

Git 'Er Done...

Similar to most academic endeavors, dental school is a process. After graduating college and passing through the minefields of interviews and aptitude tests, one can then move on to four years of learning about teeth. Actually, year one is anything but teeth. Unless things have changed drastically, the first year of dental school closely mirrors that of medical school; advanced health science classes with a few token courses about teeth mixed in. Year two mainly consists of learning how to fix teeth in a lab on mannequins who are by far the most compliant and agreeable patients around. They open wide, always get numb, have no cheeks or tongues, and generally contort themselves at will. Nothing like the real world, but a good place to start. Finally, in years three and four budding young dentists start to see real patients and fix real teeth. We then spend the rest of our lives learning how to be the perfect dentist.

I tell you that so I can tell you this.

At the beginning of my third year of dental school, a friend called and said he needed a tooth looked at.

"I've had this cap a couple of years and it has never been right. Now, I can hardly drink anything cold. It's starting to affect my beer drinking. You've been in school almost three years, can you help me out?"

Oh...the horror.

Seeing that my friend had just graduated college and had taken a job with no health insurance, I figured a way to work him in the following day. When he came up to the school, we took several x-rays of the tooth and everything about the relatively new crown looked perfect. I tested the tooth and its neighbors with a cold q-tip and the pain was there, just as he'd said. I was stumped, which was not saying much as this was probably only the third toothache I'd ever seen. Little did my buddy know that my previous two years were spent reading about microbiology and poking around on dummies.

At the time, I didn't know what was going on, so I started grasping for more clues. "What did the dentist say when you got this tooth fixed," I said.

"He told me the tooth was in bad shape and I might still need a root canal."

"So when did you have the root canal done," said I, ignoring the lack of root canal in the x-rays.

"I still haven't," he replied.

It was in that moment that I reached deep into my academic knowledge and wealth of experience. I grabbed my friend's x-rays and walked him to the root canal clinic upstairs.

The very next day I received a phone call that his tooth was much better and he couldn't believe he went through two years of agony and pain. The root canal was not nearly as bad as he had heard or expected and cold beverages no longer caused him problems. The root canal resident even managed to save his crown so that he did not have to get another one. All was well and my friend wanted to show me his appreciation.

"Let's go get a cold beer...I'm buying."

Until next week, keep smiling.

-Please send comments to Drs. Parrish at www.ParrishDental.com.