a scholar and a gentleman of rare quality, an inspiring man in whose company we felt better and became better." This must have been a heritable quality. As a fellow member of the Angle Society (Sheldon having been my sponsor), I have come to know many of his students, and I am yet to meet one who doesn't reference Sheldon as one of their very favorite teachers. I was always able to call Sheldon, and we would talk – mostly about teeth, but we could talk about anything. Like him, I lost my older brother, Bob, who was also an orthodontist, about the same time that Harvey passed. It never took more than a nanosecond for Shel to get on "your page". We published largely on the same subjects, and he always had the ability to advance me to a whole new horizon. I will miss that; and I will miss you, Brother - Forever.

This memorial could not have been written without the profound contributions of Anya and Mark Peck, as well as David Musich, Beth Barrett and the members mentioned above.

A tribute to Dr. Peck is also accessible on the Angle East website:

<https://angleeast.org/remembering-sheldon-peck/>

Dr. William Northway is a member of the Eastern Component of the Edward H Angle Society of Orthodontists.