Donald B. Giddon, DMD59, PD62, became professor emeritus of Developmental Biology in July 2015 after serving more than 50 years in various academic capacities. Far from being retired, Dr. Giddon is moving ahead with new oral health initiatives about which he is most passionate. He has rededicated himself to championing the designation of “oral physician” for medically trained dentists, and continues to engage colleagues across Harvard University in discussing the importance of oral health.

With a long and celebrated academic career, and his great knowledge of the history of the Harvard School of Dental Medicine, Giddon has been asked to have a role in the planning and implementation of the upcoming celebration of the 150th anniversary of the School.

From the stage to lectern

As a young boy growing up in Newark, New Jersey, Giddon took an early interest in technology. He had an affinity for machines and electricity, facilitated by training as a ham radio operator during World War II. It led Giddon to his first scientific, if not so well received endeavor. With little more than alligator clips and a screwdriver he tapped his neighbors’ telephone lines and managed to interfere with radio signals and replace their programs with his own voice. Thus, Giddon earned the nickname “little professor.”

Despite his youthful willingness to test the patience of his elders, Giddon says, “I was an insecure kid.” It was later in high school that he overcame his shyness by taking up acting.

“I liked being on the stage, so together with my burgeoning scientific endeavors I thought becoming a professor was a natural fit.”

Giddon’s academic career began at Brown University where he earned his undergraduate degree in psychology and subsequently a master’s degree in psychology at Boston University. He began his PhD program at the University of Pennsylvania and completed it at Brandeis University, overlapping with his DMD training at HSDM completed in 1959. He had further training as an NIH-funded postdoctoral student in periodontology at HSDM and Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH).

While a graduate student in psychology, he worked as a statistician at Tufts School of Dental Medicine, where his career of combining psychology and dentistry began. Giddon credits his mentor, the famed psychologist Dr. Abraham Maslow, with convincing him to stay in dental school and pursue research that combined these two fields. His formal teaching activities began at age twenty-two as a graduate student at the University of Pennsylvania. He presented his first scientific paper at HSDM in 1954. His first academic position was at