

DONA PRINCE

pushing the limits

BY AMY THOMPSON | PHOTOGRAPHY BY KJ



“SUCCESS IS NO ACCIDENT. IT IS HARD WORK, PERSEVERANCE, STUDYING, SACRIFICE AND MOST OF ALL, LOVE OF WHAT YOU ARE DOING OR LEARNING TO DO.”

Dona

Dona Prince was a high school student with no career in mind when she picked up a copy of Seventeen Magazine. In it was an article on dentistry, something she knew nothing about. But after reading the article, she wanted to learn more, and she eventually decided she wanted to be a dentist.

Forty-one years ago, Dona embarked on her “Midwest tour” – starting with the University of Iowa, then Morningside College for continuing courses, then Kansas State University and finally landing in Chicago at the Loyola School of Dentistry. Keep in mind that in 1978, only about 15 percent of first-year dental students were women. Dona was one of 20 women and there were no facilities for women. Eventually the janitor’s locker room was converted into women-only facilities. That was a very small step for those 20 women whose professors didn’t even want them there, thinking they were “taking the place of a man who deserved to be in the program.”

“We knew we were better than that,” says Dona.

From detractors who believed women were not suited for the profession, to being told she performed well “for a girl,” Dona believed those things wouldn’t matter in the long run.

After graduation, Dona became the first female dentist in Sioux City. But that wasn’t easy either. She had borrowed all her own tuition and needed money. When she went to the bank for a loan, they assumed her husband was the dentist, and she was only approved for 24% interest commercial loans. Again, this did not stop her. She eventually received a Small Business Association (SBA) loan and opened her first practice on South Saint Aubin in Morningside.

Dona’s “just do it” attitude can be attributed to her family. Her mother was a stay-at-home mom – a steady, always there, resilient woman. Her father was a traveling

Yellow Pages salesman. When he came home for the weekends, Dona was by his side. Saturday and Sunday, she went to work with her dad, which meant actually cutting and pasting ads with rubber cement glue. Their strong bond continued when he bought the building next to her practice and opened his own phone business. Later, when the building she was renting went up for sale, her dad bought that building too. Her mother took care of her two children, Amanda and Tim, so Dona could concentrate on dentistry.

“Now with my adult children, I understand how fortunate I was and how important it was to have that support,” she says. The parental and extended family support she received made it possible for her to succeed and to find a balance of work and personal life.

“Working women can do it all and have it all,” she says. “Look at all the possibilities and don’t get stuck on the what-ifs.” She encourages women, especially mothers, to go



“ LOOK AT ALL THE POSSIBILITIES AND DON'T GET STUCK ON THE WHAT-IFS.”

after their dreams. “Things are going to happen, unplanned things, but just do it.”

When Dona moved her practice to her current location on Sergeant Road, her dad followed her, using the basement for his business. (She didn't charge him rent and he also became “the janitor” and took care of the building.) Three years ago, at the age of 91, he passed away. It was hard for Dona to return to her office. He wasn't there anymore, greeting her as “Doctor” daily. The passing of her proud and supportive father left a large hole in her personal and professional life.

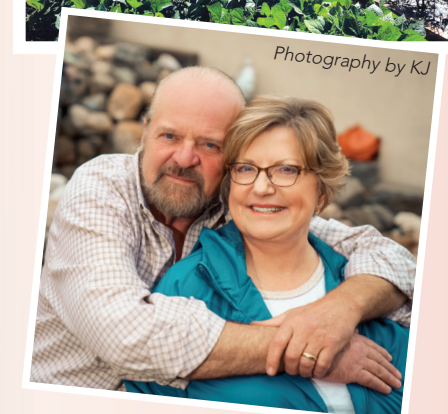
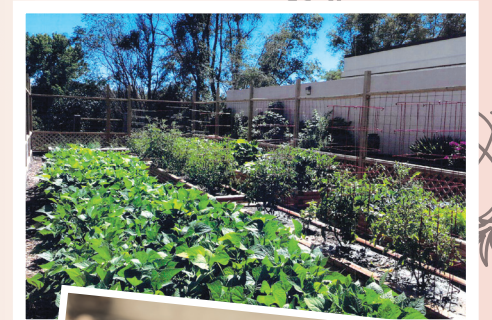
And still, her father's legacy impacts her work today. She is honored to have inherited his hard work ethic and “love your job” mentality. In her 39 years of practicing in Sioux City, she has developed relationships with her patients, but she believes in helping them beyond dental care. With her extensive medical knowledge, Dona is an advocate for their full health care.

“You can't just graduate and stop learning,” she explains, noting her passion for learning.

Dona has traveled extensively to continue her education. In 2013 she received her Masters from the Academy of General Dentistry. First, she received her Fellowship, which meant 500 hours of classes followed by a rigorous exam. Next up was her Mastership, which focuses on all the disciplines, with 1,100 hours. She has also received the Standard Accreditation for Laser Treatments and is working on her Advanced Accreditation. Her perseverance has led to her becoming a respected member of the American Dental Association, the Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry, the Academy of Laser Dentistry and the Special Care in Dentistry Organization.

With comprehensive knowledge and initiative, Dona hasn't been afraid to push the limits. She values dentistry and the importance of it, including Special Care Dentistry.





Dona had her first special needs patient, a woman with cerebral palsy, in dental school. That experience drove her desire to go further in her education of special needs care for her patients. She worked with an Iowa City hospital to gain knowledge of how an operating room (OR) works so she could work on her special consideration patients properly in dental treatments. While it is a common study in dentistry school now, she was again one of the firsts.

After practicing dentistry for nearly 40 years, Dona has no current plans to retire, but her plans do include looking for an excellent dentist to come in so she can take a step back. She wants to enjoy her private life, while working towards community involvement (including feeding those who need it) that inspires passion. She also hopes to fuel her own passions along the way.

Dona loves to cook, and she yearns to go to Italy and attend an Italian culinary school. For now, she cooks in her own kitchen, reaping the rewards of her beautiful garden. She wants to travel more, too. She hopes to explore the country with her husband Ken in their RV.

Dona's plans don't stop there. A loom that she purchased from Morningside College

sits in a room in her home. She has started a project, but the loom needs to be fixed. Meanwhile she is starting to plan her 70th birthday. On her 50th, she went dog sledding. For her 60th, she kayaked with her son in Oregon. She thinks her 70th will have something to do with bikes, maybe even RAGBRAI.

Regardless of her next step, Dona promises her drive to learn will remain.

"Never stop learning," she advises. "If your mind is open, you're going to pick something up." Doesn't that just perfectly sum up her life?