

The hinterland that smiles

When I entered the School of Dentistry as an undergraduate, I never imagined the path I tread today. We are conditioned to be office dentists — the famous open your mouth, close your mouth. I look back and see how deficient my education was, not in technical aspects, but in making us better human beings. Our courses cover both teeth and anatomy, root canals and classifications, but leave out “smiling”, humanization in Dentistry.

Life in society is a school for that.

All should attend it... and remain there.

Not only for that type of learning, but also because it is only fair and honest to return to society all the opportunities that we were granted.

In Macururé, nine hours by bus from the capital of Bahia, I realized, once more, how beautiful Dentistry is. Beauty goes beyond the laminate veneers and white ceramics, the color of those toilet bowls sold in building supply stores.

It is funny. It seems God presents you with situations to make you understand the world and His choices. At least for me, it has always been like that.

On the second day seeing patients, the municipal school was full of people seeking care for their dental complaints. I was walking in that crowd, looking for someone young to see first, as I believe that an aesthetic anterior deficiency will have repercussion in the social and personal development for the whole life; if in a teenager or a child, their perspective will be much poorer. Once, Maria Gadú told me something I have never forgotten: “Brazil is the only country in the world where a resume should have a photo. Would you hire someone whose central incisor is missing?”

Well, back to the school. I came across Edna, 15 years old. A timid smile, covering her mouth with her hand. Smile, hand on the face. Smile, hand covering mouth. Embarrassment.

A 30-second chat, at the most, and minutes later she was sitting on my chair.

We connected immediately, quite differently from the destruction in her mouth, likely to have been slow, year after year. I was really sad to see that. Although I am used to it, I always feel sad — very sad. We did everything

possible to restore her oral health on the first day, but she would have to come back to continue the treatment. She lived so far from there that, to make sure she did not miss her place on the next day, she spent the night at a place next to the school, in the home of someone she had never met before. The less you have, the more you give. They all help each other.

Second day, anterior and posterior restorations, several teeth, 3 endodontic treatments, 4 extractions of molars destroyed by caries. Sad. But her smile seemed to be back.

I asked Edna if she was happy with it all, and if she would mind talking briefly to our camera operator, who was covering our activities. In fact, as she was shy, I did not expect a lot of information to come from her, but, because of our connection, I asked.

Edna started telling her life, her teeth and her history. A history of embarrassment. Of the effort made by her mother and aunt, who had no financial means, but who showed her that her heart was more important than her smile. That she had to leave home. That she had to face it. That she had to go to school and stand up to bullying. A 15-year-old girl had faced that all, and I had no idea.

I will never forget it, sitting there where this was going on. I cried a lot as I watched a girl crying a lot, in front of the camera and of Dani, our camera operator, telling about her pain up to that day. Dentistry as social reintegration. From that afternoon on, Edna would not cry again, not for that reason. Maybe because of people's indifference to poverty, maybe because of a heartbreak... That afternoon, Edna taught so much — I received a lot more than I gave away.

- Edna... what is your dream?

- Until today, it was my teeth, first. Now, it is to be a cowgirl.

Our meeting was sealed with a hug and lots of tears. Edna now can smile. Dentistry makes sense to me.







FELIPE AUGUSTO RODRIGUES ROSSI¹⁻⁴

1. Specialist in Restorative Dentistry, Universidade de São Paulo, Fundação para o Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico da Odontologia (São Paulo/SP, Brazil).
2. Specialist in Periodontology, Centro de Estudos e Aperfeiçoamento em Odontologia (São Paulo/SP, Brazil).
3. Founder and President of the non-governmental organization Por1Sorriso .
4. Dentistry Coordinator in NGO Missão África..

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14436/2447-911x.16.2.162-165.bso>