

After each day of elementary school, all the neighborhood children and I would meet up to play. We looked forward to whatever activity we decided to play that day, whether it be a game of basketball, jumping rope, or even just simply riding around on our scooters. However, one of these innocent nights would end up permanently changing me. Having my tooth knocked out at the age of seven transformed my insecurities into lifelong motivation.

As the sun was slowly setting and we were all getting ready to go inside, I went to retrieve one of the many basketballs that went over the neighbors' fence. As I diligently attempted to do what all the "cool kids" would do- jump over the fence- my hand slipped. I lost my grip, finding myself face down in the wood chips. I had knocked out a permanent front tooth.

As a third-grader at that time, I couldn't care less about the fact that I had just lost my front tooth. I had no anguish regarding how I was perceived by others, since I was no different than all the other kids, at least not yet. The ignorance I had mocks me to this day.

Middle school was when this incident began to affect me; I no longer looked like my peers. Additionally, this was also when dentists began directly talking to me rather than my Mom. "Hang in there Kiddo, just nine more years until we can help you fix this." This was not the news I wanted to hear, nor was I ready to absorb this information. I felt defeated. There was nothing I could do to change my outcome, I needed to embrace my insecurity, but I didn't know how.

I begged my mom for a retainer that would contain a false tooth, as I had convinced myself this was the only way to fit in. But even after I got a retainer, my lack of self-confidence still ate away at me. I chose not to tell any of my friends, as I led myself to believe that being different was not okay.

I went to new dentists, with hopes that they would give me different answers. However, each opinion stayed consistent with one another - I needed to be at least 20 years old to be considered ready for an implant.

Being told that there was nothing they could do to help me was extremely difficult, but it forced me to recognize from a young age that there will always be circumstances that are beyond my control. As I worked with dentists to find the best temporary solution for me, I had to understand I would not be able to have my idea of a perfect smile.

Being able to face my insecurity head-on has truly shaped me. What was always referred to as an 'infamous night' is no longer considered infamous in my eyes. This experience has taught me that I cannot allow myself to wither away in my flaws, rather I need to embrace them. I can genuinely say that I am thankful for this so-called accident, as it has taught me the importance of loving myself and others despite everyone's differences.