Portrait of a Professional

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Interview by Douglas Hom, DDS, PCSO Southern Region Editor

DOUGLAS HOM (DH):
Jim, where did you grow up?

JAMES LOOS (JL): I grew up in Los Angeles and did most all of the usual things boys did in those days. There was very little studying, but I was busy with baseball, Boy Scouts, and summer jobs with my father, who owned a gas station, automobile repair, and tire shop. My parents, thankfully, got me transferred into the Beverly Hills school system in junior high school, and that did help with study habits a little. The summer job became holidays and weekends as well, and helped me with learning to work with my hands and to work with the public.

DH: How did you get interested in orthodontics?

JL: My father’s best friend was a dentist who recommended Dr. Cecil Steiner as my orthodontist. Dr. Steiner’s office was two blocks from my high school, so it was a natural.

Steiner’s analysis for me was “Extract two upper bicuspids, stabilize the lower [yes, tip backs, and class III elastics as well], and then class II elastics while retracting the upper anterior teeth” for $900.

When Cecil found out that my high school was pressing students to establish a career path, he went to work on me to become an orthodontist. Once I decided to wear my elastics, the treatment went well, and thanks to Dr. Steiner, I was inspired and determined to become an orthodontist.

DH: Describe your dental/orthodontic education. What techniques were you taught, and who were some of your influential instructors?

JL: I attended predental, dental, and graduate orthodontics all at the University of Southern California (USC). Predental was a struggle for me to keep the grades up, and dental school was the old-fashioned way, starting in the Flatiron Building on Exposition Boulevard and then on to the “new” clinic on 34th Street.

We lived and breathed studying, carving teeth, cutting preps, practicing state boards with Rex Ingram, and learning from the other dental legends at USC. The US Army drafted me as a dentist, and I had to wait 2 years to apply to the USC orthodontic program. USC was my only orthodontic school application, but I had
DH: Tell us about your family.

JL: My wife, Sherry, and I enjoy our four grandchildren, ages 7 through 17, who live in Northern California. We visit our son, daughter, and grandchildren as often as possible and also travel to Lake Havasu City every month for a getaway and to visit Sherry’s parents. The grandchildren are wonderful, as expected, and have more Google hits to their name than we do.

DH: Where do you see the orthodontic profession going in the next 5 to 10 years?

JL: It is an exciting time to practice orthodontics and a challenging time for new graduates. The technology and information explosion have given us almost unlimited treatment options and capabilities. I can see the demand for treatment increasing when the economy improves, but some of the survival methods we have accepted may have irreversibly changed our specialty.
It seems as though the private practice may be slowly disappearing, and orthodontic treatment will be monopolized by large dental corporations and group practices. Options are few for recent graduates, and not many are able to purchase or start their own practice. The orthodontist as an employee may be our future, but I hope not. If we are to remain in control of our profession, an aggressive approach may be needed. Sage always felt that the orthodontist should own the group practice, should be excellent at creating an environment for quality dentistry, and should also have a built-in referral base for all dental specialties.

DH: What hobbies and outside interests do you enjoy?

JL: Actually, orthodontics is still my primary hobby, but I still have and enjoy fast boats, remote-control airplanes, and model trains. I did the Catalina Water Ski Race for 35 years as a boat driver, and it is still in my blood. Two years ago, I decided to retire as a racer and turn over the title of Oldest Driver to a friend of mine.

Sherry has always been very supportive, actually raced with me a few times, but opted out when the speeds got up over 90 mph.

Sherry and I have a business doing orthodontic quality assurance audits for dental plans. I work for her now, along with nine other retired or semiretired orthodontists. If an office in California sees HMO patients, Sherry sends one of the auditors every 2 to 3 years to perform a chart and facility review. It keeps us very busy, and as consultants we feel as though we are helping our profession.
DH: **What professional groups have you been active with?**

JL: When I owned my own practice, I was very active in organized dentistry. President of the local dental society, trustee with CDA for 6 years, and chairman of TDCIS for another 7 years all kept me very busy. I was editor for the COA Newsletter until it became solely Web based, and now that I see patients only a few days a month, I am enjoying more teaching, orthodontic meetings, and seminars.

DH: **Describe your interest and involvement with teaching.**

JL: Thirty-nine years ago (wow!), Dr. Sagehorn and I took on a teaching assignment at USC and also helped Dr. Dougherty with the Typodont course. With that experience, I was asked by Dr. Root to help with the Level Anchorage course and traveled with him all over the USA, France, Italy, and Japan. When Dr. Root stopped teaching, I was asked to conduct a summer course in Basic Orthodontics in Fukuoka, Japan, which lasted over 12 years. I have recently taught the Introductory Orthodontic course at the University of Southern Nevada and University of Nevada, Las Vegas, and I have continued to teach at USC.

Teaching has been one of the most rewarding aspects of my professional life, and I hope to continue as long as possible. The bright, enthusiastic students are a joy to help, and they keep me excited about orthodontics and prompt me to continue learning.

DH: **What advice do you have for young orthodontists who are just entering the profession?**

JL: I hope that new orthodontists maintain high treatment standards, make a point of continuing to learn, and pay back the profession with either teaching or financial support. Even in difficult financial times, we are especially blessed to be in our profession.

Looking back on your professional career, it is likely you will miss your patients and your staff the most, so be pleasant, generous, forgiving, and enjoy the moment. It goes too fast.

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OVERLOOKING AVALON, CATALINA ISLAND.