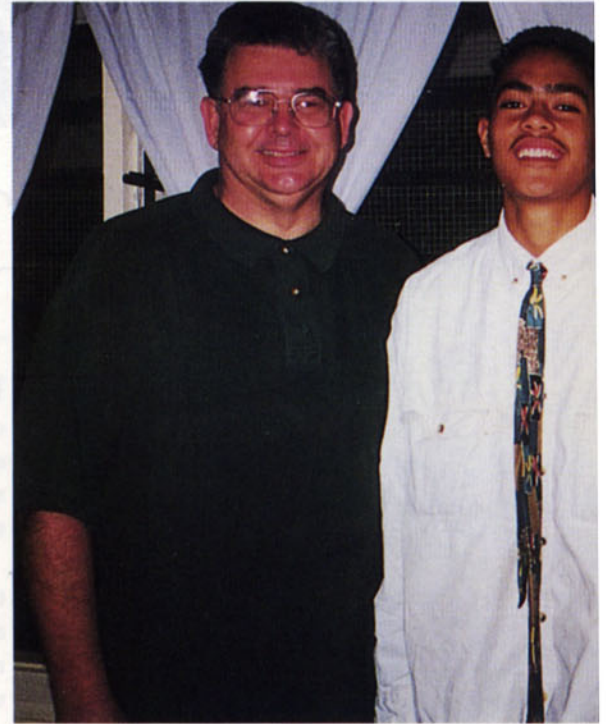




A Legacy of Service



DENTIST'S VOLUNTEER WORK IN ISLAND MONARCHY IS A FAMILY AFFAIR

In America, a trip to the dentist can evoke memories of pain and anxiety, but half a world away in the Kingdom of Tonga there are people who remember Mehrl Ellsworth as a caring and gentle dentist who improved their quality of life.

BY CAROLYNN
DELANY



Medicine is in the Ellsworth family's blood. "My father was a doctor who, in addition to his regular practice, gave an inordinate amount of his time to help the sick in underserved communities," Mehrl Ellsworth says. "It was through his example that I learned the importance of using my skills as a dentist to help improve the lives of other people." Ellsworth's mother, wife and one of his daughters are all registered nurses.

In July 1999 Mehrl Ellsworth, his wife Secelia, and three of their eight children voyaged to the Kingdom of Tonga—sometimes called "The Land Where Time Begins" due to its position in the South Pacific near the International Dateline—to volunteer for the Deseret International Foundation. Deseret's purpose is to provide surgical and dental assistance in emerging nations, primarily to children for



PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE ELLSWORTH FAMILY.

"Thank you for my smile!"
Dr. Ellsworth and son Benjamin
with a grateful patient (center).

whom a single operation offers promise of a dramatic improvement in quality of life. The Foundation has been operating since 1986 and is staffed entirely by volunteers. Since its inception, over 40,000 operations have been performed throughout the world. In 1996, the value of surgeries performed approached \$12 million.

PROMOTING SELF-RELIANCE

"One of the long-term goals of Deseret Foundation is to help educate the medical personnel in developing nations so that in the future they will be self-reliant," says Ellsworth. This type of service commitment requires both financial and personal resources. Physicians, optometrists, and dentists volunteer their services and pay for their own transportation and housing costs while taking time away from their practices at home.

The Liahona Campus Health Center on the island of Tongatapu was the Ellsworths' destination. The island has approximately 60,000 inhabitants and is one of 171 islands that comprise the Kingdom of Tonga. "I studied this part of the world in college and knew the people to be friendly and inviting," says Dr. Ellsworth's wife, Secelia.

Dr. Ellsworth could not wait to get started and was rewarded for his eagerness with an appealing case. "The day we arrived I went

to the clinic and treated a very nice little boy," he says.

The work promptly got more challenging. The four dental chairs in the clinic had a steady stream of patients and Ellsworth was the only dentist. As part of the process by which Tonga is working toward self-reliance, the clinic was required to have a licensed dentist present in order to treat patients.

Fortunately, as the dentist-in-residence, Ellsworth could appoint assistants, and he usually had three to six volunteer assistants a day helping him. He could authorize the assistants to pull teeth in his presence, a responsibility they found empowering.

Much of the benefit to a country like Tonga of volunteer dentistry such as Ellsworth provided had to do with the repair or removal of teeth decayed from years of neglect.

Ellsworth recalls a particularly rewarding experience: "I was working on a student who needed two root canals performed on his front teeth. It took over six hours to complete the procedure. He never complained about the pain but simply grinned and said, 'Thank you for my smile.'"

FAMILY FOLLOWS SUIT

Volunteering is a family affair for the Ellsworth family. Secelia Ellsworth knew her husband would be working long hours in the clinic and wanted to dedicate her time to enriching the lives of the children on the islands. She and 13-year-old daughter Mary volunteered to correct, collate and bind English-Tongan/Tongan-English dictionaries. The dictionaries were delivered to classrooms around Tonga so more students can gain a better understanding of the English language.

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Dr. Ellsworth and daughter Mary work together on a patient.



Ben, the Ellsworths' 16-year-old son, wanted to contribute too. After hearing about his family's volunteer project, he decided to solicit supplies for the dental clinic. In addition to lack of medical care, equipment and supplies can be out of date and even nonexistent. Ben managed to secure almost \$3,000 worth of materials. He has learned first-hand that, "He who gives receives"; his volunteer service is part of the effort he hopes will earn him an Eagle Scout badge. Through the work of Ben and many others like him, donations of equipment and medical supplies to the Deseret Foundation will total nearly \$1 million this year.

The Ellsworths believe they are helping their children by imparting a philanthropic spirit early in their lives. All of the children, including their eight-year-old son Seth, have also now experienced the rich cultural diversity offered in different parts of the world, as well as the challenges people can face. "This experience made me realize that people really appreciate it when you help them," Seth says. ☺

A Foundation for Family Togetherness

In spring 1997, through the help of the American Foundation, Mehrl Ellsworth created the PBJ Ellsworth Foundation.

"My father's motto was 'Service is the price you pay for the space you occupy on this earth.' He passed away in 1996, and I wanted to create a foundation that would teach future generations the value of charitable service," says Ellsworth.

Ellsworth also wanted the opportunity to direct which charities would receive his assistance. The family started the foundation with the idea that the estate his father left would provide the initial funding. However, Ellsworth noticed 1,000 shares of his own stock had appreciated and were now worth \$25,000, so he donated that to the family foundation.

"I never dreamed I would be able to make this type of contribution so soon myself."

The Ellsworths believe their foundation will enhance family unity through charitable giving. In the past few years, the PBJ Ellsworth Foundation has contributed to the Boy Scouts of America, a university, a fine arts association, a youth orchestra and various religious charities.

Through the volunteer experience and the monetary contributions, the Ellsworths are teaching their children that philanthropy and public service are responsibilities that also yield great rewards.