

I hated going to the dentist. It was so pointless. You go to one doctor for everything else, but your teeth have to get special treatment. I never wanted to go, but I knew that if I bailed, my mother would sense it and my phone would be ringing like mad for days until I went. She and my father were both dentists, so it was never something I could avoid as a child. They worked together in a small practice a few blocks from our home, and they were quite popular. I spent my weekends sitting in the waiting room reading the magazines because my parents were too stubborn to hire a babysitter so I could stay home. My entire life was centered around dentistry, and I really started to resent it. As an adult, my teeth were flawless. My parents had given me so much dental work over the years that my chompers were steel and resilient to even the sugariest of foods. I moved out of the state as soon as I could, away from my parents and their tooth obsession, which made them quite upset because that meant I would have to find a dentist that wasn't them.

I pulled into the parking lot of the local dentistry around eight in the morning on a Saturday. I wanted to be in and out as quickly as possible, and before the rush of customers. I hopped out of my car, my heart pounding a little harder than usual. It was my first time going to the dentist since I moved out of my parent's home. My parents made sure to examine my teeth one last time before I hit the road, which gave me ample time to avoid a new dentist, and new hands digging into my mouth.

After all the nonsense paperwork, I was in the chair, remembering all the times I had been in these types of chairs with my parents looking down on me. In that moment, I missed them terribly. If someone was grabbing at my teeth, I would want it to be my parents- someone I could trust. The hygienist came in and, after a warm greeting, began cleaning my teeth.

"Would you stop that!?" The young woman yelled, pulling her hands quickly out of my mouth.

"What do you mean?" I sat up quickly, staring at a very startled woman.

"You LICKED me! You licked my hand! Why did you do that?"

I turned my head, puzzled. That's what mother always had me do. She said it helped keep my tongue out of the way. "I'm sorry. That's what we did where I'm from."

"Well, never do that again! She looked at me, appalled by my weird habits, and went to retrieve the doctor. She didn't want to clean my teeth anymore, and I can't say I blamed her. I stayed in the chair, embarrassed and staring at the painting of smiling teeth across the wall in front of me.

I was pulled away from the painting to reach for the phone vibrating in my pocket. I looked at the glass screen to see the smiling face of my roommate and her name, Jenny, stretched across the top of the phone. I chose to ignore it, awaiting the arrival of a most likely upset doctor, and whatever she needed, it could wait.

The doctor came in and discussed with me the error in my ways. I apologized profusely, saying it was just how I was taught, but the dentist still regarded the incident as a sort of attack on his employee, so he kindly asked me to leave his place of business and never return. I sighed and left in a hurry. I knew I hadn't had a proper dental check up, but I could at least tell my mother I went and be telling the truth.

I sat in my car, my heart racing. I had never been kicked out of anything before, and I felt horrible about myself. I remembered the phone call from Jenny, and picked up the phone to redial.

“Sarah?? Sarah! Oh my gosh are you okay??”

“Yeah. What do you mean? I’m fine. I’m at the dentist.”

“Oh my god you don’t know!?”

“Know what?” My heart was racing even more so now.

“The apartment! It burned down! Everything is gone! Oh my god I’m so happy you’re okay! I didn’t see you outside with everyone else when I came home and I thought you were in there!”

“What? It’s all gone!? No! Please tell me this is a joke!”

“Sarah, it’s really gone. They’re saying it was a faulty hair dryer or something, but I don’t know. Come over here soon. We’ll figure out what to do together.”

“I’ll be right over there. Don’t worry, Jenny. It’s just stuff. We’ll be alright.”

I joined Jenny in front of the apartment complex, now mostly a pile of burnt rubble, still sizzling. I breathed in deeply and took it all in. It was a tragedy, but I knew then that if I didn’t have that dumb dentist appointment, I would have been sound asleep. I may not have made it out alive.

So in short, my dentist appointment saved my life, and the dentist told me to stop licking her fingers.