

The Dental Card

Jeanette Rhyan

Slowly, I walked into the house and sat down at the kitchen table.

“How was school today?” my mom asked as she walked into the kitchen. Watching me, she became a bit concerned. “What’s wrong?”

Gradually, I pulled the yellow card from between the pages of my science book. I laid it on the table near where Mom was standing. Looking at her, I groaned, “Do I have to go?”

“Of course, you have to go to the dentist. You don’t want to be the only student in your sixth-grade class not to get their dental check-up card signed, do you?”

“But Mom. It’s not your teeth Dr. Peterson will be checking. Every time I go to the dentist, he finds a cavity and has to drill.” My voice was getting louder. “Mom! He doesn’t numb my tooth when he drills. It hurts.”

Realizing that I was going to lose this battle, I finally said, “Who invented these dumb cards anyway, and why do we have to fill them out each year in grade school? I’ll be glad when I get to seventh grade and won’t have to fill out one of these dumb yellow dental cards.” I grabbed a Pepsi from the refrigerator and headed to my room to change clothes.

Eventually, Mom made my dental appointment for a Saturday morning.

Standing outside the dentist’s door, I made one final plea to Mom. “Do I have to go in? He’s going to find a cavity and drill. Maybe if you sit in the chair, he won’t notice the difference between you and me.” I was pulling out all the stops. I did not want to go to the dentist!

“Open the door, Jeanette. The sooner you go in, the sooner we get out of the office and continue with our shopping today. There are a lot of items on my grocery list. Maybe a box of Frosted Flakes is in your future.”

Mom was now stooping to bribery.

Opening the door, I entered the dentist’s office. The dental assistant immediately escorted me back to the dreaded dental chair. “Dr. Peterson will be right with you,” she said as she seated me in the chair and placed a paper bib around my neck.

I gazed out the window and tried to relax. Looking around the room, I spotted the deadly drill. Shivers went down my spine. I could already hear the buzzing of the drill in my head. Keeping my fingers crossed, I said a silent prayer for no cavities today. Next to my left arm was the white porcelain spit bowl. It looked harmless, but who knew what was it had in store for me?

“Good morning, Jeanette,” Dr. Peterson said as he spied the yellow dental card lying on the counter. “I see it’s time for your annual dental check-up.” I didn’t say a word.

“Well, let’s get started. Open wide.”

I did as Dr. Peterson instructed. He poked and scraped my teeth for a while getting some stubborn tartar off my back molars. So far so good. I never could figure out what you’re supposed to do with your eyes, keep them open or shut them. I kept my eyes tightly closed.

He was working on one of my teeth when I suddenly tensed. He had found a small hole and poked it with one of his sharp instruments.

When he pulled his hand out of my month, I complained, “That hurt a lot.”

“That hurt because you have a cavity, and it needs to be filled.” My worst nightmare was coming true. “The good news is you only have one cavity this time.”

He reached for the drill. In my head, I was screaming, “No, no, no!”

Quietly I asked, “Are you going to numb the tooth?”

“It takes too much time to deaden the tooth, and I’ll be done in no time flat. Open wide so I can get to that tooth.”

Grabbing the arms of the chair, I squeezed with all my strength getting ready for the terrifying drill. Reluctantly, I opened my mouth.

After what seemed like an eternity, thank goodness the drill stopped. Next, the dentist prepared a silver concoction called amalgam that would fill my now bigger cavity. This stuff tasted nasty if I accidentally swallowed it. After a few minutes, the dentist pronounced the cavity filled, and I spit leftover pieces of amalgam into the porcelain spit bowl. I rubbed my jaw, which was sore from holding my mouth open for so long.

I rubbed my tongue over my newly filled cavity. It was smooth. Dr. Peterson handed me a mirror and showed me the tooth. Luckily, the silver amalgam couldn’t be seen.

Dr. Peterson patted my shoulder then handed me the signed yellow dental card. “Let’s aim for no cavities in your next visit. Take my advice and limit you sugar intake.”

My bowl of Frosted Flakes tasted delicious Monday morning. Grabbing my signed dental card, I headed to school, where I handed it to the teacher, who proudly stapled it to the health board alongside other signed dental cards.

During recess my friend handed me a Tootsie Roll Pop. So much for watching my sugar intake!