

FREDERIC E. MOHS

1910-2002

This is a story about the life of Fred Mohs. What I am going to tell you is based on my own observations, and what I was told over the 65 years that we were together. Only after I jotted down these memories, did I reread a 1983 short autobiography by my dad that was a reprint from the Journal of American Academy of Dermatology. When you leave here today, I will provide you with a copy of that short article, which is longer on science than what I will tell you. This talk is about what I remember. It is the story of an honest and good man, a ferocious and courageous worker - strong, fearless, and heroic. I have not one complaint or criticism of him. I am going to tell you about his last years and death first because these are not the images that I most want you to remember.

He died at the age of 92, seven years after the death of our mother by stroke in 1995. By the early 90s, Dad had already begun to fail mentally. He was nicer, more appreciative, and less intense. He was enjoying our mother's companionship and she was grateful for the time they spent together which had been so rare during their marriage. They had been reading the Sunday paper in the living room of their home on Lake Mendota when suddenly she slipped to the floor. Dad later told me, "I thought she was playing." He was nevertheless alert enough to realize she had had a stroke (her second), and call the village emergency number. The ambulance arrived almost immediately and rushed her to the University Hospital. Dad jumped into his aged Cadillac Fleetwood (every panel of which was dented) and followed the speeding ambulance down University Avenue to the hospital.

He went immediately to the Medical School Library and withdrew resources having to do with strokes. He was determined that he was going to save her. This was him: heroic, in command, and always determined to succeed. I remember that he was unhappy with the grim prognosis offered to him by neurosurgeons, whom he considered "students," and he explained to my brother and me that he had some theories which, if he could only achieve some cooperation around the hospital, had real promise. It did not matter that everyone else had agreed that there was no hope and that hydration and feeding should be terminated. Dad would have none of it.

Finally, Dr. Mitch Javid, the former chairman of the neurosurgery department, intervened. Mitch had worked with Dad in the early days of what was then known as "chemosurgery;" together they had performed joint surgery on patients' tumors that went deep into the brain, in sessions lasting over many days. Mitch was gentle, persuasive, and positive. Thankfully, he was also old enough and a good enough friend of Dad's that Dad was finally able to take his advice. After Mom's death, Dad's own condition declined more rapidly. He moved from homecare to an excellent residential facility, and finally a nursing facility. At his funeral in July 2002, Mitch Javid officiated with an ecumenical prayer. Dad's devoted former staff also attended, although not without some apologies because, as they said, Dad would not have wanted them to take time off work for a funeral; he believed their attention belonged with the living. There is no gravestone, Dad didn't believe in them. Only a small ground level bronze plate. Dad liked that idea. It didn't call attention to itself and mowing was more efficient.

HIS PEOPLE

My Dad's grandfather and his brother emigrated from Prussia, from the vicinity of Gdansk, with the great wave of 1848. They came immediately to Wisconsin and settled in Viroqua, which is in west-central Wisconsin, not too far from the Mississippi River. It was an agricultural community. Dad's grandfather ran a dry-goods store and became a popular local known as "Jolly Gus." He married Sophia Lynn, a beautiful and fine featured woman, in contrast to her square, stout husband.

Dad's father, Frederic Carl, was a slim, studious young man, who married Grace Tilton. The Tiltons had emigrated in 1640 from Yorkshire, England. My great-grandfather Tilton was a successful farmer and local politician.

Frederic Carl took his first job as the accountant for a creamery in Burlington, Wisconsin, which is south of Milwaukee. He and Grace had a happy, successful life. They built a home, and had three children, Carl (nine years older than Dad) and Ruth (seven years older), and Dad.

When Dad was three months old his father died of tuberculosis, and his mother went to work at the local blanket factory as a timekeeper. Dad was cared for by a neighbor woman whom he called "Aunty." Because Aunty had a family of her own and needed to return to her home to make dinner each night, Dad had to be left alone for about two hours every evening where he waited with his nose pressed against the window for his mother to walk up the street from the blanket factory. He was a latch-key child. There is no doubt that the loneliness of those early years had an effect on him -- though he was never the type to feel sorry for himself.

In 1918, the Burlington High School principal asked to talk with Grandmother about her eldest son Carl's future. He said Carl was very intelligent and should go to the University of Wisconsin. Grandmother's solution was to sell the house and move herself and her three children to Madison, Wisconsin where she rented an apartment on Conklin Court. For those of you who are familiar with Madison, it is a half a block south of University Avenue, between Lake Street and Murray Street. Grandmother found work, and not too long thereafter invested the money that she had received from the sale of the Burlington House into a one-half interest in a rooming house on Lake Street that she bought in partnership with Tilly Skulrude, a Norwegian maiden-lady whom she had met at the Conklin Court apartment house.

For most of these years, the family lived on the thin edge. During the depression, university students couldn't afford rooming houses, and Grandmother and Tilly often found themselves renting to families who had been evicted from their homes. Nevertheless these two women managed to run the rooming house for over 40 years and hold down full-time jobs. Tilly worked at the bandage factory at the Wisconsin General Hospital, and Grandmother worked as a practical nurse and restaurant cook. They spent their Saturdays doing laundry for their Lake Street boarders. No one's life was easy. The children worked hard, as well, at any job they could get. Dad worked as a delivery boy and a tender of boilers and furnaces in his neighborhood.

Dad met my mother at Madison High School. Her name was MaryEllen Reynolds, and her father was in the moving and millwright business. Her mother was an orphan who had immigrated as a teenager from Telemark, Norway. MaryEllen and her three sisters were beautiful and popular. She said she remembered Dad as being smart -- but definitely in need of a good scrubbing.

RADIO DAYS

This is where the great intellectual curiosity of Fred Mohs, for those of you who knew him, began to emerge. He played guard on the high school football team, although he was not really all that interested in athletics. What did interest him was radio, which was new at the time. He first became interested in 1922, when he would have been twelve. Later he associated with other young men who were ham radio operators. They operated their homemade sets using Morse Code. Dad didn't have the money for the parts for a really good transmitter, so he had to content himself with a "spark set" which he said you could hear through the air just about as far as it could transmit.

Some of Dad's happiest memories were playing with a slightly older boy who shared the same great fascination with radio. In almost every other respect, their lives were different. Reginald Jackson's father ran the Jackson Clinic. His grandfather, Breese Stevens, was a millionaire. As Reg was the family's only heir, his parents and grandfather lavished him with anything he wanted – which at that time was the best ham radio set that could be found. With Reg's materials and Dad's brains, the two boys set about building an outstanding radio operation in the loft above the Breese Stevens' barn in downtown Madison, including a tall mast on the roof to hold the antenna. You can still see the barn in the 400 block of North Carroll Street along with the Breese Stevens' mansion and the Jackson home.

Dad loved to tell about the time that he and Reg entered a contest to see who could raise the most responses from other countries using short-wave. Reg's mother made him go to bed at about 2:00 in the morning, but Dad, whose mother worked all night as a practical nurse, had no parental control – and he stayed up in the loft all night listening to the winning competitors. Early in the morning, he also received the broadcast announcing that Charles Lindbergh had taken off from New York in an attempt to fly the Atlantic. Dad already knew Lindbergh; he had been a friend of his brother Carl's and had come to the rooming house while Carl and he were engineering students at Wisconsin.

Another story that Dad like to tell was about the summer that Reg Jackson accompanied his mother and father on a grand tour of Europe. Reg had protested strongly at first, because he didn't want to stop all his tremendous plans for the radio with Dad. At last he agreed to go, on the condition that he would be allowed to take a large trunk containing his radio receiver and antenna equipment so that he could continue receiving transmissions at specified times from Madison. The captain of the Jacksons' trans-Atlantic ship agreed to stop the engines mid-crossing so that there would be no electrical interference while Reg received his messages from Dad.

At one stage of the tour, the Jackson family stopped at the Grand Hotel in Baden-Baden. Apparently Reg spent the entire time at the spa stringing antenna wire through the trees and balconies near the hotel, hoping to pick up more communications from home. This activity aroused suspicion from the German police who thought some kind of spy operation must be underway. Reg explained, and the police permitted him to leave his antenna in place. Shortly before Reg died, I visited him at the family's house on North Carroll Street and he proudly showed me a framed letter on Baden-Baden Hotel stationery on which was written in pencil: "Ms. Schubring doing fine. Ground broken on Methodist Hospital." The founding of the Methodist Hospital, later merged with Madison's Meriter Hospital, had been one of Reg's father's greatest endeavors and the older man had been very proud of this news -- and of his son for being able to receive the transmission. Dad, of course, was the sender.

This was the late 1920s and, in addition to working hard and pursuing his adventures as a radio ham, Dad also managed to explore society a little -- as usual, in his own way. His older brother Carl, who by now was on his way to becoming a successful engineer and real estate developer in Madison, was the ultimate big brother. He took Dad with him whenever possible in what were successively wonderful cars. Dad was eventually able to buy a car of his own, a Model T Roadster. From every account I have ever heard, the eminent Fred Mohs was an incorrigibly wild driver. When I say wild, I mean he drove his car up the steps of the State Capitol. Whenever he drove over to East Mifflin Street to pick up our mother for a date, he never just parked the car at the curb: he slammed the car into a spin in the middle of road in a great squeal of tires, which needless to say brought him great disapproval from his future father-in-law. There was an article in the local newspaper around this time describing how some students from the high school had driven all the way to Middleton, Wisconsin at high speed, with the driver using only his knees to steer. The driver was Dad.

Another time in high school, he took my mother to a dance along with another couple. After the dance, the foursome decided to visit Mom's family cottage on the other side of the lake. In those days of dirt roads, driving all that way at night was a pretty daring adventure. They reached the cottage, but on their way out the car got stuck in the mud and the four kids had to bunk back at the cottage for the entire night. The next morning they found a farmer who hitched up his horses and pulled the car out of the mud. Mom was grounded for a year after that, and when I mean a year, I mean twelve months.

Dad, of course, was not grounded -- and he continued to whip his car around, even as an adult. I remember how on Sundays, after family dinners, Dad would drive our Grandma and Tilly home to the boarding house. Grandma and Tilly would sit together in the backseat of Dad's Buick in their seal-skin coats, and Dad would drive down Lake Street, which was a highly cambered brick street with brick gutters, and suddenly throw the car into a drift, making a 180° turn and snuggling the car right into the curb going the opposite direction. Grandma and Tilly were so used to this maneuver they didn't even stop talking. They probably thought that this was how everybody parked their cars.

FRED MOHS, INVENTOR

Dad idolized two men in history above all others: Henry Ford, for his innovations with efficiency and introduction of the assembly line, and Thomas Edison, for being the consummate inventor. Dad wanted to be a doer and an innovator. He read all of the Horatio Alger books, like "Sam's Chance," that told the story of a poor office boy who through hard work and ingenuity became president of a big company.

Much later, in 1945, he would meet one of his idols. Our family was walking through Greenfield Village, near Detroit, when along came a black Ford with a chauffeur. Henry Ford himself was in the back. The car stopped and he extended a cadaverous white hand. Tom and I both shook hands with Henry Ford.

For most of his youth, as I've described, Dad had his heart set on being a radio engineer. At eighteen, he enrolled at the University of Wisconsin in the Engineering School. Then occurred one of those extraordinary accidents in a life that, one could say, changed the course of history. In order to fund his education, Dad found a job as an hourly worker in the University Biology Department. His duties there were to feed the animals, clean the cages, and do any other tasks required during those evening hours. Because the lab animals needed continual attention, caring for them was a seven-day-a-week job. Dad became a ubiquitous presence in the labs, and he was soon noticed by Dr. Michael F. Guyer, the hard-working chairman of the Biology Department. Dad, ever curious, showed an interest in how the lab worked, and Dr. Guyer explained to him that the rats that Dad was taking care of had cancers, which they had learned to induce in the rats. Guyer himself was excising cancers from rats and preparing slides for

microscopic examination. He showed Dad how this was done and eventually taught Dad make slides himself. It was during those early evenings with Guyer that the idea of what has since become “Mohs Surgery” began to take shape in Dad’s mind. Now, at this point, you will hear a lawyer and real estate developer discuss your discipline, so bear with me.

Although Dad had taken biology in high school, he had no particular interest in the field until then. But Dr. Guyer inspired him during those evenings at Birge Hall, and explained the challenges involved in treating skin cancer. Guyer explained to him cancer cells can escape and metastasize. Together, they discussed different possibilities for treatment such as using chemicals to kill cancer.

It was during this period that Dad envisioned a sequence of treatment that would begin with a chemical application to kill the cancer, followed by a process of examining the excised dead tissue layer after layer, following or tracking the cancer until it was eliminated. The description of those early days in the 1983 reprint sets out a more thorough and accurate description, but for some inexplicable reason leaves out the rat-cage cleaning aspect. Dr. Guyer encouraged Dad to pursue this line of inquiry and gave him his full support, including the provision of rats and mice on which to work. Dad was fascinated, but also torn, because he still hadn’t given up his dream to become a radio engineer.

His big brother Carl helped him reason through the choice. Carl was impressed with what Dad was trying to do with Guyer. He urged Dad to switch majors from engineering to medical school. Dad agreed, reluctantly at first, but, as his work at the lab progressed, he became more enthusiastic and more engrossed in his research. You must remember that this was happening when he was still only 19 years old. Dad earned his Bachelor’s Degree in three years which allowed him to not only enter Medical School but continue his project at the lab.

Another stroke of luck at this time came from a different quarter entirely. One of Grandmother’s brothers from Viroqua was Uncle Will Tilton. Uncle Will owned a gravel pit and was what my mother described as a “blow-hard” and “four-flusher.” He had purchased what was supposed to be a skin disease cure from an Indian, and brought it down to Madison so Dad could analyze it and tell him what was in it and why it worked. It turned out that the paste was, I believe, antimony suspended in sumac milk. Dad analyzed it and found that the antimony did indeed kill tissue and that the antimony, unlike acid or other materials which he had already tested, killed the tissue without destroying its cellular structure. For a better discussion, refer to the 1983 biography.

Uncle Will wanted to patent the formula and make a fortune. Dad had Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation patent the process, and gave it to the world. Uncle Will begged Dad to go into business with him, curing cancers with the black paste that he had provided. Dad turned him down, and Uncle Will went into business for himself. He was eventually convicted of practicing medicine without a license and spent time in the penitentiary at Waupun. This is another part of the family lore that Dad apparently didn’t feel was necessary to include in the 1983 piece.

After a medical residency in Portland, Oregon, Dad and Mother returned to Madison where he began his work at the McArdle Institute, which was brand new at the time. He had a first-rate lab and animal subjects. His project was the first to be financed by the Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation, which was then earning revenue from royalties on Vitamin D patents. The foundation paid Dad \$500 a month. Tom Brittingham, President of the WARF and one of the WARF founders, brought him his check each month and followed up on his experiments.

Wisconsin was an agricultural state with northern European farmers who were subjected to plenty of sunshine. Many farmers had cancers on their lips, noses, and ears that simply went untreated. For those who did make it to a doctor, the results were often a grotesque gamble. Surgeons treating skin cancers at

that time tended to remove substantial amounts of peripheral tissue along with the visible tumor, simply to make sure that they had got it all – or rather, hoping that they had.

What was soon to become Mohs Surgery was not going to be welcome by this establishment.

FIRST PATIENTS AND FAME

By 1936, Dad was ready to try his technique on human subjects. He was 26 years old. Because the technique was experimental and there was great concern about actually cutting into cancers, most of his first patients were people who would never have obtained medical treatment on their own or otherwise: They were inmates from the State Prison at Waupun or patients from the Mendota Mental Health Hospital across the lake.

In 1941, Dad had his first brush with fame. As the first research project financed by the newly created Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation, his progress was already a topic of conversation among a small number of moneyed alumni. Then somehow or other, a reporter from The Wisconsin State Journal heard about this young doctor's promising new technique and paid a call on Dad to ask him how it worked. Dad willingly went into the details of his research and his first human trials. The reporter returned with a photographer who took a famous picture of Dad looking through his microscope. The Wisconsin State Journal's headline blared: "Cancer Cure Discovered," with a large picture of Dad looking through the microscope. Dad, who was totally unaccustomed to any type of publicity, was thrust into the limelight. And there were some people in the community who did not appreciate it.

Local surgeons who had been treating cancer using the conventional methods reacted negatively. Some called it "black magic" because of the black paste that was used in those early days, or referred to it as "picking at cancer." The Dane County Medical Association even initiated proceedings aimed at revoking Dad's medical license; and were only deterred when Dr. Middleton, Dean of the University of Wisconsin Medical School, threatened to resign if the local surgeons persisted. Soon after, Dad attended a lunch at the Lorraine Hotel where the surgeons told him he had better take care in future when talking with the press, because his treatment was still experimental.

Then an event occurred that changed everything. Dr Abe Quisling, son of the founder of the Quisling Clinic in Madison, had developed a cancer of the neck that was the size of a small lemon. I know this because a model of the tumor was made of lead and painted various colors for Dad to use as a training aide. The Quislings were famous doctors in a community that had a large Norwegian immigrant population. The Quisling family took Abe everywhere to see what could be done about the tumor, including to the Mayo Clinic. The universal consensus was that they should use morphine to keep Abe comfortable, but that there was no hope of curing a cancer of that type.

The senior Dr. Quisling had heard about Dad's experiments and early successes with patients from the prison or Mendota. He asked Dad to try his technique on Abe. Dad successfully treated Abe's tumor and gained the prominent Quisling medical family as advocates for his procedure. Nevertheless, doubters and critics were still in the majority.

All of this happened when our family house on University Bay Drive was being built. On a Sunday Dad was varnishing the woodwork himself in order to save money -- when a huge Packard rolled up in front of the yet unfinished house. A resplendent senior Dr. Quisling walked in and announced, "Fred, put down that brush. I am finishing this house for you."

Parenthetically, sometime in the '70s, a "60 Minutes" program on what was still called "Chemosurgery" was developed for a 30-minute segment on national TV. The lead model of Abe

Quisling's tumor was used in the program. At the end, the program's narrator stepped forth to attest to the significance of the now well accepted procedure and held up the tumor model. It was Abe Quisling himself, who announced, "that patient was me."

FIRST MEMORIES

My first memory of Dad was when I was standing in my crib in our second floor apartment on Orchard Street, watching him get into the '35 Ford Coupe. The drive to the Wisconsin General Hospital where he worked and adjacent McArdle research lab was ten blocks. My next memories were of the excavation and construction of our house on University Bay Drive, and the house next door. I remember in particular watching the basements being excavated with a horse-drawn scoop.

From that point on, with the exception of Christmas, Thanksgiving, the 4th of July and our Sunday dinners, most of my daily memories were of Dad mowing the lawn, trimming the bushes, shoveling snow, washing the car and mostly being at the hospital.

Dad's schedule was regular as clockwork. He would be out of the driveway at eight, and return at a quarter to six. We would sit down to dinner in our kitchen at 6:00. At about 6:15 Dad would get up, quickly peruse the newspaper and lie down on the living room sofa for a snooze. At around 6:45 he would get up and return to the hospital. Sundays were for working around the house. But after dinner, it was back to the hospital.

As was the custom in those days, people would drop in for weekend visits. Dad would sit with the guests for about 15 minutes and then drift off to his study, or actually get in the car and go back to the hospital. He just wasn't interested in visiting with people, unless it was another scientist who had something profound on his mind.

THE PRESENTER

In 1942 Dad bought what would have been one of the last Fords built before civilian production ceased for World War II. It had a painted grill because chromium was already being rationed. He was invited to give a paper at a surgical convention in White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia and decided to take the family. We drove there in the Ford. We didn't stay at the big hotel, but rented a little cabin nearby.

In May of 1945 a number of speeches had been arranged for him and we went by train to Washington D.C., Philadelphia, New York City, and Pittsburg. The trains were packed with soldiers and sailors, often sleeping in the isles. Pennsylvania Station was mobbed. The U-boat threat had ended and the lights of Broadway were back on. A German sub had been captured in the South Atlantic and brought to Times Square as part of a war bond promotion. Dad bought three \$25 war bonds and we climbed the wooden staircase up to the conning tower. A man with a microphone took our names and we heard them broadcast out over the throngs of soldiers and sailors that filled Times Square. Tom and I were so proud of our Dad we could have burst. Afterwards, we toured the captured sub.

Dad was gaining experience as a speaker, although he worried a little bit about presenting in front of large groups. In 1946 he spoke in Houston and New Orleans. We drove there from Madison in our new 1946 Buick Roadmaster. We were still living in the little house, but we had one heck of a car. We loved it when we would stop at a filling station and the attendant would raise the hood. Often he would say, "Boy that's a real engine" referring to the majestic straight-8 with writing on it that said "Fireball 8," with a picture of a fireball. In those days they always opened the hood, and Tom and I were always there to hear what the filling station man had to say about our motor.

In 1948 we drove across the country to San Francisco and took the S.S. Lurline to Hawaii. Wayne Wong, one of Dad's early trainees, was our host. Harry Bridges, the powerful head of the Longshoreman's Union, called a strike and we were stuck in Hawaii. We eventually came back to San Francisco on a Pan Am Stratocruiser, with two stories.

I am not exactly sure when Dad started to train other doctors in the procedure, but beginning sometime after World War II there was a steady stream of people who worked side-by-side with him. Perry Robins is one that I remember.

Speaking of Perry Robins, a meeting of the American College of Mohs Surgeons took place in Madison on the 50th Anniversary of his first human patient. By this time, Dad was in deep decline and we were very worried about having him attend the big dinner that was to be held at the Madison Club. My wife, Mary, and I got Dad dressed up in his best suit and took him to the club with some misgivings. On the sidewalk, before entering the Madison Club, Dad noticed a man and said, "I know you." It was Perry. That was the last social conversation Dad had.

BROADENED HORIZONS

Up to this point, I have described a super-industrious, courageous man of science. Even though work consumed him more than anyone I have ever known, he occasionally tried to break out of his routine, though always with seriousness. One year he joined the Geology Club. The club was headed by Professor Bean, chairman of the UW Geology Department. From time to time, the club would make expeditions to the driftless area, the terminal moraine west of Madison, where the great glacier stopped. This is a very interesting geological area and old Professor Bean would lead a trail of cars to various sites and then would spryly prance up the boulders to explain some important feature. We would usually put Grandma and Tilly in the backseat, with either Tom or me, and mother and the other one of us would sit in the front seat. Once at the study site, Grandma, Tilly and Mom would stay in the car while Dad, Tom and I would climb the rocks and listen to Professor Bean.

Dad's relationship with religion was less straightforward. As mentioned before, Dad had a sister, Ruth, whom he adored. Ruth had been attending high school in Madison and in either 1917 or 1918 she contracted the Spanish Flu. She became very ill, and Dad, who would have been around 7 years old, stayed up all night praying that she would live. In the morning, when he found that she had died, he was utterly broken-hearted. His despair and anger hardened completely, and he concluded that there was no god at all.

He only wavered in this conviction once, as far as I know. He decided that our family would attend the Unitarian Church, which, for those of you familiar with Madison, was at that time a darling little stone church on the corner of Wisconsin Avenue and East Dayton Street where the parking ramp for Manchester Place now exists. The congregation was composed almost entirely of University people, one of the most prominent of whom was Harold Groves. Dad enjoyed the company of the eminent professors who belonged to the church, probably having reached the conclusion that his single-minded focus on his work had made him a little narrow.

Tom and I attended the Sunday school for two years. Because I was very big for my age, I was chosen to pump the organ with a huge lever. When the choir was about to sing, one of the choir members would come to the Sunday school and say, "it is time for Fred now." During the entire time I attended Sunday school, I don't believe I ever heard the word "Jesus." Our teacher, Mrs. Talliopharo, was very interested in Pearl S. Buck and China. We learned a great deal about The Good Earth, growing rice and many other things about China, and absolutely nothing about religion. That was typical of the Unitarian Church at that time.

The church grew in popularity and the congregation was getting too crowded for its darling but very tiny church. Dad joined the committee to investigate building a new church, and was made chairman of the building committee, likely because his brother Carl was an engineer and building contractor. Except for being president of the Dane County Medical Association, and president of the Madison Technical Club in 1980, the chairmanship of the building committee was the only outside position he ever held.

Planning for the Unitarian Church began in the late 1940s, and a site was finally selected near the current University Hospitals location, which was only four blocks from our house. Dad and some of the other members favored hiring Frank Lloyd Wright to do the job. Frank Lloyd Wright was despised by many business people in Madison because he never paid his bills, but that didn't bother the professors.

Dad and the building committee met with Wright on a series of design conferences for the church. Our family would drive up to Taliesin in Spring Green, as usual with Grandma and Tilly accompanying us in the Buick. I remember hearing the committee members worry that this was all going to cost too much, but Wright told them that he would be as economical as possible and would meet their budget. Eventually the church was built and cost eight times Wright's budget. It almost bankrupted the members. But Dad was mesmerized by the design process and was stirred by the artistic aspects of the project. Eventually, of course, Wright's Unitarian church became world famous and is still a draw for visitors. But Dad dropped out of the church almost immediately after it was built. I remember the moment.

I was standing with Dad in front of the church in the gravel parking lot, with Groves and some of the other professors. Their conversation had to do with a complaint that the Republicans were much too critical of communism. To begin with, Dad was a Republican, because his brother was a Republican and everyone on both sides of the family was a Republican. Dad was quietly listening as usual, but ventured that, "I heard that Stalin starved millions of his people in the Ukraine just in order to have money for one of his plans. How can that be a good system?" Groves put his arm around Dad's shoulders and said, "Fred, you have to understand, sometimes there has to be sacrifice in order to make progress." Dad said, "You mean murdering your own people? You guys are nuts!" And with that eloquent statement, he bolted for the Buick. I didn't even get the door shut before he spun out of the parking lot spewing gravel all over the place and almost losing me in the turmoil. We never went back.

The experience of building the church whetted Dad's appetite for construction and after examining a number of sites, he settled on an undeveloped parcel on Lake Mendota in Shorewood Hills, just a block away from his brother Carl's towered stone house. Carl's wife Doris was an architect. Together they worked out a Frank Lloyd Wright-type design for a house on the new lot. The lakefront lot cost \$100 a front foot. Dad only wanted to spend \$7,500 on the lakefront lot which required a relatively narrow design. Dad decided to use one of his brother's old trucks to drive down to Burlington in order to pick up stone that had been quarried there. I am not sure if it was to save money or to be involved. I was 12 years old and big for my age. I helped Dad carry and stack stones at the house. Tom did what he could, but the stones were very heavy. In the 1990s, after Dad vacated the house, it was sold to the adjoining neighbors who eventually tore it down to give themselves wider side yards. Fortunately by this time Dad was beyond understanding what was happening because it would have disappointed him terribly to see his artwork destroyed.

THE PARENT

As one of my older cousins observed, “you and Tom weren’t raised, you were just turned loose.” It was true. We were left to roam with little supervision. Tom had a rowboat and we thoroughly explored Lake Mendota. Dad let me drive the family Buick to the skating rink when I was in 6th grade. Nobody said anything when I bought a ’36 Ford when I was 14, and drove it to junior high. The police knew I was doing it and they didn’t even say anything. When I was 16, I announced I was going to buy a motorcycle and take it Europe. In 1964, having just turned 17, I took my junior year exams three weeks early and, together with my 1948 Indian Scout, equipped with a rack for luggage and a sleeping bag, sailed for Holland. After visiting ten countries on the continent and Great Britain, I came back -- after my senior year in high school had already begun. Nobody seemed to mind. Where did all of this freedom come from? The only limit placed on my brother and me seemed to be that a person should earn their own money, be honest, and never destroy property. After that, anything went.

There is no question that Dad himself set that tradition. In high school, Dad’s best friend was Maury Hammer. Dad often told us how, as teenagers, they rode a freight-train from Madison all the way to New York City. In the ‘20s, open boxcars were much more available than they are today. The boys arrived somewhere in Brooklyn, but then didn’t know how to reach their objective -- which was the Great White Way. They found a policeman and asked him where they could find the Great White Way. He replied, “You don’t want to go to the Great White Way. You’re looking for ‘tomatoes’!” Dad and Maury didn’t know what “tomatoes” were, but finally they got the drift that they were girls. They persisted, but the cop never told them where the Great White Way was. Eventually they found help elsewhere and made their way to Times Square. As far as I know, that is about all they did in New York City, except for figure out how to get home. Nobody seemed to worry. My mother later observed to me on a number of occasions, “Your father didn’t have a father, and because of that, he doesn’t know how to be one himself.” I am not sure that she was right. We turned out pretty much to be the kind of men that Dad would approve of. We were honest, worked hard, and didn’t destroy property. Dad didn’t know what allowances were either. You got money for working, not existing.

Dad could succeed with his light touch because we were totally in awe of him. We always considered him to be the smartest, bravest, most courageous person that we knew. We were sure that he was by far the best father that there could be. When our family went with him on speaking trips, he would always find the time to teach us something along the way. One of the first lessons we learned was to explore the hotel for the fire exits. Dad told us stories about hotel fires and careless people who had not taken the time to acquaint themselves with the fire exits. He took us on walks through tough neighborhoods, so that we could “see how the other half lived.” We would walk through bars with sawdust on the floor that smelled like spilled beer and cigar smoke. He would point out the “down-and-outers” and skid row types. He showed us flophouses, I believe with the intent that these were not places that one should stay at. In that case, it didn’t work out all that well because when Tom and I went on our railroad adventures we ended up staying in 50¢ a night racks because we actually knew what they were.

When we were on these adventures with Dad, Tom and I always hoped that some bad guys would try to hurt us so we could watch our Dad kill them, which we were sure he could do. We really did believe he was the strongest and most fierce father alive. We used to look at other kid’s dads and think how pathetic they seemed, compared to ours. I would watch people look at him and was sure they were admiring him and envying me because he was mine, and they didn’t have a father nearly as good.

Dad always encouraged us in our education, in spite of the fact that neither Tom nor I was as smart as he was. Our mother usually signed our report cards because Dad was a little scary, and we were sure that what we were doing wasn’t nearly as well as he had done at the same stage of his life. One time, however, my mother wasn’t around and Tom took his report card into Dad who was busy writing one of

his books. Dad took the report card, signed it and gave it back to Tom. Tom asked him, “Aren’t you even going to look at it?” Dad said, “No. It is your life and if you screw it up, it is your own fault.”

HIS BOOKS

Based on his meticulous records, Dad had written a number of articles on his topic and eventually decided to write a major book on the technique. This was a monumental task for someone who already had a tremendously full schedule. When he came home from work he would put in long hours at his study, sometime working until 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning. Occasionally, he would pull an all-nighter working straight through the weekend, putting together his subjects and the slides that he intended to use in order to demonstrate his points. He was also an accomplished grammarian. He was determined to having his manuscripts completely free of any type of error, and he was proud of the final result. He also had his thoughts about correct language, which began with his criticism of President Eisenhower over his mispronunciation of “nuclear”. Another irritant was the growing adoption of the word “utilize” as opposed to “use.” And there was no end to his disappointment with a society that had basically abandoned the word “effect” in favor of “impact.” You know, cause and impact? Impactful? Civilization in decline!

TRAVELER AND PEACEMAKER

In 1957 Tom and I went with Dad on a seven week tour of European capitals where he gave his talk at many important venues, including London, Paris, Bonn Germany, and Stockholm Sweden. Except for my 1954 trip, this was the only time that Tom and I missed a summer of work. We had a grand time. We were able to get to know our father on a totally different level. He bought a Volkswagen Convertible and took us to fabulous restaurants. He was enthusiastic about the art museums that we visited. And we were so proud of the respect that his hosts showed him, and the enthusiasm with which he was received. This was at the height of the Cold War, and during those years Dad became even more passionate about world peace.

In 1959 Dad obtained an invitation to demonstrate his technique in Moscow and he accepted, becoming one of the only people we knew who had travelled to Russia. In what appeared at the time to be a rather naive approach to world politics, Dad would say he “just couldn’t see why we can’t all get along.” Having already made his 1957 trip to European capitals, he now planned a much more extensive program. He decided to spend and give extensive training to the doctors and nurses in Moscow. To do this properly, he decided he would need to learn to speak Russian. As I pointed out before, he was a very busy and overcommitted person, and to take the time to learn Russian was almost incredible, but he committed himself to doing it right. He wanted to show the Russian surgeons and medical community that he was glad to be there and to give them his respect.

After his return, Russian doctors came to Madison to visit him and to study further. The goodwill shown by Dad and others like him helped the two countries turn the corner on what many felt was a path to nuclear holocaust.

One of the Russian doctors who visited was very tall, probably 6’4” with a mane of white hair. He was a prince, but was allowed to survive because of his medical expertise. He was enjoying his trip to the States immensely and with the help of an interpreter enthusiastically engaged Dad partially on medical subjects, but also on the prince’s observations on world affairs.

Dad returned from Russia by way of Paris where he met Mary and me. We were on our honeymoon. We met Dad at the Hotel Du Mont Blanc on Rue Huchette, on the left bank. Flowers for Mary were waiting in our room. Dad was exhilarated. That night we went to the Ritz for dinner, then on to the late show at the Lido, and from there to Montmartre, where we closed up a nightclub at about 4:00

in the morning. We went from there to Les Halles for onion soup and arrived back at the hotel in full daylight. The next night was Maxime's. We were there for four glorious days, with Dad and I taking turns dancing with Mary, and celebrating Dad's Russian triumph, even though he wouldn't have put it that way.

THE "CREW"

Those of you who trained with Dad will remember the Crew. Rachael Caruso, RN, his nurse; Bob Patnaude, his assistant; Mary Smith, Technician; and Mary Jane Ellickson, his manager and secretary were with him almost all of the way. They were a part of the assembly line--one preparing, one operating, one dressing, and then back to the start. Sections of tissue were constantly being prepared and examined. Everything was fine-tuned with Henry-Ford-type efficiency and was self-contained. Often this set-up foreclosed the possibility of lunch, which didn't seem to bother Dad or, surprisingly, anyone else that worked for him. They saw his purpose and accepted his logic, and they adapted.

Leaders in the UW Surgery Department participated in a formula for sharing earnings. Dad never joined. He made it clear that he didn't want to subsidize lazy doctors, or "politicians." I still remember the time he unflatteringly dismissed another doctor for being the type that "goes down to the cafeteria and drinks coffee." Unthinkable! He was widely respected at the hospital, certainly; but a nomination for the Nobel Prize in Medicine wasn't going to be forthcoming from the UW Surgery Department.

GIVING UP THE REINS

Dad would never discuss the topic of retirement, but little by little he had to start to face reality. At one point in the '80s, he was asked to give a major talk in New Orleans. I think the occasion was his having received the Gruber Award. He traveled to New Orleans and was taken to dinner at a restaurant in the Garden District that featured barbecued shrimp. There was a mishap, and a tray of the specialty ended up on Dad's shoulder. He only had one suit and so the next morning he headed off to the nearest dry-cleaner. It turned out to be in a subsidized housing project. The cab driver insisted on waiting because the neighborhood wasn't safe. Dad assumed that the driver just hoped to keep the meter running, and sent him off. He walked into the dry cleaning shop and left off his coat. No sooner had he walked out the door than he was slugged from behind, his pocket sliced with a razor, and his money stolen. His glasses were broken, and his face bruised and bleeding. The police came, and the shop did the best they could with the soiled jacket, and Dad made it back to the hotel. He had no spare clothing and so with his trousers taped together and his glasses askew, that evening he gamely gave his talk. He later claimed that he thought the blow to the head that he received caused his myasthenia gravis, and how he handled that disability tells you something about him.

Because his muscles were weakened by the condition, he could no longer keep his eyes focused straight ahead. His heavy eyebrows had begun to sag down, nearly closing his eyes. His first solution was to obtain glasses that incorporated a series of prisms which redirected his vision back to normal. On the spur of a moment, he then approached a resident in the surgery department and instructed him on how to remove substantial amounts of tissue above his eyebrows in order to solve the eyebrow problem. That evening he walked into the kitchen with his forehead all taped up, and our mother waited for him to explain what happened. Eventually he gave her his usual minimal explanation.

Dad began to relax a little around this time, and become more tolerant, and he started turning over the reins to the very capable hands of Steve Snow, Paul Larson, and others. Dad began to take a deeper satisfaction in all of the people that he trained, and those that were trained at other centers.

He also knew that he was slipping into another world with what he called “my trouble,” but he was at peace, which by his standards would have meant a job well done, progress made, a future in the hands of committed and skilled surgeons and creative researchers who were and are not only helping humanity, but improving upon his great life’s work.

During Dad’s last days, a family member took the family photo albums to his room in the hopes that they might spark some response or memory. Unfortunately, at the end an employee of the nursing home discarded all of the books, which were predominantly contact prints taken throughout my parent’s lives. I have included some photos that were not a part of those albums in a small booklet containing the text of my remarks here and his 1983 autobiographical piece which you can pick up as you leave the auditorium. In his early life Dad probably wouldn’t have approved of this much focus on something that didn’t have to do with progress, but I think in later life he would have thought what I have told you today would be okay.



Frederic E. Mohs, MD (center)
Pictured with his mother, Grace Mohs (left)
and nurse, Auntie Burlington (right)
1914



Mary Ellen Mohs



Frederic E. Mohs, MD



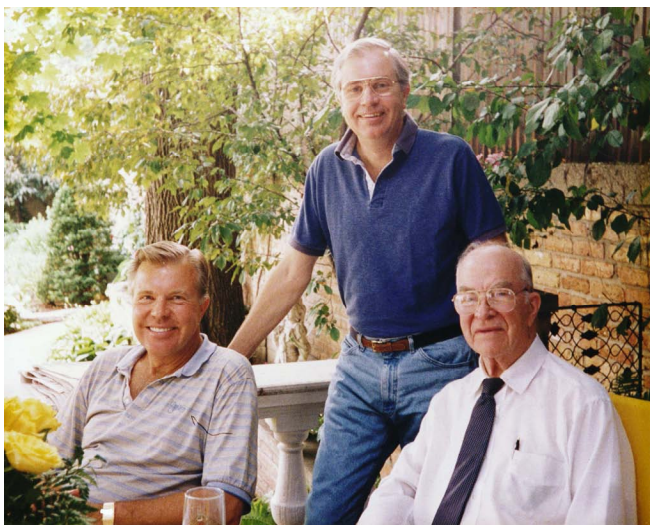
The Mohs family in front of the family house (1949)
(left to right) Mary Ellen Mohs, Max (dog), Fred Mohs, Sr., Jane Mohs,
Fred Mohs, Jr., Tom Mohs



August 1959, Maxime's, Paris
Fred Mohs, Sr., Mary Mohs, Fred Mohs, Jr.



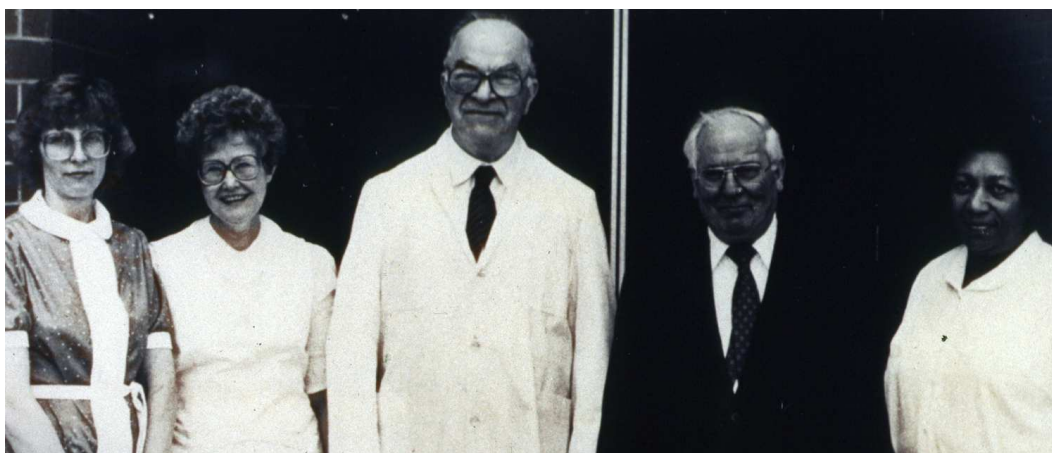
August 1959, the Lido, Paris
Fred Mohs, Sr., Mary Mohs, Fred Mohs, Jr.



Fred Mohs, Jr., Tom Mohs, Fred Mohs, Sr.
1987



Armand Hammer (left) and Fred Mohs, MD (right)



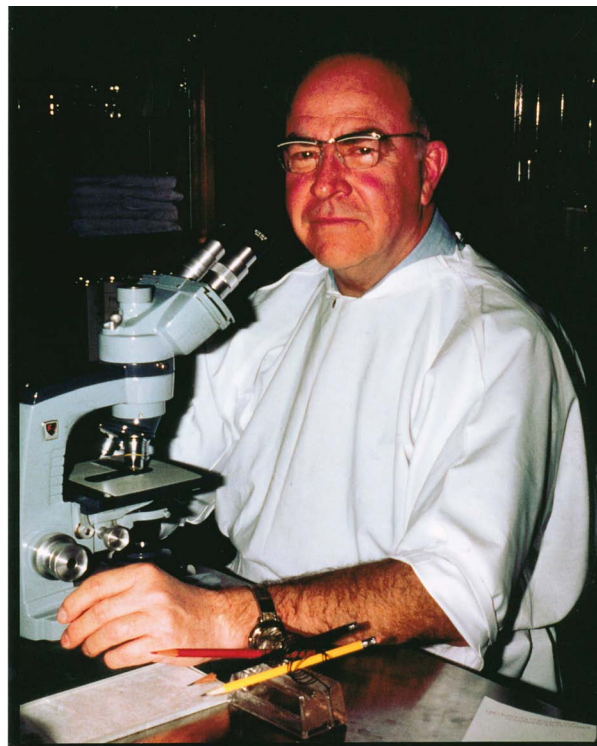
Dr. Fred Mohs & staff
(Left to right) Mary Jane Ellickson, Mary Alice Smith, Dr. Mohs, and Rachel Caruso



Fred and Mary Mohs



Fred Mohs, Sr. and Fred Mohs, Jr.



Frederic E. Mohs, MD