

Fifteen (or so) Things We Love About Dentistry

In a recent issue of *Back-packer*, there was a list of 50 things we love about camping and the outdoors. In fact, it was more than a list; it was actually the entire issue. If there are 50 things we love about the outdoors, surely there must be an equal number of things we love about our profession. Due to space constraints, however, we had to pare down our list. With that, we offer 15 (or so) things we love about dentistry.

Cast gold. What could be better than inspecting a highly polished MOD inlay onlay with perfect occlusal anatomy, and finding the margins imperceptible to the sharpest explorer? Then finding out it was placed 35 years ago by your predecessor. Forget porcelain and composite, that is esthetic dentistry.

Oral pathologists. Let's face it. Oral pathology was one of those courses in dental school you could only cram for. As our training turned from the academic to the clinical, oral pathology was that last remaining purely scientific hurdle we had to jump in order to graduate. So the night before an exam, we got together in our study groups, ordered Domino's Pizza, loaded up on caffeine, projected our oral path slides onto a wall and tried to tell the difference between benign keratosis and cellular atypia. Most of us don't understand why anyone would make a career out of oral pathology; perhaps they find H and E stain intoxicating or simply enjoy playing with microscopes. Whatever the reason, we're glad they like taking the hunks of soft tissue we send them, slicing them up, and seeing what they're made of. And we're glad they can tell the difference between benign ker-

atosis and cellular atypia so we can call Mrs. Jones and tell her with confidence that she doesn't have oral cancer.

Eugene Sekiguchi, ADA immediate past president. Spend two minutes talking with him and you'll understand.

Porcelain. This is a material that has climbed many rungs on the prestige ladder. What once was relegated to use in bathtubs and toilets now adorns the smiles of the majority of the adult population. It has a remarkable ability to be transformed from a rather useless and unattractive powder into those beautiful little nuggets that look like teeth, and keep our patients happy, their smiles healthy and attractive, and our schedules full.

Lab technicians. The men and women responsible for creating the aforementioned nuggets of porcelain, as well as those made of gold, composite and whatever the material *du jour* happens to be. In the art and science of dentistry, they are the Van Goghs and the Renoirs. Like most good artists, they can be temperamental. However, they make it up to us by serving as our default scapegoat when there is a poorly fitting restoration or a mix-up in the due date, even when it is not their fault. Thus, our relationship flourishes. Besides, if it weren't for lab technicians advancing their craft, we would still be cementing crowns that look like Chiclets.

Bob Horseman. Those other journals may have their erudite wordsmiths, distinguished scientific researchers, and academ-



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We love our profession, but a job is still a job and the weekend is still the weekend.

ic giants on their editorial boards. But damn it, WE HAVE HORSEMAN!

Computers. OK, so they crash in the middle of Monday morning, your software company gets bought out — four times — and they become obsolete within weeks of installation. But with the integration of digital radiographic and photographic technology, we can do things today we could not even conceive of 30 years ago. Besides, would you rather go back to a schedule in a three-ring binder, a pegboard system and your old Smith Corona typewriter?

Nitrous oxide. A gas composed of three simple atoms, yet it has allowed countless numbers of patients with high anxiety about dental treatment to safely and comfortably receive the care that they need. Note: Our research uncovered possible other uses by our colleagues who were young adults between the years 1967 and 1971. Such uses purportedly involved balloons and Jimi Hendrix records. Use of nitrous oxide in such a manner, if it ever occurred, cannot be recognized nor condoned in a professional scientific journal.

Arthur Dugoni. (See Sekiguchi entry.)

Oral surgeons. Sure, they may not be known for giving the most atraumatic injections, but we will forever be amazed at the ease with which they can flick out a lower third molar with a dilacerated root that is halfway imbedded into the ramus.

Fridays. We love our profession, but a job is still a job and the weekend is still the weekend.

Dental society and association staff. Although they are (with few exceptions) not dentists and never see the inside of our offices, these men and women are our extended staff and work as hard at dentistry on our behalf as we do.

CDA Scientific Sessions. Take your pick, San Francisco or Anaheim. Cabernet sauvignon, foie gras and the symphony, or beer, burgers and the House of Blues. Culture elegance and sophistication or Mickey, Donald and Goofy. Whichever city

you attend in, you can obtain world-class continuing education, shop for any and all items related to dentistry, get together with colleagues; and it's all a tax deduction.

Dental school deans. They're flamboyant, opinionated, and stubborn. They never do what we tell them. They're a slave to those alumni with bottomless checking accounts, but they are also a slave to excellence in the profession. They are visionaries and seemingly tireless leaders. They manage to orchestrate students, staff, faculty, and alumni in a grand symphony that advances the profession by preparing tomorrow's dentists and adding to the body of knowledge. While we are grateful for what they do, most of us would not dare wish for their job.

Bill Emerson and Sam Aanestad. Giving up your dental practice to run for statewide public office? Are you kidding? That alone gets them on the list even if they hadn't won.

Endodontists. It's 3:30 p.m. Friday. You're getting ready to go fishing for the weekend in the High Sierras. Your patient walks in with an abscessed upper second molar. The roots are thin, the canals are conjoined and the patient can barely open wide enough for the X-ray due to the pain. Are you going to pick up the handpiece or the telephone?

Optimism. While complaints and negative comments about the profession sometimes garner more attention than they deserve, there is an overwhelming preponderance of optimism in dentistry. We seem to love our profession and it shows.

We would like to know what other things our members love about the profession. If you would like to add to the list, address your comments to the associate editor.

CDA

CDA has recently reorganized its e-mail system. All comments, letters or questions should now be addressed to the editor at alan.felsenfeld@cda.org. The previous address is no longer valid.