

Toothless Wonder....A Tale of Horror

By Deborah L. Kunesh

©Copyright 2009 by Deborah L. Kunesh

As a writer, I find myself sometimes having the need to chronicle certain life events. I think we've all experienced those times when things are just too crazy and unbelievable, not to share the story. This is one of those times.

About 2 months ago, I developed a bump on my gum, next to a tooth that has felt "funny" for nearly 2 years. It didn't hurt, it just felt strange...almost as if it was telling me that it needed to come out. In my mind, I kept picturing the tooth being extracted for some reason. I just felt intrinsically like it needed to come out.

My dentist kept taking x-rays throughout the years at my urging, only to find nothing amiss on the x-ray. Until this past December, when, after my noting this unusual bump, the dentist took another x-ray and found an infection in one of the canals. This tooth had had a root canal about 20 years ago, but had evidently developed another infection in the distal root.

So about a week before Christmas, my dentist performed a root canal on the distal root. I was in that chair for about 2 hours while he drilled, had to remove a post, and then cleaned everything out, took x-rays and put me on an antibiotic, which later gave me side effects so bad I had to stop it. I get home and unbelievably, experience no pain from this root canal.

Now mind you, I am a person who takes really good care of my teeth. I brush several times a day, floss almost daily, see my dentist twice a year, take supplements, exercise, eat fairly well. My dentist, upon my last visit, even commented on how healthy my gums were (thanks in part to flossing really well and my Shaklee Vitalizer supplements).

I had had several years in a row with minimal dental work needed (unusual for me...we have a family history of problem teeth), so I was wondering when the other shoe would drop, and drop it did ;-)

Two months later and I'm in the dentist's chair again for more dental work (did I mention this has been a stellar year for my dentist due to my needing a crap load of dental work all at once? ;-) Another 2 hour appointment. I mention once again that this bump has not gone away. He takes another x-ray, which shows the infection has cleared, lances it and sends me on my way. The dentist claims he has never seen a bump like this and is not sure what it is (yikes!)

The next day, I bite into a soft brownie and the filling on the "trouble tooth" comes out into my brownie! Back to the dentist yet again so he can refill this filling. I remember thinking at that point "this tooth is trying to tell me something!" The bump stays gone....until the next day, when it comes back with a vengeance. It continues to come and go on a daily basis.

Since it was a Saturday, I call and leave a message at my dentist's office, after scouring the internet and finding that these bumps usually indicate an abscess....I am panicked. Early Monday morning the dentist office calls me and asks me to come right in. I do. The dentist looks at it yet again, says that something is definitely going on (you think?) and would I go and see his endodontist "just for a consult, so that maybe he can diagnose what's going on." I insist on

going immediately. They call and get me an appt. I ask them to reassure me that this is just going to be a consult and he won't have to do anything. They reassure me.

I take my seat in the endodontist's suite waiting room and look around, feeling pity on those around me who have come in and have to have root canals. These poor people I think. Glad that's not me! Meanwhile, while waiting, I pick up some brochures on root canal therapy and strangely start wondering if I am sadly mistaken about my risk factor being zero for having to have any additional work done. I am taken back to a room, where they take an x-ray, the endodontist comes in, tells me that he believes I have a hidden canal that may be infected and that I need to come back in for a complete root canal retreatment. My thought, which came out in audible form "You've got to be kidding me!" He meanwhile also inserts a sharp thingee into the bump to take an x-ray to see where it may be leading to. The x-ray is inconclusive. By the way "Can you come back in today?" he asks. OMG....I am now going to be one of those poor people I was pitying in the waiting room. How can this be? This tooth has already had 2 root canals!

After the panic attack subsides I regain my composure and call Mike to alert him to the situation. Mind you, it's only February and I have blown through almost all of my dental insurance!

I set up the appt. for 3 p.m. that afternoon, go home, let the dog out, try to relax and head back. As they lead me back to the room, I feel like a cow being led to slaughter. The doctor comes back in and begins to administer the novacaine shots...the worst of which I have ever had. I could actually hear the needle puncture the tissue in the back of my jaw and it was very painful. I have never experienced that before. I am almost never bothered by these shots.

Minutes later he comes back, puts a rubber dam on my mouth to completely cover it (being nice enough to put a small hole in the center so at least I don't feel as if I'm suffocating), places a special band on the tooth and starts to dig and file. Meanwhile, he is fairly cheerful, asking me if I'm okay, etc., while he works with his tools that produce all kinds of foul odors as they melt the surfaces of your canal down (think of flesh burning). I had smelled this same odor when I first walked in the room and wondered what it was. Now, I knew. The odor threatens to make me nauseous and I start worrying what will happen if I suddenly feel like vomiting while I have this rubber dam attached :-/ Suddenly, he stops and says "This is interesting." Interesting, in dentistry or in medicine, is never good. He is much more serious now and has stopped asking me if I'm okay.

"Well, we found a fourth canal, and we cleaned it out, but that's not the problem. One of your other roots is torn open at the bottom and is bleeding, quite a bit." He then sticks one of his files down this bleeding canal all the way through to, you guessed it, the bump on the gum (so all this time this torn open root has been draining out to this bump directly), so that the file came out the other side of my gum. As numb as I was, I felt this!

My heart is now racing at marathon pace while I sit there with this blasted rubber dam on my mouth, a bleeding canal and a sense of panic as I can barely talk through all of this enough to ask him what's going on. I feel as if I can't breathe or am going to pass out. As if I'm there, but not really.

I mutter almost inaudibly “is it something serious?” I mean, when they tell you a canal is bleeding and it’s not supposed to be, all kinds of crazy things go through your mind.

He then reassured me that the worst case scenario is loss of the tooth. Sadly, this comforts me.

He then tells me that he is trying to stop the bleeding so that he can treat and close the canal (at this point I am praying that the bleeding stops so I don’t go into a complete panic). The endodontist tells me that most likely this problem has been going on for a year or two (interesting...exactly the amount of time that the tooth has felt “Funny” and I have been trying to get to the bottom of this) and it has eaten away jaw bone! He reassures me that once the tooth is removed and the infection cleared, that the jaw bone will regenerate itself. He also mentions that most likely the infection ate right through the root and that’s why it was open. He called it "reabsorption, something".

Once that ordeal was over, I set home and wish for the novacaine to wear off quickly as I hate that feeling. Once it wears off, I wish it would come back. The jaw joint is so sore from the shots that I can barely open my mouth and the tooth which only felt “funny” for the last 2 years, now seriously hurts. I can’t put any pressure on it and the tooth is throbbing. I spend the rest of the evening with an ice pack on my face.

The next day (Tuesday) most of the throbbing is gone, though my jaw is still very sore. I decide to call the oral surgeon to see if they can fit me in on Thursday, which was Mike’s day off. This oral surgeon, 6 years ago, had removed all 4 of my wisdom teeth and had each wisdom tooth out in less than 2 minutes each. I just KNEW he was the doctor for me. The doctor isn’t in on Thursdays, but “we have a cancellation today at 11 a.m., would you like to take that?” It’s 8:30 a.m. I paused. Am I ready for another procedure? I am still so sore! Yet, I just wanted it over with. I took the appointment.

Just a short time later, Mike and I arrive at the oral surgeon’s office. After filling out some paperwork, they take me back. I think the nurse felt sorry for me because after the events of the week and the previous week, my nervous system is now a major mess. Read....seriously needs medication ☺ Anyone have a valium?

The nurse asks me about my medical history and then takes my blood pressure, which was 150 something over something (can’t remember). This is extremely high for me as my blood pressure is normally around 103/80 or 113/80. She reassures me that this is normal when people come in for oral surgery.

She exits, tells me the surgeon will be in soon and closes the door. Minutes later, I hear a ruckus going on outside my door. It’s the surgeon yelling angrily at his staff...”What do you mean I have another one? What’s this? If you add someone on people, you need to tell me!” More screaming and yelling. Suddenly, complete silence and whispers. I am fairly certain this surgeon did not realize that I was right inside the door he was standing outside of.

If my nerves weren’t bad before, I was now almost ready to be committed. The last thing you want is an angry oral surgeon pulling your tooth out! I didn’t know whether to run out of the room, scream, get angry or cry. Suddenly, evidently after regaining his composure, the oral surgeon walks in the room, extends his hand to shake mine, introduces himself and asks me what the problem is.

I then proceed to tell him and in my fear of what might happen because of a bleeding canal (I pictured a guiser coming out of my mouth once the tooth was pulled), I asked him if that would be a problem. His reassuring answer "Well, I don't know." Thanks doc. I am sure if they had taken my blood pressure at that point, it would have been in astronomical numbers.

He then looks at the x-rays and says "whenever I see a tooth like that, I know that there is a crack inside the tooth." I am now wondering why a dentist and an endodontist, both x-raying the tooth and seeing the interior of the tooth during root canals, did not pick this up. This tooth had been x-rayed so often in the last 2 years, that it was practically glowing with radioactivity. But I am too shaken up to even ask. He comments that this tooth cannot stay in there like that and has to come out immediately. You think Doc?

I ask him if this is going to be a fairly simple extraction. His somewhat angry-sounding, loud answer? "That tooth (#19 molar) is NEVER easy to extract!" Dear God...get me the H*ll out of here!" I am sure he was half kidding, but I did detect frustration in his voice. I realize that it is a fairly large tooth, but I was looking for an answer that was maybe a little more reassuring and calming. I am now not only nervous, but a bit angry myself as it is not my fault if his staff didn't tell him they added me on!

He gets the shots ready and begins to administer. If I thought the shots the day before were bad, these were a living h*ll. I think due to the gum tissue and joints still being sore from the shots and work the day before, I nearly went through the roof with these shots. It felt as if he were sticking needles directly into my jaw bone and joints and nerves. After this masochistic display of dentistry, he leaves the room and says he'll be back in a few minutes. Please doc, take your time. No need to rush ;-)

Evidently, he must have heard my thoughts. After nearly a ½ hour or more, he returns and I alert him that though my cheek and lips are numb, I can still feel my tooth a bit. He administers another shot, but begins work right away! He slips a black thing in the other side of my bite and jokingly tells me that this is to muffle the screams. I smile wincingly.

He takes his shiny metal pliers to the tooth and begins to pull and rock vigorously, while at the same time, honest to God, telling the assistant "I am just SO frustrated! I think they think we should just work through the whole day! They need to tell us when they add patients on!"

Hello doc! I am the Add-On for cripe sake! By this point, I am a mix of emotions. Anger that this surgeon is being so unprofessional, disappointed at the same time because I had seen him several times before and he was so nice, and in lots of pain as I felt EVERYTHING! I could feel the tooth and roots separating from the jaw bone and if it weren't for that little black piece I was biting down on, let me tell you, there would have been some serious screaming!

He is pulling quite hard and I'm not sure if this is normal or if he is taking his anger and frustration out on me, my jaw and my poor tooth. It felt as if my jaw was going to break!

Minutes later a large piece comes out and he then says "what do we have here?" Please God, not another problem! Turns out it was just that the tooth had broken in half. (I later found out that a piece of root was stuck in my jaw and at that point the surgeon had to cut a "flap" in the gum next to the tooth behind the extraction) to access and remove this piece of root). More pulling and minutes later, he had the rest of the tooth out.

I was relieved until he told the assistant to get him the suture kit. I see a needle and thread looming above my face as he inserts it into my gum...I could feel this as well. He then tells me that while pulling the tooth out, the gum had torn and he needed to sew it up. The gum that tore was on the cheek-facing side, exactly where the bump had been (the surgeon later told me that the gum was weak from the infection and tore upon extraction of the tooth). After finishing with the stitches and placing a gauze pad to bite down on, he told me that indeed the tooth was cracked inside, gave me a few instructions and left the room.

I was relieved it was over with, but was still quite shaken up.

Mike drove me to the pharmacy for meds, then drove me home and had to leave for work. Things were up and down for a bit as my jaw was really sore...up until today I couldn't even open my mouth fully, and the gum tissue is sore and a bit swollen, along with the stitches really pulling.

The tear happened on the outside of the gum, on the cheek side, and you can see that the gum tore in half all the way down to the gumline. Not a pretty sight. The hole is half-way filled up now (a major change from the huge crater that it was on Tuesday where you could see down to the jawbone) and the gum seems to be pulling together a bit. I am not sure, however, if the tooth in front of the extraction site, is now slightly chipped? I did feel the pliers hit another tooth. I am praying it isn't as that can sometimes cause problems down the road (read...another root canal!)

I am feeling better, though I just want these stitches gone, the gum healed and to be able to eat a piece of pizza. I still feel soreness at the extraction site, the tooth behind the extraction is sore when I bite down on it (probably because the gum surrounding it is still a bit swollen) and the stitches are still pulling and uncomfortable. I don't even want to think about the restorative work around the corner.

Did I mention that just last week I also had a crown put in and another filling done? So I can't chew on the side of the extraction, and when I chew on the other side with the crown and filling, it is still sensitive (especially to pressure and cold). I told Mike that though I used to joke about him feeding me blender meals, that this may indeed, become a reality ;-)

Up until yesterday, I hadn't even realized that the only other tooth I ever had extracted (outside of my wisdom teeth and an emergency extraction for an abscess with high fever when I was about 5 on a baby tooth) ...well, that open hole is right above this very tooth I had out this week! What a site if I open wide enough.

So, now all I need is a pitchfork, a few additional missing teeth in front, and I'm all ready for the Hillbilly po-dunk. Dear Lord.

As for the surgeon, I'm guessing he had a bad day as he had never acted like that before. I like to give the benefit of the doubt unless proven otherwise. We'll see when I go and see him again this coming week for a post-op visit.

As for that proverbial shoe dropping? In the matter of 2 months as of today, I have had 2 root canals, a crown, a filling and an extraction/oral surgery.

The moral of the story? Always go with your gut and what your body is telling you, because your gut feelings are almost always right. Your body knows when something is amiss. And....never let an angry oral surgeon near you with extraction pliers.

Debbie