



"It needed doing, and he did it."

MEMOIR ABOUT A MARTYR

by Dixie Franklin

"He found time to organize the popular American Legion Drum and Bugle Corps that won prizes in the late 1930's."

When Robert J. Anthony felt the glass pierce his left arm that night in the early 1930's, he knew he was in trouble.

The narrow window broke as he fell against it on the landing of the stairs. Blood gushed down his shirt, down the bell-bottom trousers, which had tripped him as he ran down the steps to join his friends in a game of pinochle.

"If I lose this arm, let me die," said the dentist as his friend, Mondo Zei, applied a tourniquet and, with others, rushed him to the hospital.

During the next 20 years, he would lose not only the arm, but both legs. Yet he kept climbing the steep stairs to his office as long as his patients needed him.

"He was always lively," Zei said.

They had grown up together on the Keweenaw Peninsula, in Laurium, Michigan, getting together on Saturday nights, playing music with the Mandan Hayseeds, calling at barn dances, and hanging around with the fellows.

Anthony liked the woods the best and dreamed of becoming a forester. But, when his school teacher sister offered to help finance his way through dental school, he accepted.

He graduated from the Chicago College of Dental Surgery in 1924 with Allan Hoatson, also from Laurium, Michigan.

When he came to join Dr. Alfred Balwin's practice in Laurium, he brought along Hazel Sterenson as his bride.

Perhaps he got part of his determined spirit from his father, who lost a leg to a bone disease. The younger Anthony was to need all the determination anyone could muster.

The physicians took 80 stitches in his arm the night he was taken to the hospital. They spoke optimistically, but Anthony wondered. He and Hazel had three children at home. How would they manage? Dentistry was all he knew.

Less than a week later, the telltale signs of gangrene

crawled up his arm. The doctors amputated above the elbow.

Son Bill recalled a childhood remark which gave his father back his independence. The children came running in from play and saw their mother helping him wash his hand.

"Look," one said, "mother has to wash daddy's hand just like she does ours."

Bill said his father never allowed anyone to help him after that.

The hand brush attached to the sink with a suction cup was one of a long list of gadgets Anthony invented which allowed him to do things for himself.

Six months after the accident, he was back in his second-floor office with an assistant acting as his second hand.

"It was in the days before chairside assistants were well known," said Eleanor Zei, who worked with the dentist for three years before she married his friend, Mondo.

Life fell back to nearly routine. Bill recalled how he tried to hit the baseball harder when his father occasionally stopped by the vacant lot where the neighborhood kids gathered to play. However, no real rapport developed between father and children until they were almost grown.

"It was as if he didn't know how to communicate with us until we were old enough to join him at the bar," Bill said.

But he knew how to communicate with patients.

"Why didn't you call me?" he often scolded when someone admitted staying up half the night with a throbbing ache.

Night calls for Anthony meant night calls for his nurse, since he couldn't manage alone.

"Three Hands Are Better Than One"

"Three hands are better than one," he would tell Eleanor Zei.

Numerous residents in the Keweenaw recall how he

always expected his patients to pay something—chickens or vegetables from their gardens if they were short of cash.

He didn't believe in free dentistry. He felt charity destroyed the American way of life. But he had leaves to be raked, storm windows to install; so chores settled many bills.

Mrs. Zei overheard him tell a young boy that if he would take a wastebasket down the hall and empty it for him, they would call it square.

"I would appreciate your doing it for me," Anthony said. "I don't have the time."

He found time to help organize the popular American Legion Drum and Bugle Corps that won prizes in the late 1930's. But he enjoyed most the hunting parties at his camp on Gratiot Lake. He never shot game; he went along for the social side and to be near the woods he loved.

He preferred chopping wood with his huge right arm, raking leaves or digging in the garden.

It was about 1950 that doctors warned him of diabetes. His wife scolded him about his diet, but he shrugged it off.

Eight years later, he was out at camp again, kicking sand on a bonfire to cover the last of the coals when he burned his toe. The pesky thing refused to heal.

First the doctors amputated the toe; then, because of the effects of diabetes, they were forced to take off the leg below the knee.

As soon as he could maneuver on crutches, Anthony was climbing the stairs back to his office as before.

His artificial limb was heavy as was the arm, a

clumsy device held in place with a heavy vest. Still, it came in handy to steady dental appliances while he worked in his laboratory.

He often removed the prostheses in the privacy of his home. As he massaged the stump of his left arm, his children sometimes asked, "Does it hurt?"

He would merely say, "It feels like I want to wiggle my fingers, and there is nothing to wiggle."

In 1960, his other leg became irritated and overworked. Amputation followed.

"Anthony Still Had One Good Arm"

Anthony still had one good arm and patients who needed him. He learned to negotiate the heavy stairs to his office. While he refused to install a chairlift, he bowed to one concession—and for the first time he took his lunch to the office to save himself the stairway trip.

Dentists were beginning to work from a seated position, but Anthony continued to stand on his two artificial limbs.

He was beginning to tire.

He died in 1966, at age 67, without leaving any great philosophy to explain his valiant efforts. It was something that needed doing, and so he did it.

Hazel Anthony lived until April 1979.

Their children are Jean Munn of Rockford, Illinois; Robert Jr. of Laurium; William of Calumet, Michigan; Frederick of St. Louis, Missouri; and James of Negaunee, Michigan.

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"Dr. Anthony practiced one-handed dentistry with the aid of dental assistant Eleanor Zei."