

The cheap way to protect your teeth – don't smile (17, 11, 12)

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“You just don't smile anymore. What's wrong?” Miriam queried.

It was true; for the past few days since getting back from the dentist, I had consciously determined never to smile – for safety reasons. Yes, safety. If you work in a shop with power tools, you wear safety glasses, right? Well, I thought that I might operate in the same fashion.



After more prodding, I had to explain to Miriam what was going on. After all, when you live with someone for 45 years, and that person is constantly chuckling and telling dumb jokes and suddenly, after a visit to the dentist's office, that silly behavior ceases, well, it's time to connect the dots.

Here's the situation. Remarkably, despite playing a great deal of hockey in my youth, I still have a full set of teeth. When I played hockey, there was no such thing as protective visors or helmets. An errant high stick or a puck shot too high – well, that resulted in some missing teeth, usually those located in the front. Many hockey players of my era wear plates. I have never had to resort to dentures, and a former dentist told me that I possessed the hardest teeth he had ever drilled. Not the sort of thing to add to your resume. “Say Bob, did I ever tell you about my hard teeth?”

Okay, we have established that unlike many seniors I have all of my teeth. I suppose I should tell you what happened at the dentist's office. When travelling on the west coast, I bit down on some morsel and, just like those glaciers that we saw calving in Alaska, a tooth suddenly cracked, leaving a jagged mess behind. There was no pain involved, so I was content to wait until my return to get it fixed. Of course, there followed many days in which my tongue never tired of exploring the area of the missing part.

I eventually returned and reported to the dentist who seemed quite happy to see me. Miriam and I have no dental plan. We pay as we go. In my case, for years all that I have paid for has been regular cleanings by one of the many denturists (teeth cleaners) employed by my dentist.

I was given two options and I chose the most expensive, a crown which was recommended by my smiling dentist. Total cost: \$1100! That's why I no longer smile. It seems that I paid more for my tooth than I did for my first car, but there it is, my precious gold crown, whenever I look into a mirror.

“So what's the big deal about not smiling?” pressed Miriam.

“Miriam,” I said, trying to remain calm. “Do you realize how much gold I have in my mouth with my three crowns? Do you know that in some big cities, kids get shot for their expensive sneakers? They get shot! My three crowns (I just checked the TSE stock listings.) are now worth \$3300! That's a lot of money. If I was a street person or a drug addict or even an ex-Nortel stock holder, do you know what I would do if I saw \$3300 walking towards me?” I asked rhetorically.

“No, what would you do?” replied Miriam unaware of my rhetorical bent.

“Well, I would shout ‘glory, hallelujah,’ that's what I would do.”

I have these terrible dreams lately. They involve bodies delivered to the undertaker aka funeral director aka the host for your last sendoff. All of the bodies have gold crowns, and the undertaker stands to make a small fortune. When I told Miriam about my dreams, she said, “Don't worry, I will retrieve the gold. Besides, it would be wasteful to bury you with all that bullion lodged in your teeth. It might start a gold rush at the cemetery. I can see hundreds of miners rushing through the gates with their picks and shovels.”

“Stop!” I implored. “I'm the one who is supposed to tell the jokes in this column.” Miriam simply smiled, which is a lot more than what I would do.

