



# A Man You Don't Meet Everyday

Text: Rori Caffrey • Photo: KS

**Dr. Daryl Beach helped shape modern dentistry — and has lived a life much less ordinary. KS visits him at his center in Nishinakajima.**

Years ago, a Nebraska farm boy named Daryl Beach was given four options by the US Navy. Because he passed their aptitude test, he could study engineering, physics, medicine, or dentistry. He chose dentistry on advice of a fellow WWII draftee he met in the waiting room. Dentistry equals longest training equals less chance of seeing combat.

His offhand choice has since taken him around the world. Calling Japan his home base since the early 50s, he's fixed teeth in Alaska, taught university in the Philippines, and worked with the WHO in Thailand. His innovative lectures on ergonomic approaches to oral care have taken him through Asia, Africa, Europe, and beyond. Medical equipment he developed and patented is used globally today.

Instead of living large off his laurels, which he easily could, Dr. Daryl Beach has remained that simple farm boy. He dislikes possessions. He doesn't own a house or car. He does, however, have a medal from the Emperor, a resume longer than your arm, and, as Kansai Scene learned, life experiences which beg to be heard.

## ON COMING TO JAPAN

"When I came it was during the occupation. On the trains, lines of Japanese would break

up. Nobody would stand in front of you. They all said, "No, please, go ahead". Americans rode first and second class, with Japanese in the other class. The best hotels were owned by the US, and we could stay there for next to nothing. We were being given everything. I didn't care for this at all. But as soon as the occupation ended, things changed overnight. Nobody gave you the front to the line anymore. It was surprising, but it felt a lot more natural."

## ON BLAZING TRAILS

"During the war, Japan was in such a straight they couldn't get metal, even for fixing teeth. They were putting concrete in them for fillings. The basic treatment at the time in Japan was arsenic acid, and in the vast majority of teeth that were treated, the nerves were killed deliberately. Rather than try to educate, I [as hospital chief] just ruled arsenic acid out [of Nihon University Dental School]. I went to the professors' meeting and explained why, and everyone agreed. There were sixteen medicines in use at the school and I ruled out every one of them ... All the medicines were taken out, but a week later they were back again. I said "It's been voted officially that this is ruled out!" Their reply was "Yes, but we need some time to think this over. This is too abrupt". I said "No. At 3pm tomorrow, I'm coming in with a truck and taking it out". The dean called me at midnight, asking me to delay it. I said "No, I can't change my word now." I went in with my truck, ready to carry out the medicine, and found it all locked in glass cabinets. Nobody knew where the keys were. I said "I hate to break the glass, but I don't know any other

way I can do this. The rule has been passed, and I must enforce it". Suddenly, the keys appeared. The medicine went out and never came back. If I had never done that, it would've taken years to educate people. It was such a shock, and it raised such a question in Japan's schools that within three years almost all of them stopped as well.

## ON BEING DECORATED WITH THE EMPEROR'S MEDAL

That medal came through the Ministry of Education. They came and told me "We know you are somebody who doesn't have much respect for nations, but a medal is being offered to you by the Emperor. Will you accept it?" I said "Well, okay" ... I asked what I had done to deserve a medal. The fellow said "Well, what do you think you deserve it for?" I said "Probably for identifying the principle for use of the human body that is used by health care personnel", and he said "Yeah, as far as we can tell, you've done some pretty serious work in that".

## ON KEEPING ACTIVE

I'm 78, but if somebody has problems, I'll still get involved. I enjoy solving problems if I feel they're worth working on. It's wonderful to participate with others. People I respect and know from long ago offer me problems and I'm happy to share them. I feel pretty good that they still take me seriously.

## DR. DARYL BEACH

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