

The author (standing) poses with Dr. Esther Wilkins, Tina Potemken, and Lynn Blatzheim.



Tribute to Dr. Wilkins

The grand matriarch is a treasure!

by Dianne Glasscoe Watterson, RDH, BS, MBA

My schedule changed at the last minute, making it possible for me to attend a lecture on clinical dental hygiene presented by none other than two renowned and beloved icons to dental hygienists everywhere — Esther Wilkins, BS, RDH, DMD, and Anna Pattison, RDH, MS. Dr. Wilkins has just completed the 10th edition of the dental hygiene textbook used throughout the United States. Pattison is an international lecturer and the co-author of *Periodontal Instrumentation*, a text used in dental hygiene schools nationwide, and is an associate professor in the USC School of Dentistry.

It is difficult for me to put into words the deep admiration and respect I have for Dr. Wilkins. Her textbook (I have the dark blue one) guided me through hygiene school and became my primary roadmap in learning how to become a dental hygienist. Down through the years, we have crossed paths numerous times at dental meetings. I was first personally introduced to Esther many years ago when I spoke for the Massachusetts Dental Hygienists' Association. I was so honored to be seated next to her at dinner. After we were introduced, she told me that she always reads my columns in *RDH* and that I was doing a great service to dental hygienists by addressing their real-life work issues. I'm sure I blushed! To be complimented by the author of my primary

source of education in dental hygiene was the supreme compliment to me!

Some time later, we were together for a weekend when Dentsply honored Esther and me along with four more dental professionals as "Distinguished Dental Professionals." How great it was for me to get to know her on a more personal level. It was there that I learned we shared a common tragedy — we had both been widowed.

Over the years, I have sought Esther's wise counsel on matters related to issues in my own professional life. She has always made time for me and gave an understanding ear. When I finished my MBA and wrote my Capstone Thesis on "Magnification in the Dental Industry," she asked to proofread my final paper and made some

editing suggestions that brought clarity to my writing.

This past Saturday, as I sat in her audience of approximately 300 people, I was deeply touched. Here stood a diminutive woman with snowy white hair who commands more respect than anyone in the profession. She may be small in stature, but she is a giant of a woman! She lectured in the old school style with an overhead projector and illustrated her points with colored markers. She also used some PowerPoint to highlight particular points. Her ability to connect with the audience comes from her passion for teaching and her vast knowledge of the subject matter. Nobody does it like the master!

I saw a woman who loves dental hygienists so much that she cannot/will not be content to fade into history. She could have retired many years ago to a life of leisure, but has chosen to keep doing the thing she loves most, which is teaching. Who do you know that is still working in her nineties? Her hand is steady, her mind is sharp, and her wit is quick.

Esther probably grows weary of hearing people say that she's a "treasure," but it is no less true! A treasure is something precious, valuable, and highly prized. Even those words seem inadequate to describe her worth to the dental hygiene profession. Dr. Esther Wilkins deserves all the accolades and praise that dental hygienists heap on her.

There is reference to another "Esther" in the Old Testament. She was described as a beautiful and daring queen who actually risked her life for the love of her people. Our present-day Esther is also a queen in her own right. She's beautiful through and through, bold and daring in the face of advancing age, and loves "her people" — dental hygienists everywhere. She deserves the title "Grand Matriarch of Dental Hygiene."

To this end, all of us who have benefitted from her wisdom humbly thank her for all she has done and continues to do for the profession of dental hygiene.