

## SIXTY-SIX YEARS IN DENTAL HYGIENE AND STILL LOVING IT

I have been very fortunate. Immediately after high school graduation in 1940, I was accepted by the West Liberty State College Department of Dental Hygiene. There were only thirteen dental hygiene schools in the United State and West Liberty was just ninety miles from my home, Clarksburg, West Virginia. That hygiene school was in its third year and was doing a good job of molding the program and inspiring the students. I still remember how excited I felt about being there and what a joy those two years were.

After I took the State Board exam, I was employed by the State Board member who practiced in my home town. Our city had never had a dental hygienist, so I enjoyed being a pioneer. For two years, I served as president of the West Virginia Hygienists' Association.

Then I married my special patient, Marlow Davis, CPA and moved to Pittsburgh, PA. There I loved working as a school dental hygienist in five schools. My main teaching tool was a little furry hand puppet puppy dog. My mentor not only taught dental health to children in the schools, but she created a delightful weekly children's TV show to spread the work of children's dental health.

Next, we moved to Phoenix with our two small children. Hygienists were so scarce in Arizona that when I took the State Board exam in 1957, I was offered four jobs. I accepted all of them, one day a week in each of the four offices. Two years later, my Tuesday dentist said, "Betsy, I would like you to quit all your other offices and work full time for me." My reply was, "I can't do that because I'm going to be a Cub Scout den mother when school starts." For the next three years I thoroughly enjoyed my Cub Scouts. The following year, I took on the Camp Fire girls. I was their leader for eleven years. They were a joy, too. I do believe that if we balance our lives with other interesting activities, it will in some subtle way, contribute to our staying enthusiastic about our career. I can sincerely say I have enjoyed every office in which I have been employed. I like being a dental hygienist, partly because I enjoy people, and partly because it's such a worthy cause. We really are making a difference in people's health and happiness.

When my Monday dentist, with whom I had practiced for twenty four years, retired in 1981 he sold his practice and says he sold me, too. So, another one of my blessings is that some of the patients I now treat have been my patients for as long as 51 years. Once a cute little four-year-old bit my finger, then rolled her pretty blue eyes up at me, wondering what I was going to do about it. I ignored it (somewhat painfully.) So, she released her chomp. I saw her just last week, as I do every six months. She is still one of my favorite patients, a lovely, very caring middle-aged lady (who doesn't bite my fingers any more.)

When I think about the fact that there are hygienists who get burned out so early in their careers, I wonder how I might be helpful. Scheduling the patients too closely could cause it. Also, working too many days a week, not having adequate lunch time or having work days that are too long. Actually, I have had all these situations sometime, but not very often. Sometime within recent years, this illuminating thought occurred to me: A job is not just a job: it is a significant part of one's life. Wow! I had never before thought of it that way. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could live our lives with no regrets, full-heartedly approaching everything we do

with a zestful attitude of gratitude, etc., etc.? Well, we're all human and no one has a good day every day. But, we can keep striving.

Let me tell you about the most touching experience of my career. One morning, a few years ago, I had an adorable new patient. He was three years old with gorgeous curly red hair. He had just enough baby fat for his hand to be dimpled. He was so cute! His daddy came into the operatory with him and gently said, "OK, Collin, climb up in the chair." He did so without much hesitation. Then the daddy said, "Now put your head back." Again little Collin cooperated. This adorable little boy then looked up at me and said, "I don't want to get hurt. I'm not bad." Just imagine what someone must have told him! I quickly replied, "Oh, no one ever gets hurt in this chair. We just have fun." I gave him the mouth mirror to play with and he held it up to his eye. I'll never forget his happy smile when he saw his eye in that little mirror. I told him all about the instruments and everything. We really had fun. Then I told him that Dr. Patterson would come in and "you can show him your sparkling clean teeth. After that, you get to go to the toy box and pick out a toy to take home and keep." When Collin came back from the toy box, his daddy was in the chair. He reached his little hand up and patted his daddy's arm and said, "It'll be all right, Papa." When I told Marlow about that, it brought tears to his eyes. The next day, he said, "Tell me that story about Collin again." Again, there were tears in his eyes.

Now, I am a widow, missing Marlow very much and working 2 days a week. I balance my career with activities with family and friends, piano, gardening and community and church volunteering. Last, but certainly not least, I want to say it is a special pleasure to participate in ASDHA. I have served on the Executive Board 20 years, treasurer for 4 years, historian for 1 year and president of my component for a year. Now, I am enjoying being a delegate from CADHS representing other hygienists. Come join the fun!

**Betsy R. Davis, RDH**

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