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TO THOSE WHO TREAT OUR CHILDREN BY INGRID KIDD GOLDFARB



When I was young, there were popular toothpaste ads showing happy, grinning kids holding up a report card from the dentist and shouting *Look Mom, No Cavities*. I was not one of those kids! I rarely had a visit to the dental office without the need for drilling and filling. In the early 50s, there were few, if any, practices specializing in treatment of children. My parents valued good dental care; my own grandfather was a dentist. However, as well meaning as my parents were, they approached a visit to the dentist with fear and trepidation. Our family dentist was uneasy in treating children and it showed. He talked about me to my parents as if I couldn't hear. The only thing he would say to me was "This will hurt, but if you sit still, it won't last too long." The smell of the office and the sight of a needle would send me into a dark and fearful place. I was well into my 30s before I experienced nearly pain-free dentistry from professionals whose skill and technique had come a long way.

My grandchildren provide the greatest joy in my life today. There is not much I wouldn't do for them. If I could take away all fear and pain in their lives, I would. In the last few weeks, they have both had dental experiences that have heightened my awareness and appreciation for a whole group of dental professionals doing important work.

Emmitt, a very active two-year-old, slipped in the bathtub and chipped his front tooth. I went with my daughter to the pediatric dental practice where she has been taking the kids for regular check-ups. The reception area was open, colorful, friendly, and filled with toys and activities appropriate for a variety of ages. Staff members were professional and friendly and seemed happy to be there. As I watched Emmitt happily push wooden beads on a wire maze, I had a pit in my stomach. I was sure we would go from this "happy" place into a sterile "scary" place with screaming children.

I was so wrong. The treatment space was also bright, colorful, and friendly. There were DVD players to engage the kids. When Dr. Stella entered, he was warm, friendly, and confident. He spoke with ease to both my daughter and grandson, explaining what he was doing and why. Before I could take it all in, he had smoothed the tooth and bonded it. We were ready to leave and not a single tear had been shed. Emmitt had his perfect smile back.

My six-year-old granddaughter Sophie has had a very active "tooth year." The joyful announcement of a "loose tooth" was soon followed by the tooth fairy's visit. Appropriately, Sophie was without her two front teeth for Christmas. She'd happily gone to the dentist for check-ups, cleaning, and sealants. The kids get mailings from the practice almost monthly. On their birthdays, they each received a recorded message with the entire front office singing "Happy Birthday."

Sophie's latest check-up revealed she needed three fillings, one of which might require a root canal. On hearing the news, I immediately went to the "dark" memories of my own childhood. Luckily, my daughter refused to buy into the fear mode and instead instilled calm. Again, the professionalism, skill, confidence, and care of Dr. Stella's entire staff provided my granddaughter with a most positive experience (and happily no root canal was needed). It has even inspired her to talk about being a dentist when she grows up ... or a veterinarian ... or a mom ... or President of the United States.

Dr. Stella recently visited my granddaughter's kindergarten class, passed out toothbrushes, and talked about oral health. It's not only good marketing on his part, but also a public service. I was especially impressed to learn he had quietly offered help to a child who visibly needed immediate dental care.

It's wonderful to see how much parenting and dentistry have improved. There are thousands of pediatric dentists now who treat our most precious little ones with exceptional skill and care. My hat is off to all of you. 