

Good morning, I'm Dr. Jim Harris.

I was Dr. Leary's partner in private practice before he ran off to The University of Iowa. I will always consider Mike my mentor and my friend, but yesterday, as I stood in line at the funeral home for the visitation, I kept hearing all of these flowery remarks about the deceased. The faces of all of these people were very familiar but I wasn't exactly sure who they were talking about. Was this the same guy I knew? I wasn't sure if these people were just being kind to the family or if they really just didn't know the person I knew. Then somebody called him Jim and somebody else called him Mike and I knew that this really was the same guy. He was, in short, a wonderful contradiction to us all.

James Michael Leary, was known to most of us here as "Mike," and to the rest of you as Jim. You know it's always a concern when you have two names. Here are a few other names that he was known by: wonderful, loving husband and father; great dentist; crusty S.O.B.; "The Colonel;" actor; thespian; stubborn Irishman; "Ornery;" 1959 Keota High School Stud Muffin; Dental School Geek (complete with pocket protector); great friend; tough old bird; General Leary; Corporal Klingler; warm and caring instructor; and just a few others I've heard dental students use but I can't repeat here.

As all of you know, you rarely thought of Mike in grey terms; he was pretty much black or white with no room in the middle. It's really no wonder he was contradictory: his dad was a dentist and his mother was a school teacher. For a long time he wasn't sure which to be. He tried both separately before he finally came to a career where he could combine the two: dental\_professor. Early on, he gave his first dental instruction at around age 10 or 11. He took it upon himself to instruct a young female classmate, who had an appointment with his dad later in the day, about what to expect. He told her how easy it was to get her teeth checked. He reassured her that it was all very easy except for that x-ray thing. He went on to explain to her (remember this is circa 1955ish with clear tube heads on machines) that when the dentist pulled the x-ray tube over and the wire in the tube started to glow, the next thing was that fire would shoot out the end. Other than that, one thing it would all be easy. Well, you can only imagine what happened later that day. The young lady did very well until it was time for radiographs, then she went screaming out of the

office front door, only to be found hiding somewhere, and of course, she told. I think Mike said something about ending up with a blistering.

Delinquency was next on Dr. Leary's list. Mike frequently broke into Keota High School to shoot baskets after hours. He often got caught. Ornery is the word I hear from Keota residents a lot.

Next, the big Keota High stud went to Cornell College in Mt. Vernon to play basketball for a year. Then it was on to that bastion of higher learning in Fairfield, Iowa, Parson's College, where he first got into acting. Envision Mike preaching fire and brimstone and you're all going to hell for sinning, on the front steps of the student union, just for the fun of it, only to look up and see his mom standing there watching.(She was attending P.C. at the same time.)

From there, he went on to Carlisle High School to be a math teacher and junior varsity boy's basketball coach. He loved the kids but hated the parents. (I wonder if we could've been partners if my son had played basketball for him.)

From Carlisle, it was back to school, finally, at the College of Dentistry where by his own admission he was kept from graduating last in his class by two foreign exchange dental students. Somehow I always thought he was exaggerating on that one but I couldn't get him to tell me otherwise.

1968 - Next he was off to the Army to do a GPR, ending up in the Chicago area. Two things of importance happened at this stop in Mike's life:

1) He almost ended his dental career by extracting all the Base Commander's teeth. See #7 of Dr. Leary's Greatest Sayings (When the patient wants to keep teeth and they are not restorable, give them a jar.)

2) And most important, he met his wife, Karolyn.

1971 – From the Army it was on to Washington (he missed my high school graduation by a month) to focus in private practice. He worked with Dr. L.B ("Eich") Eicher. This is where he got interested in community theater and was in many Washington Community Theatre productions. He somehow always seemed forever typecast as that immortal Seabee Luther

Billus in the musical "South Pacific." Mike was the best straight man I have ever known but many of his best performances were saved for those of us who knew him more personally.

Like the time he dressed his kids in rags and got the sheriff (his friend, Yale Jarvis) to serve papers on his wife for neglect while she was at her card group.

Or, hearing him talk tough to a problem kid in the chair while looking back and winking at me in the hall.

Of course, there is the immortal "not a stitch" story, but I don't think I can tell that one here. Just as he was ornery, he could use the same technique with a different twist. He couldn't afford a diamond ring when they got married so he staged this elaborate ruse on one of their anniversaries about seeing a sky diver, who was actually a friend of Mike's, who ended up bringing Karolyn her new diamond ring. The guy loved surprises.

In spite of all this good fun, Mike really did have an Irish temper. You could always tell when Mike was angry – his masseters (cheek muscles) would start flexing almost involuntarily. Sometimes you could get him to do it just by bringing up certain names. Some of you may even may have been in the room.

In the '80s, Mike went back to school to get his dental specialty degree at the college, to become Professor Mike Leary. Still, some things didn't change! Like when he accosted a fellow grad student who was working part-time at a gas station (back when people came out and serviced your car or truck). Anyway, Mike goes screeching into the drive, jumps out and screams, "Keep your hands off my wife or else!" Or when a lot of people would be in the elevator with him and other colleagues and as the doors were shutting he'd slip out the door and calmly ask about the paternity suit and how it was going ...or when fellow professor, Dr. John Doering, was having rabbit trouble. He actually ended up killing a rabbit in his yard. Mike jumped on this opportunity and procured some official DNR stationery (from a former patient) and wrote several letters to Dr. Doering suggesting he was in serious trouble with this state agency.

What was Mike's style was honesty. You got it full on whether you really wanted it or not. It was this unique contradiction of love for whatever was important to him and upfront honesty that was the Mike/Jim Leary we all loved.

If you were his family, you got his unending love; his friends got his unedited, totally honest opinions whether you wanted it or not; his patients got his very best effort every time; his students never got a real answer. He had the unique ability to always answer their questions with another question. Many D-4s were totally frustrated by this but the few who got it figured out that they had really been put on an unending quest for more knowledge and the path to excellence. It was a gift he gave to all us but so few of us availed ourselves to it.

If you have looked at Mike's obituary, you would see his awards and honors were many...too numerous to list here. And while not unearned or unwanted it, they would fall under reference 1, 2, 3 and 5 of Dr. Leary's Greatest Sayings. In the end, Dr. Leary's legacy is really about the people he touched. Whether you knew him from Keota, from Washington, or Iowa City, from the theater, or from the Army, or from private practice, organized dentistry, or the dental college, it was our privilege to walk with him for awhile.

The numbers of us that he touched are too many to count. As one of those who were touched, I just want to say we will miss you, my friend.