

“What is happiness without a smile?” Dr. Schierlinger

I think about how much joy comes from a simple smile. As the universal sign of happiness, a smile can brighten anyone’s day. Spreading joy through a smile is just one of the reasons I want to become a dentist.

Having sampled various career paths in my early years, I learned I gravitate towards those in healthcare. Working in accounting, property investment, and childcare, I found I prefer working in conditions that allow for personal connection and one-on-one interactions. By shadowing different professionals in the medical and dental fields, I found these and more. I became passionate about the care doctors and dentists give and their commitment to making people feel better.

From shadowing, dentistry won my heart, because I feel it aligns naturally with my strengths and values. As a tactual learner, I love that every procedure is hands on, active, and personal. This is exciting to me. Being a visual learner, seeing the outcome and effect of my work is truly satisfying. As a people person, interacting and connecting with others feels good. Valuing health and effective communication, I am compelled by how effective communication between the dentist, hygienist, and patient helps assure patient healthiness.

Helping, serving, and caring for others, and giving back to the community has always been a part of my life and has become important to me. I was raised believing if you are able to help, it is the right thing to do, and as I have matured, I find it brings me the most happiness. Throughout high school, I volunteered in many organizations and churches managing different groups and fundraising events. In college, even with my rigorous schedule, a small group of us started a club called the Campus Lions, dedicated to serving the community. In giving to others, being invited into their lives to help, I have seen real problems beyond anything I have experienced in my own life, and I am humbled. I realize how much I have and can give and do.

At a charity gala, a speaker caught my attention. He was a dentist who donated services to families. One of the families spoke about their emotional and grateful response, and it moved me. From their words, I felt and witnessed the heartwarming and physical impact this dentist had on their lives. Together with their words and hearing the dentist speak about the emotional reward he received from helping this family gave me further reaffirmation that the field of dentistry is the right path for me. My mind started racing, and I could not stop thinking of the different ways I can one day contribute as a dentist.

In college my passion for dentistry flourished. I shadowed, researched, and grew in my education. By my senior year, I thought I had a well-rounded understanding of how a dentist could change a person’s life. Life was about to show me it was even more.

About two months ago, my father was diagnosed with stage four-throat cancer. In disbelief, my first question was, “How did you find it?” He looked at me with a half-hearted smile and said, “My dentist.” Before I could ask another question, he said, “I went in to get a cap fixed on my tooth, and he spotted it.” Still in shock, I continued to let him talk. “I went to my physician, and he could not see anything but due to how adamant my dentist was, he would send me to an oncologist.” The oncologist said, “Be thankful your dentist caught it before it metastasized any

further than the lymph nodes.” As my dad consoled me, he said, “Take this as a learning experience for when you become a dentist. Always be thorough, persistent, and knowledgeable, so your patients will be as grateful for you as I am for my dentist.”

I have learned that without your health, you have nothing, and I am thankful for our dentist every time I look at my father. It is a constant reminder of the reason I became so passionate for the field in the first place. Eight years after the gala, I am also able to fully grasp the type of gratitude the family had for their dentist. I will be forever grateful for this profession and my desire was fueled even more having been personally affected by its care. I am eager to be able to brighten a smile but also to save someone’s life, guided by the values of happiness as a priority and healthiness as an essential – both joined together by a radiant smile.