Dr. Arne Bjorndal, first head of the Department of Endodontics, died November 4, 2012 at the age of 96.

Arne’s dental career began during World War II in Oslo, Norway. He matriculated on August 20, 1941. On 28 November, 1943 the university and dental school were surrounded by 2,000 German troops. At the time, Dr. Bjørndal was arrested while treating a medical student. This came one day after a university building was burned in an act of sabotage by radical communists.

The student prisoners were first taken to a warehouse in Stavern, then transported several days later to Oslo and loaded on a German ship, the Donau. Arriving in Stettin, Germany, they were imprisoned under brutal conditions with Polish and Jewish prisoners. One week later, the Norwegians were transported by train over six to seven days to Sennheim, (a German training camp for the SS Forces), which became their home. The train cars were packed and the students had no toilet. One student had active tuberculosis and after everyone shared a spoon to eat a single can of soup, all fifty students contracted the disease. Arne was transported to a TB sanatorium located in an old castle in Ebreichsdorf, Austria, which bordered Hungary. Having completed one year of dental school, Arne and Bjørn Gitlestad became the town and camp dentists. Although there were many cases of periodontitis and trench mouth, anesthesia was not available because Hitler did not believe in it.

In December of 1944, Arne departed for Prague, Czechoslovakia, and from there continued to Berlin. He went on to Arhus, Denmark, and then back to Oslo, Norway.

Arne was elected class president when he returned to dental school. The class voted to repeat the sophomore semester they had been completing when arrested. Arne financed his education with pay he had earned as a prisoner of war.

During the semester, Arne experienced pain and stiffness and was diagnosed with poliomyelitis; half his face became paralyzed, and soon after, his left arm and chest were also affected.

As class president, Arne assigned his classmates to their site for the mandatory one-year government service. He purchased a practice in Oslo but in 1950, having received a Fulbright Scholarship, Arne travelled to the Forsyth Dental Infirmary for Children in Boston where he met Katherine, his future wife. They were married in London in 1951 and both returned to Oslo. In May 1953, Arne got his acceptance for advanced standing at the University of Iowa College of Dentistry. Rotating through the departments “to show what he could do,” Dr. Bjorndal graduated in 1954 and passed the Iowa Board. While looking at the bulletin board for a place to practice, Dean William O. Simon came up and asked him what he was doing. Arne explained, and Dean Simon replied, “You are not going anywhere. You are going to work for me.” Dr. Bjorndal joined the operative dentistry department and practiced in downtown Iowa City part-time with Dr. Soucek. Using his reparation money from Germany, he bought a house and began his academic career. Being a young faculty member, Dr. Bjorndal started the Department of Endodontics by literally carrying carbon steel files around in a cigar box. He initiated the endodontic graduate program and in the early 1970s, the department was separated from operative dentistry and it became a separate entity at the college and one of 81 departments at the University of Iowa. Although Arne had many opportunities to leave Iowa, he remained in Iowa City throughout his career.

Dr. Bjorndal was like his contemporaries in the heartland: Jim Jensen at Minnesota, Sam Patterson at Indiana, and Garth James at Nebraska, who were endodontics pioneers. They were dedicated to teaching and practicing endodontics. They established the educational standards and foundation of knowledge endodontists take for granted today.

Arne’s research interest was internal anatomy, and he published his life’s work in a monograph entitled “Anatomy and Morphology of Human Teeth” with our former Foundation president, Ed Skidmore, in 1983.
During the 2009 Annual Session of the American Association of Endodontists, says, Dr. Bill Johnson, head of Endodontics, “Arne was recognized with the IB Bender Lifetime Teaching Award, the organization’s highest award for education.” All of those attendees in the audience were asked to stand, if they had been taught by Dr. Bjorndal. The rest of the audience was then asked to stand, if they had been taught by the first group. This request was repeated once more. Half of the approximately 2,000 members were standing. Dr. Donna Mattscheck (Endodontic Certificate ’96) added, “...the vast majority of the room was standing, a concrete example of how his legacy has affected so many. I am personally proud and grateful to be a part of his efforts to advance endodontics.”

Dr. Vince Williams noted, “...I first knew Arne when I was a student in the dental college in 1953-1957. He was teaching in Operative Dentistry at that time. When I was doing my Pros. residency, he and I co-authored a paper together. I always found him to be very friendly and helpful in that endeavor that we shared. He will be missed by us all.”

Dean David Johnsen noted that Dr. Bjorndal was on his thesis committee.

Dr. Tom Gound (DDS ’67) recalls, “Arne was my favorite instructor while I was in dental school in the mid ’60s, and I was pleasantly surprised when he remembered me and was so nice to me when I visited Iowa City.”

Dr. Bill Johnson added, “Arne not only left a great legacy, he taught Dr. Ed Skidmore (MS endodontics ’71), a past president of the American Board of Endodontics (ABE) as well as the AAE Board of Directors; Dr. Kenny Sunshine (MS and endodontics certificate ’71), current director of the AAE Board of Directors; Dr. Sandra Madison (MS endodontics ’81), former president of both the AAE and American Board of Endodontics; Dr. John Olmsted (DDS ’75), another former AAE president; Dr. Bill Powell (MS endodontics ’72); and Dr. Keith Krell (DDS ’81) who is current AAE Foundation president. (Note: Dr. Bill Johnson is also a former endodontics graduate student of Dr. Bjorndal who received both an MS and certificate in endodontics in 1981. Dr. Johnson is also a former president of both the AAE and the ABE.)

Dr. Bjorndal retired in 1984 and enjoyed many years of traveling, golfing, and reading. Dr. Arne Bjorndal is survived by his wife, Katherine, and three children: Katharin (William) Mead; Kari (Henry) Bullamore; and Lee (Judith) Bjorndal, and five grandchildren.

Online condolences may be left for the family at www.lensingfuneral.com, under obituaries.