

INTERVIEW WITH DR. JOHN DIDDAMS
MARQUETTE MICHIGAN
JUNE 2, 2009

START OF INTERVIEW

MAGNAGHI, RUSSELL M. (RMM): Start out John with the usual question at the start of the interview. What is your birthday?

DIDDAMS, JOHN (JD): December 8th 1939.

(RMM): Now to tell us about your background, where were you born and anything you want to get into in that area in terms of your origins.

(JD): I was born in Wausau Wisconsin. I grew up in central Wisconsin in the Wausau and Schofield area and decided on medicine in my senior year of high school. My dad was a chemist and he thought I should be a chemist and so did a lot of other people. And in college I majored in chemistry. It was going to be a fallback if I didn't get into medical school and several professors thought I should go into chemistry but of course that was their field. But I kind of stuck with my original high school design to go into Medicine which I did and then went to medical school at the University of Wisconsin. Also I had a residency there in ear, nose, and throat.

(RMM): Now did you go through a premed program in college or just go as a straight chemistry major.

(JD): I was a straight chemistry major but there are a couple of classes, like Latin medical terms and a few other requirements to get into medical school that I wouldn't have needed to take or wouldn't have taken if I didn't have it as "I'm going into medicine". So basically it was a straight chemistry major.

(RMM): And then when you start medical school, what year.

(JD): 1962. So I was in medical school from 1962 until 1966 and I did an internship in Oakland, California 66 to 67 and (then was) at the University of Wisconsin for residency training. And completed that in 71 and then I was in the navy for two years during the Vietnam era for basically all doctors and then came to Marquette directly out of the navy.

(RMM): Now just to backtrack a bit. You were at Oakland, California and you were there when there was a lot of the antiwar disruption and what not - see, I'm originally from San Francisco.

(JD): Oh yes. There is the Haydash Period. Stuff was all going on when we were there and when we came back to residency in Wisconsin there were a lot of demonstrations there. And we were there when there was the bombing of (the) math building. And frequently there was a smell of tear gas in the streets when they were trying to break up demonstrations in Madison.

(RMM): So it's sort of, it followed you or you followed it?

(JD): Yeah one way or the other. Well I think it was all over the country at that time.

(RMM): Now how did you get the call sort of to come to Marquette?

(JD): Well, we were from the Midwest and my wife had relatives from Escanaba. We went to Escanaba looking first. We looked at Wausau, Escanaba, and few other places in Wisconsin. When we went to Escanaba and interviewed there the physicians there realized that Marquette was sort of the medical community of the Upper Peninsula and advised me to look up here as well. So we came up here and kind of fell in love with it. We were skiers at that time and we could go skiing five minutes from town. There was also hunting and fishing and other outdoor things we were interested in. We just fell in love with it.

(RMM): Now, as they do some of the interviews, or at least the people in charge felt that they were trying to lure physicians to Marquette and there is a certain amount of that, but with you it was love at first sight almost? It was the Midwest were you wanted to be.

(JD): Yes we did feel very welcome here. There was only one other Ear, Nose, and Throat doctor here at the time. He was Dr. Kronshnoble and he was trained in the old school. He was not doing modern reconstructive ear surgery and that sort of thing. He was very busy and there was really demand for more ear, nose, and throat coverage. The physicians were very welcoming. Dr. Kronshnoble was not in particular. He didn't want me to practice with him and he didn't want to share call or anything like that. So I was encourage so much by other physicians that I decided to set up my own practice, you know, not feeling welcome at Dr. Kronshnoble's practice.

(RMM): How would that work? Kind of explain that. You would have been in the same office, a shared practice?

(JD): He did not want that and (I) really didn't either. He was trained in a different manner and was kind of the old school. It was a mutual understanding that it wouldn't work very well.

(RMM): Do you want to talk about your practice and how it went that after you got to Marquette?

(JD): Okay, well I came in 1973. I was alone for a couple of years, other than Dr. Kronshnoble practicing separately and totally independent. It was a wide open area for ear, nose, and throat at the time. There were lots of people with draining ears and hearing losses that had not been attended to ever. So we were pretty much the referral area for the entire Upper Peninsula. There was a huge amount of ear surgery and reconstructive surgery for hearing losses and that sort of thing. It was a great field and a great location for an ear, nose, and throat person at the time.

(RMM): So what you are saying is there weren't enough doctors? This wasn't an area of concern or focus? I mean for the whole U.P. there was the backup of people that needed help.

(JD): Right, the nearest other modern trained ear, nose and throat person was in Green Bay. So I was the referral person for the entire U.P. and some parts of Wisconsin, the Iron Mountain area and the Menomonee/Marinette area.

(RMM): So you were a super busy person then?

(JD): I was. I was very, very busy. I was desperate for help. It was very difficult to take a vacation because if I was doing surgery Dr. Kronshnoble did not want to cover and see my patients. It was a really wide open field but very, very busy. We couldn't really get away. If I

wanted to go somewhere I had to stop doing surgery a couple of weeks early. It was kind of hectic for a while. It was very busy for a couple years until I was able to recruit my associate, Dr. Craig Stien. I think he came two years after I got here. It might have been three. He came in either 1975 or 1976. He trained (at) the same place I did, at the University of Wisconsin. We had a very comfortable relationship because he did things the same way I did. Most ear, nose and throat surgery you do alone, but if you're doing a tonsillectomy, you need to have somebody available in case they should have bleeding or some other problems. We felt very comfortable with each other and each other's training. We did everything the same way, so it was a good relationship we had until our retirement.

(RMM): You had your practice and you worked through or with the hospital?

(JD): We had our office at the medical center and did our surgery at the hospital.

(RMM): Were there any interesting or unique developments in terms of setting up practice here or was it pretty much routine?

(JD): Of course they had to order all new instruments and things because they are specialty instruments for middle ear surgery that they didn't have. I had to specify and make a list of instruments that were needed and microscopes, operating microscopes, and that sort of thing. The hospital was always extremely willing to provide anything that we wanted. They completely filled our requirements and lists of instruments and equipment. We were very pleased with the cooperation of the hospital.

(RMM): Your practice is over at the medical center (Upper Peninsula Medical Center, PenMed).

(JD): That's correct.

(RMM): You were there then when they were still in the original building?

(JD): Yes. We had a small office. When Dr. Stien came to join me, we were really crowded in the single office, the small office that we had. We then moved to a larger office as they added on to the medical center.

(RMM): I'm asking some of these questions because when people look at the situation today it's very modern, it's expanded, you know, it's first-rate. What you're talking about even in the 1970's which is, for me and you, not that far removed. How things were not as up to date, not so much the medicine just the operation, the facilities and whatnot and how things were done. People had to work at them and you had to expand your office and I still remember going over to the old medical center. It was pretty crowded over there. It was all kind of one small building, now it's expanded.

(JD): There was a big controversy whether or not it should expand the first time. I remember each expansion. There was always a lot of discussion, you know, the pros and cons of expanding and they always seem to just fill (it) up.

(RMM): Were there any special problems that you encountered in terms of your practice, things you did, techniques and so on? Did you introduce anything new or have to introduce anything new in terms of taking care of patients and so on?

(JD): Of course, I introduced modern middle ear surgery and reconstructive surgery to the middle ear to restore hearing loss. Over the years there were considerable advances in sinus surgery that both Dr. Stein and I had to take additional courses in. There's always new instrumentation that was required - the endoscopic type surgery of the sinuses wasn't done

when I first came here. We always had complete cooperation from the hospital in getting the equipment needed for the new techniques.

(RMM): How has the practice progressed after the two of you came? What has happened subsequently?

(JD): Well Dr. Kronshnoble died not very long after Dr. Stien came. He had a heart attack and died. We were quite busy for many years. It was a while later before the next ear, nose and throat doctor came to the Upper Peninsula and that was in Iron Mountain. I don't know the year he came but it must have been somewhere in the mid 1980's. That relieved our burden quite a bit because he started taking a lot of patients from that area that used to come to us.

(RMM): What you're saying is that it was the two of you in Marquette. So anyone with a problem in the copper country say, had to come to Marquette?

(JD): Yes

(RMM): Or probably in the Soo area they could go to Canada or down to Petoskey.

(JD): We probably got about half of the business from the Sue and the rest of it went to either Canada or the Lower Peninsula. We got most everything from Newberry. We did clinics pretty much every week. One or the other of us would be going someplace. We did clinics in Newberry, Manistique, Escanaba, all the way to Bessemer and Ironwood, and of course in the copper country, Iron Mountain, and then we gave up some of those clinics as other ear nose and throat doctors came in.

(RMM): You have things like heart problems, heart disease and so on, which would be more extreme. Was it that ear, nose, and throat was not as life threatening, and that's why you didn't get a lot of physicians in that field? You're saying there was one then you came up, so two and then three of you.

(JD): There was for a long time a nationwide shortage of ear, nose, and throat physicians. The training programs were slow to expand. There were a lot of opportunities for ear, nose, and throat physicians all around the country. So weather-wise and all this, a lot of people didn't find the Upper Peninsula that attractive to them. You almost have to be from the upper Midwest to really love it.

(RMM): It was more a lack of trained physicians or an area or specialty that was attractive to people because at some point medical schools where not training them. It was just an open field?

(JD): It was pretty much an open field when I went into it, and for many years after. You could go almost anywhere and set up a good practice. In some of the west coast areas and other desirable areas there weren't an abundant number of positions. Nationwide though, you could go almost anywhere to practice so there were a lot of choices.

(RMM): What has happened then? What is the situation with physicians in the U.P. in this field?

(JD): There are two in Marquette, Dr. Stein and Randy Folker replaced me. Then when Dr. Stien retired just a few years after me, Dr. (David) Heichel came in. So there are two in Marquette still, but now there are others around. There are two in Escanaba and in Iron Mountain, and some, I believe, that are traveling up from Lower Michigan and are seeing

patients up in the Soo. So there is much more coverage from surrounding areas, but still just two in Marquette.

(RMM): That's sort of, the two take care of all of the patients and their needs?

(JD): Right. I understand there is some waiting list to get into see them, but they're doing other things that we didn't do too much of. They're doing allergy work and that sort of thing. Dr. Stien and I were mainly surgical physicians. We referred allergies to the allergist. Now the ear, nose, and throat, I think perhaps to fill up their practices more. There isn't that big a backlog of surgery that needed to be done from (compared with) when we got here. I think that ear, nose, and throat physicians are doing more in the way of nasal allergies and that sort of thing.

(RMM): So is that sort of a new subfield?

(JD): Well it's always been part of ear, nose, and throat to some extent because nasal allergies have always been common and prevalent, but our training program at University of Wisconsin did not emphasize allergy. It was mainly a surgical training program. We were trained very well at surgical techniques. At the University of Wisconsin allergy problems were referred to the allergy department there. Not (evaluated) at the ear, nose, and throat department.

(RMM): So at one point it was a special department for allergies.

(JD): Yes, at the University of Wisconsin. Not having extensive training in allergy we referred our allergy patients to allergists rather than doing them ourselves, just as we had done during our training and the University of Wisconsin.

(RMM): So there were then allergists that were physicians that are still out there?

(JD): I can't remember that we had any allergists when we came, but, you know, internal medicine (physicians) and pediatricians handled allergies and now of course there are two allergists in Marquette. They have been here for quite a while. Dr. Myrna Meneses and I can't remember his name right now (Dr. Bobby Joseph) but there are two allergists in Marquette.

(RMM): I didn't know there was that kind of a breakdown, that there was actually an allergist as a second category. I just thought that that was the territory of general physicians.

(JD): Well a lot of it is but there is a specialty of allergy and we do have two in Marquette. There was an allergy training program where we trained at the University of Wisconsin.

(RMM): So if you wanted to go into that field, you would have had to deviate off of surgery into allergies.

(JD): Right, yeah.

(RMM): Now though you're saying that because the backlog is gone that they have the time to focus on allergies.

(JD): Right. We were very busy doing what we were trained to do and what we liked to do. Getting caught up, plus now there are more physicians in the surrounding areas, so they don't have the huge referral for ear, nose, and throat like we used to.

(RMM): When we talk about the physicians coming in and assisting in all fields, but in your field now, you are actually welcoming them to come in and help out in a very busy situation for yourself.

(JD): Yes. We were as busy or busier than we wanted or needed to be. When a new physician came to Iron Mountain, we were quite happy and welcomed him.

(RMM): It's sort of a relief for you then.

(JD): It was. Now it became a little different toward the end of our practice, when we were getting near retirement. Of course we weren't as (Dr. Stien and I) were not as anxious to be so busy anymore. Also we were happy to have the extra time off. We were no longer as overwhelmed as we had been during the first $\frac{3}{4}$ of our practice years. During the last few years we were able to see patients the same day they called rather than having a backlog. During the major portion of our practice we were welcoming other physicians into the area.

(RMM): Now when did you retire?

(JD): July 1999. Quite a while, ten years ago.

(RMM): Now what have you done to fill the time?

(JD): Oh, hahahaha. Well, some people seem to be a loose ends when they retire, but I have not had a moment of boredom. I like the outdoors. I love to be out mushrooming in both the spring and summer and fall, you know, different mushrooms. I love to be out in the woods. We cross-country ski some in the winter. I like fishing. I don't hunt anymore, now I let the animals live. We travel a lot. We have family in town. We have two children and they both have families. We are happy grandparents, doing a lot of babysitting. We're just too handy sometime. There hasn't been much down-time, you know we've stayed pretty busy.

(RMM): Now you've been here for a while, do you find that when the physicians retire do they stay in Marquette or do you see them leaving?

(JD): I think most stay. I think if you've lived here for that long you kind of like the area.

(RMM): And have gotten used to the changes in climate.

(JD): Yeah, right. I can't think of very many that have left. I think most of them have hung around.

(RMM): Is there anything that I didn't ask you? Something I may have overlooked? Or something you would like to add to the interview that I missed?

(JD): I can't think of anything. No I can't think of anything off hand.

(RMM): Good, well thank you for your time. It's appreciated.

(JD): You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW