

Show us your teeth

Kate Craig
faces up to
her own
sibling rivalry
and braces
herself for a
career in
dentistry

Whenever I tell anyone I work in dentistry I get the same response. 'Let's have a look at your teeth then.' Followed by the obligatory 'Oh, yes, you *have* got nice teeth haven't you.'

Now, I guess I should take this as a compliment, but there are two reasons I find such flattery hard to swallow. One – getting my job was more related to my mind than my molars, and two – the straightness of my teeth is simply a stroke of genetic luck, and is in no way related to the field in which we work.

In fact, I could just have easily have taken after my father and be living with the legacy of his generous overbite to this day. As luck would have it, my Mum's fine jaw line won through. At the time though, having straight teeth seemed more of a curse than a credit.

Watching my big sister being fitted with braces sent me into fits of juvenile jealousy. The attention, time off school, special meals and stylish array of miniature coloured rubber bands were too much to bear. Not to mention the thousands of dollars being spent on the little princess. Surely I was entitled to some form of physical enhancement elsewhere? Perhaps a spiral perm to make me the envy of my classmates, or investment in a bubble skirt, leg warmers and a pair of acid washed jeans? And I definitely could've done with some help on my inner beauty.

Not that colour therapy, the reading of auras, feng shui and getting to know your inner child were widely accepted in the mid eighties, especially not in New Zealand where I grew up. While today it seems perfectly natural to uncover regressed memories, join self help groups and take time out to find yourself, back then we seemed to busy ourselves with the mundane business of everyday living. No, clothing and counselling aside,

what I really wanted was a pair of braces.

I still remember the day of the unveiling when my sister's braces came off. Didn't she look beautiful! What a good girl she'd been! And the food... apples, sweets, nuts, chewing gum and to top it all off a removable plate and night brace – the glamour of it all! The anonymity of being the middle child had never struck me so hard.

All that said, I guess I shouldn't complain. My naturally straight teeth have stood me in good stead over the years. I'm one of those people who can sense a camera at a 200 metre range and provide an appropriately toothy grin without a moment's notice. It seems I was destined to end up in the dental world.

There's a thought, perhaps we should all be screened for tooth quality on interview. It would certainly be a lot easier than dissecting the reality of team dynamics, discussing what makes for good communication (verbal and written) or listing our strengths and weaknesses: 'My problem is I work too hard...' And that way we would all be walking advertisements for the service we promote.

That does it – it's never too late. I'm calling in a favour from Mum and Dad. My teeth may be straight, but do you think they've ever heard of tooth whitening? My career depends on it.

