Courageous & determined: Dr. Tilda Loew

This is one in a series of articles devoted to recognizing extraordinary individuals who overcame great adversity to practice dentistry.

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Heart pounding, nerves on edge, tension and pressure mounting... do you remember taking the dental practical examination for licensure? Everything you have been working for the past four years culminates in this practical test. Even though you have passed all the written and oral exams given to you for the past four years, everything depends on passing this practical exam now.

To practice the art of dentistry, to earn an income, to provide a living, to pay off debts incurred these past years, to feed your family, to pay the rent... all depends on this test. Compounding the strain are questions such as: Will the patients that you need to produce the specific restorations show up? Is the grading instructor going to be in a bad mood?

Now imagine taking this exam three different times at 10-year intervals, each time in a different country and each in a different language. This is what Dr. Tilda Loew had to do to continue to practice dentistry.

Living in Bulgaria and a mother of two, Loew dreamed of being a dentist. To achieve her dream, she attended dental school, passed the arduous practical exams and opened her own clinic. She continued her practice through Germany’s invasion of Bulgaria during World War II and afterward. Then the Russians had taken control of Bulgaria, executing political dissidents in the name of Communism.

Suddenly, Loew’s husband was arrested, accused and sentenced to death as a dissident. Loew walked 20 miles to the police station, stood tall (all five feet of her), shook her finger at the police officer and in a persuasive diatribe, earnestly convinced him that her husband was innocent. Incredibly, he was released on the spot.

Fleeing Bulgaria, Loew and her family found themselves in Israel. Not speaking the language, she immediately acquired a job as a dentist in a clinic and found living quarters for the family. She quickly learned Hebrew and passed the exhaustive and strenuous dental licensure examination once again so that she could practice dentistry privately.

Years passed and Loew’s children moved to England and then to America. She followed to be close to her children in the United States. Again, the yearning to be independent and practice dentistry beckoned. She not only learned English and attended dental classes, but she passed her licensure exams and opened a successful practice in Manhattan. She continued to take continuing education courses, always keeping abreast and up to date, even before regulations were enacted mandating this.

Loew has recently retired at the age of 90. Yet, she volunteers as she always did, to participate in the Great New York Dental Meeting (GNYDM), a meeting that consistently draws more than 50,000 people each year.

She also continues to take dental education courses to keep herself informed about her chosen passion. You can recognize her each year at the GNYDM; she is the one with the bright contagious smile.

Her daughter and son-in-law have represented the United States as ambassadors to Romania, and her son, Dr. Anton Loew, and his family have settled in New York as well. Recently, Dr. Tilda Loew was honored at an elaborate 90th year birthday party. People came from all over the world to celebrate with her. One could hear her conversing in several languages to numerous adoring people. It was quite a tribute for this remarkable woman.

Dr. Tilda Loew is a woman whose burning desire to practice dentistry overcame political burdens and language obstacles. She fiercely defied adversity to save her husband and practiced dentistry in three different countries. She is a brilliant and vibrant woman who felt privileged to have the opportunity to be a dentist and felt it a privilege to be allowed to take a dental licensure exam. She truly deserves our tribute and appreciation.