

## A Trip to the Dentist

When my generation was growing up, a trip to the dentist was usually met with dread. Oh sure, if you did not have a cavity, you had the treasure chest to look forward to. Where you would get to choose a cheap plastic ring, spider, or possibly an army guy with a parachute attached. But for the most part, your mother forced you to go and there was little to smile about during the visit.

My childhood dentist was a huge man, with giant hands. He was more suited to a different profession, really. Like construction. I even remember the dentist office waiting room. Like so many things in 1970's décor, it left a lot to be desired. The walls were drab, the carpet was brown, and the chairs were those metal kind with brown vinyl seats. There was never anything to read except a few battered magazines and maybe a ripped up Highlights with all of the puzzles already filled in. Nobody was particularly friendly, not that any of us expected him or her to be. They had a job to do, and so did we. When we had a cavity, there was a definite disappointment in the air. The dentist would frown and deliver the bad news. Mom would shake her head and sigh. The hygienist would sternly recommend flossing and better brushing. As a final send off for those with cavities, you knew there would be no trip to the treasure chest for a cheap plastic ring.

Fast forward to the present day. My children go to a dentist that specializes in children. There is a giant salt-water fish tank in the middle of the office; Nemo and all his pals are swimming happily inside. The walls in the office are completely painted with beautiful murals of the jungle. There are several play areas, one is the base of a giant coconut tree, complete with a monkey hanging in it. Everywhere you look there are toys, children's books and magazines, and other kids to play with. As if that were not enough, there is a separate room with several free arcade games. Oh, did I mention there are televisions everywhere, including on the ceiling above the chairs where you sit to have your teeth cleaned. The movies are always the latest smash hit, and there are never any commercials. The people are also different. They are always smiling and happy. The hygienists in the office are all young and beautiful and none of them ever mention the "D" word (drill) or the "S" word (shots). Laughing gas is dispensed freely---pain is not an option. Our dentist is a petite woman with tiny hands. She smiles a lot and has a soft, soothing voice.

If you are thinking how positive all this sounds, I agree. My children love going to the dentist--and why wouldn't they, in many ways it is fair competition to Six Flags. But these observations I am making came about as

I sat in the waiting room while my youngest had his first two cavities filled. He had no remorse about the cavities, especially since nobody except me seemed to have a problem with it. There was no guilt here, only smiles. When he emerged from the chair, he even had a prize---to go along with the one he got when the dentist delivered the news (in a positive way, of course) that he had his first set of cavities. He could have cared less---he actually tried to console me when I told him we really had to be better about flossing and brushing. "It is o.k. mom, they are just my baby teeth," he assured me. Of course I am glad my children do not have the same fears and sense of dread that I have about the dentist, but I still cannot help but wonder if their experience is almost too positive. No, I don't want them to be scolded about having a cavity, but maybe a slight reprimand from somebody besides just me would help.