

Jeffrey Mills

Out of the pain of the past spring new beginnings

BY RON RAJECKI

Devin Conaway's experiences in the dental chair inspired him to become a dentist. He's getting the chance to pursue that dream at the CWRU School of Dental Medicine thanks to the Jeffrey Mills Memorial Scholarship.

There's an old saying that "all the world's a stage," and that's an interesting concept for practitioners of the dental arts to remember at every patient visit. You never know when you may have the opportunity to make such an impression on a young patient that he or she will aspire to dentistry.

That was the case for Devin Conaway, a 22-year-old from Phillipsburg, in central Pennsylvania. Conaway is attending the Case Western Reserve School of Dental Medicine thanks in part to assistance from the Jeffrey Mills Memorial Scholarship.

Conaway had a permanent canine positioned horizontally across the top of his mouth. Between his dentist, an oral surgeon, and an orthodontist, he had what he sums up as "a lot of work" done over four or five years. Although the work was painful at times, it served as an inspiration.

"The best teachers I had in high school were science teachers. That and having the good firsthand experiences that I had with my dental work really inspired me to pursue dentistry," Conaway says. "I wanted to be in a profession where I could help people."

Conaway first visited the CWRU School of Dental Medicine during the summer following his sophomore year at Juniata College

in Huntingdon, PA. He heard about CWRU's Summer Medical and Dental Education Program through an advisor, and spent several weeks experiencing the dental school. He came away impressed.

Conaway liked the School of Dental Medicine, but what really sold him on the school was the curriculum.

"The incorporation of the problem-based learning and the sealant program that provides patient interaction at the end of the first semester were very attractive to me. We just finished the early patient interaction, and it really helped me become more comfortable around patients," he says.

Conaway says he would ultimately like to start a practice that he could pass down to his children — once he has some. In the meantime, he plans to enjoy his educational experience at the dental school. He is very grateful for the scholarship that made it possible.

The scholarship that is assisting Conaway at the CWRU Dental School is named for Jeffrey Mills, who was tragically murdered on the day he was going to graduate from the dental school in 1982. An intruder broke into Mills' Cleveland house that morning, shot Mills and made off with \$40 in a crime of senseless violence.

The intruder has never been caught. The money for the scholarship came from a reward fund set up by the Mills family. The reward fund turned into a loan fund, and eventually an endowment.

Jeffrey Mills' brother, David Mills, D.D.S. '79, is a practitioner in Euclid. He says the

scholarship is a way to keep his brother's memory alive.

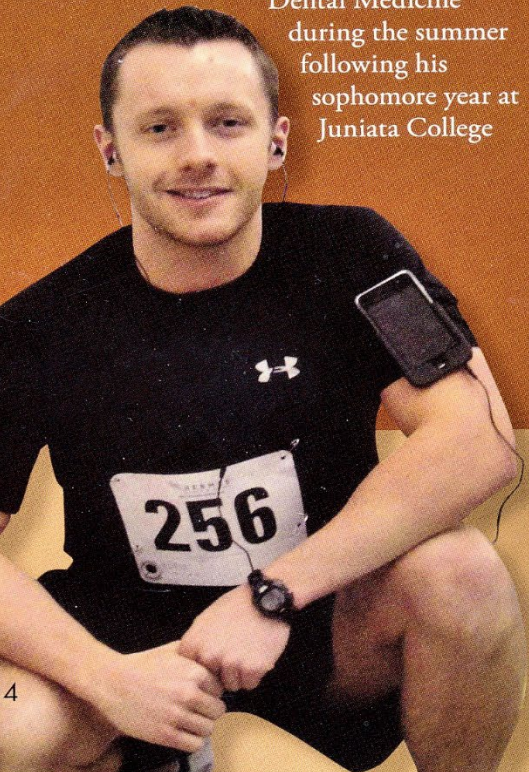
"I went through dental school three years ahead of Jeff, and we both needed a lot of loan assistance, grant assistance, anything that we could scrape together to get through," Dr. Mills says. "We both attended classes during the day and worked part-time jobs in the evening and weekends, and it was very difficult. So I know Jeff would be grateful that in his memory some financial assistance is available to other students."

Dr. Mills notes that the students who are benefiting from the scholarship today probably weren't even born when Jeffrey Mills was killed. "I think it's really nice that it has become a permanent memorial."

Despite all the financial difficulties, long hours and hard work that his years at the dental school engendered, Dr. Mills would "absolutely" travel back in time and do it again if he could.

"It was all worth it," he says. "My dental education at CWRU prepared me for a career in dentistry. I think my little brother would have been a more talented dentist than me. He was the more artistic of the two of us."

Thanks to the Mills Scholarship, Devin Conaway has the opportunity to make those memories today. "I think there are a lot of alumni who are very aware of what a great school this is," says Conaway. "I think that's why so many of them want to give back through things such as scholarships, and help other people experience it." ■



Devin Conaway is a recipient of a scholarship from the Jeffrey Mills Memorial Scholarship, one of the crucial sources of support to the school. Gifts like these and bequests allow us to continue to attract the best and brightest students and educate them for future careers in dentistry. If you'd like to do your part to support future professionals, please contact the development and alumni relations office at (216) 368-3480, toll free at (877) 468-1436, or email dentalalumni@case.edu.