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I'll throw it back in your face

When my dad started practicing in 1953, he worked for a great trial lawyer named Sid Davidson in the Powers Building for six months, *gratis*.

He told me how skillful Sid was, but he also found it difficult to provide shelter and food for his wife and baby without drawing a paycheck. That's when he opened his own office.

Times were tough, and I am told we celebrated on the day he came home with two live lobsters — the equivalent value of a year's worth of work, but somehow he managed to buy them.

I still try to get over the guilt, although my parents protected me continuously from even the possibility that I would feel such guilt, about the trauma they went through after I was born. Almost every Sunday morning when I turn on the mic at WHAM, I think about the fact that the doctors in Manhattan on Park Avenue (supposedly the best in the world) told my parents that I would never speak.

Some of my friends think they were very wrong.

When my parents moved back to Rochester after law school, they got a chance to meet a saint of a man, Dr. Warren George, who was a plastic surgeon with a heart as big as the sun. He explained that, through several surgeries, he could close the cleft palate I suffered, but my father was extremely concerned about what the doctors on Park Avenue had said.

"Doctor, I don't want to offend you, but some of the best people in the world have told us that we have to wait until Bobby is five, and then extract all of his teeth and then fit him with a prosthesis with false teeth," my father said, without meaning to challenge Dr. George too adamantly.

"Do you see this baby? I wouldn't hurt this baby," Dr. George replied. "Bobby needs this surgery, and I can take care of him."

My parents finally felt some hope after all.

My dad decided it really was the right thing to do but, as I just mentioned, buying two lobsters was an extravagance.

"Okay, doctor," my dad relented, "What is your fee for the surgery?"

"How long have you been out of law school?" the doctor asked.

"Six months."

"Well, we'll take care of Bobby now," Dr. George proposed, "and when you've been practicing for six years, come on back and we'll settle up."

My dad was a proud man, and a hard head. He explained that such a deal would not be agreeable, and Dr. George yelled back: "If you go out and borrow that money, I'll throw it back in your face."

So I actually never figured out how my mom and dad did it, but I'm sure Dr. George made great concessions in his fee because his motivation in life was to help children and adults who had difficult problems.

I never was told exactly what transpired when Dr. George looked my dad in the eye, but I know he exhibited compassion, enormous skill and a zest for helping others, traits all of us should aspire to exhibit.

In fact, I was at a meeting on Wednesday morning when it was suggested that we should have more meetings with both doctors and attorneys in order to enhance the relationship between the two professions.

I know this much: If it weren't for Dr. Warren George, my participation in such a meeting would have been nil, and even though it's not a Sunday morning, I am aware of the fact that I am able to speak because of that wonderful man.

I also know that he was proud when his son, Robert, became a surgeon also.

Although I thanked you while you were still alive, doctor, I hope you and your family understand just how grateful my family and I are.

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