

Dreams, the Deficits and Dry Gulch



couple times a month, a large truck backs up to my building and disgorges upward of 82,000 cubic feet of dental literature in the form of subscription-free magazines. Some of them are of conventional size, others are large enough to qualify as room dividers, but they all have one thing in common—fear. The U.S. Postal Service must have sent all these publications a thinly disguised threat that if they couldn't prove every few days that the dentists on their mailing lists had actually asked for their publication, the USPS was going to raise their mailing rates to an exorbitant 37 cents for the first ounce like everybody else pays.

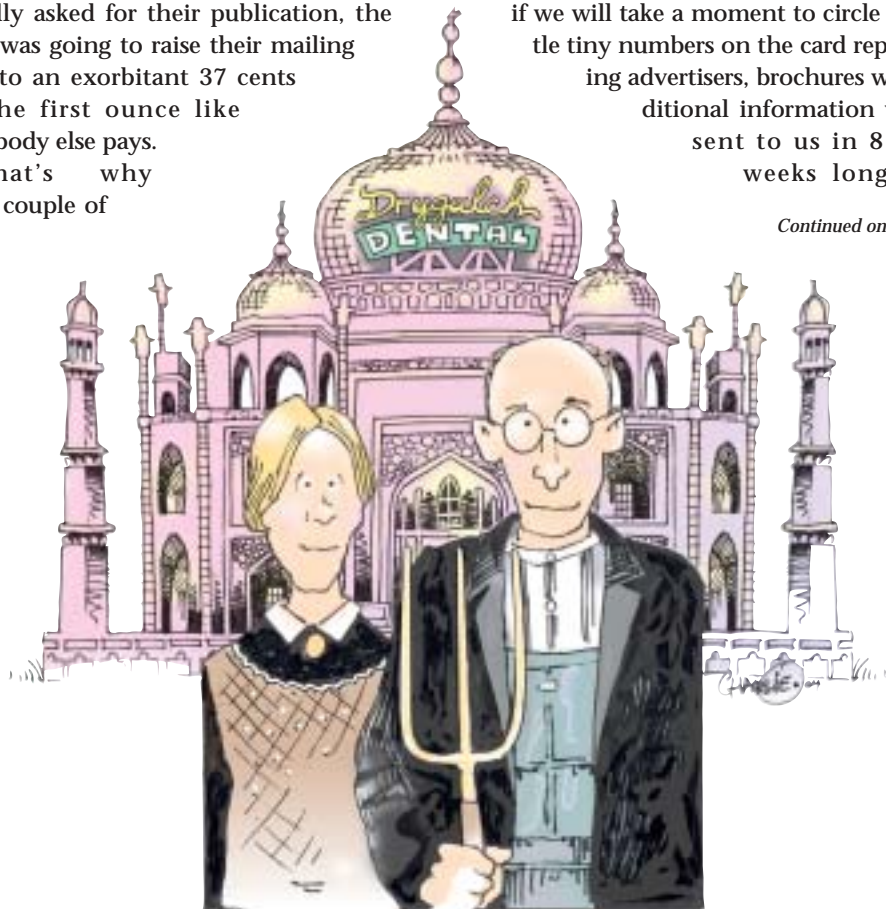
That's why every couple of

issues, we are requested to take a few minutes of our time to fill out a detachable card indicating that YES we want to continue to receive the magazine and YES, we are still in the same practice location, same type practice, see the same number of patients per week, still claim we graduated in the same year as the last 100 times we have complied with the requested information. Apparently, the magazines' computers crash regularly and these facts are lost in cyberspace. Then

if we will take a moment to circle the little tiny numbers on the card representing advertisers, brochures with additional information will be sent to us in 8 to 10 weeks long after

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we've forgotten what it was we wanted to know.

Otherwise, they say ruefully, they will have to hit the "delete" key and we will have lost the opportunity to ever again know what's going on in the profession. An exception seems to be that if we should forget to return the pre-paid card, we will be given another 40 or 50 chances to re-establish ourselves as the magazines continue to arrive regardless.

This must come as a relief to the advertisers whose contributions to the publication make it possible and therefore can claim upwards of 90 percent of the content. Fair enough! It's the theme of some of the articles hidden randomly among the ads that can tilt us precariously toward clinical depression.

Case in point: **Featured Office of the Month** — Dry Gulch, Texas, population 3,416, mean average per capita income \$4,027 per annum, \$63.15 per month after taxes. Number of dentists in town: 22. There are no blue-collar workers, they can't afford collars. However, they are a proud people and none more so than Dr. Billy "Doc" Deficit and his wife Ellie Mae "Marge" Deficit.

The Deficits came to Dry Gulch, reports the article, seeking a better life after Billy Doc graduated from dental school two years ago \$125,000 in hock for student loans. They had only the clothes on their backs, plus a few strategically placed remnants on their fronts, but they had a dream. Yes! And a goal. A goal and ambition. And drive! These attributes were so evident to banker Roy Jack Fignewton of the Dry Gulch Debenture and Fiduciary Bank, that he immediately granted the pair a 30-year loan of \$895,000 at 2.32 percent interest, taking their 1937 Gremlin as collateral.

Billy Doc and Marge set to work with a determination born of American grit and impending starvation. Within nine months they had created a dental office compounded of equal measures of the Taj Mahal and Rockefeller Center; 25,000-square feet of the very latest in dental equipment and amenities unequalled outside Beverly Hills.

In the last 12 months, Dr. Deficit grossed \$1,325,538 on a three-day week. Interviewed by the dental magazine corps, Billy Doc was asked how he accomplished this remarkable feat.

**They had only
the clothes on
their backs, plus a
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had a dream.**

Q. How did you accomplish this remarkable feat, Doctor?

A. We had this dream, me and Marge and ...

Q. No, really, how did you do it?

A. Just because this is a small town and the people are poor and there are 21 other dentists to care for their needs, doesn't mean that they don't want and appreciate quality dentistry if it is offered to them at 18 percent interest compounded daily in an environment that is caring and unlike the galvanized iron lean-tos to which they

are accustomed.

Q. And you do this?

A. No, I read that in a magazine. Marge's uncle died and left her \$400 million. So I hired the other 21 dentists and signed them up for every HMO I could find. We'll check in after we return from St. Moritz later this month.

Next month you will read about Olaf Knudsen, DMD, of Swampwater, Minn., who last year paid \$755,000 income tax working his little one-man practice in a hamlet of 819 souls whose only water supply comes from Knudsen's three-way syringes. Alternatively, you could forget to return one of those subscription cards and maybe you'll get lucky. **CDA**