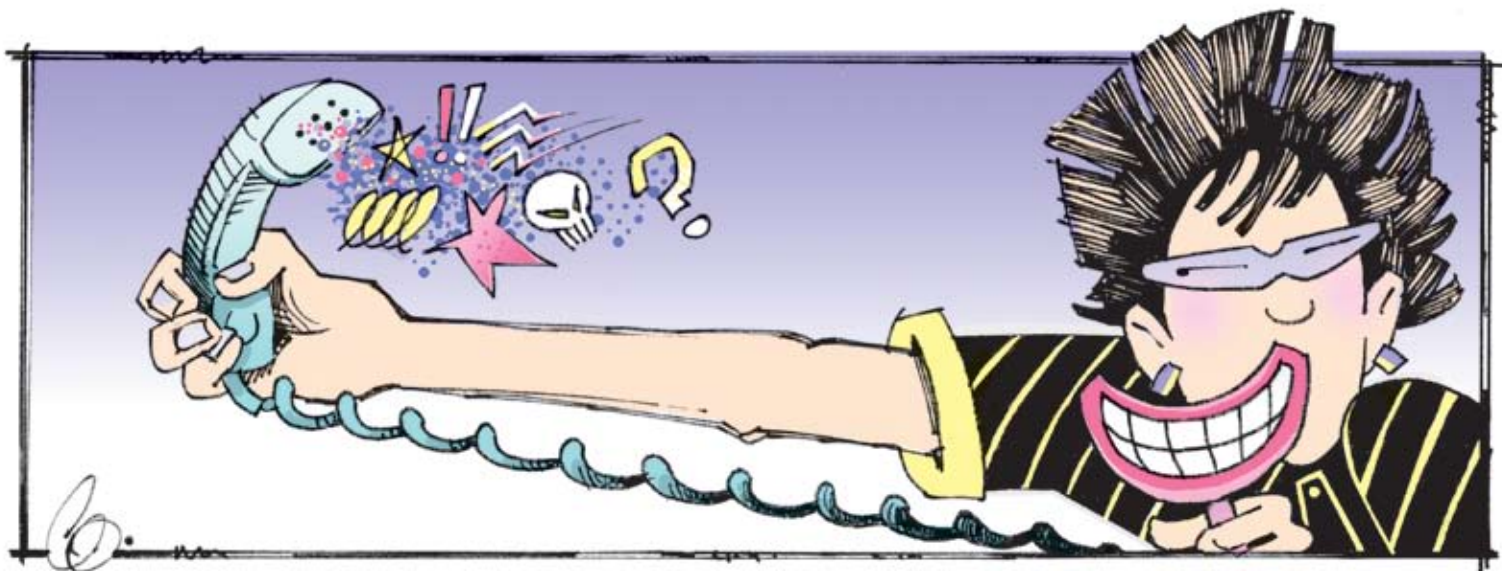


Smile Yourself Sick



Responsible journalism —
an oxymoron if ever there
was one — has struck again!

→ Robert E.
Horseman,
DDS

ILLUSTRATION
BY CHARLIE O.
HAYWARD

The last time something really good happened in recent memory was when dark chocolate was discovered to be beneficial to your health and the consumption of red wine was proven to add at least a decade to your longevity.

Women immediately rushed out and consumed enough chocolate to initiate zits the size of tennis balls and reduce their wardrobe choices to muu-muus and waterproof ponchos. Both genders downed copious draughts of red wine to the point of wearing funny hats at parties and dancing on bar tops in their underwear. Then you never heard another word about it. It was like a cosmic joke played by bored reporters assigned to the Friday science health section of the paper when they'd rather cover a bikini contest in Santa Monica.

Responsible journalism — an oxymoron if there ever was one — has struck again! This time it affects the dental profession in such a significant way that all our efforts of the last 25 years may have been for naught.

What has been our goal for the last couple of decades? What have we seen as final acceptance of all our efforts? It is life, liberty and the pursuit of the Perfect Smile even if you have to hock grandma's silverware to get it. The firm belief now held by the public is that foremost in their guaranteed entitlements, even above that of their stimulus checks, should be teeth exactly like those of any number of cloned young men and women featured in the celebrity magazines. Fame based entirely on being famous, has evolved from being traditionally Hiltonesque to include an acreage of tattoos formerly the acquisition of alcohol-lubricated seamen, the wearing of clown hats regardless of the occasion and the piercing of body parts that ought not to be violated. The world can consider itself lucky that Jerry Lewis' teeth as featured in *The Nutty Professor* are not a part of the smile du jour. Not yet.

Threatening the entire dental porcelain industry, therefore, is a headline out of

CONTINUES ON 805

DR. BOB, CONTINUED FROM 806

Frankfort, Germany, as reported by United Press International stating “Smiling can hurt your health!” It’s true, says Dieter Zapf of the Johann Wolfgang Goethe University, who studied 4,000 volunteers working in a fake call center. Why 4,000 people would volunteer to take fake calls or who would be employed to make the fake calls is not quite clear, but possibly involves unlimited Heineken in large steins.

Zapf’s hypothesis is this: People forced to smile and take on-the-job insults suffer more and longer-lasting stress that may harm their health. Right! And stepping in front of a Porsche 911 in top gear on the autobahn would probably do the same, but Dieter couldn’t get a grant to research that.

So 2,000 of the volunteers were allowed to respond in kind to abuse on the other end of the line while the other

half had to suck it up. I don’t know what a German insult would sound like since we didn’t study Teutonic slurs during my two years of junior college German, but maybe something like “Du bist ein dumkopf!” would produce stress in a delicate psyche wearing a forced smile. The other half who could respond vigorously with the German equivalent of “I’m rubber and you’re glue ...” or the classic “I know I am, but what are you?” did experience a brief increase in heart rate, but nothing compared to the bunch with the frozen Jessica Simpson smiles.

In an interview with the German health care magazine *Apotheken Umschau*, Zapf said, “Every time a person is forced to repress his true feelings there are negative consequences.” He suggested that people who must keep smiling on the job should get regular breaks to let it out. At

least that’s what I think he said. There are no German words that translate into this English statement that contain less than 32 consonants and vowels each. If the stricken ones are not allowed time off to release their smiles before rigor sets in, I would have suggested they seek employment elsewhere, like the German DMV, IRS, or Social Security where smiling is traditionally not a job requisite.

The point is, we can’t afford to have news releases like this UPI piece appearing in our press. We have too much invested in The Smile now to back off. Zapf should strive to get a real job, letting the phony calls stay in the province of der kinder with their newly acquired texting cell phones.

But how about white wine or milk chocolate? With almonds? Anybody looking into that? ■■■■