

## A Retainer's Tale

What did I ever do to you?? I was only trying to keep your teeth straight! I can't help it that I strive for perfection. Now I've been reduced to a lonely retainer in a lonely garbage can, with all of the lonely garbage.

I suppose I should introduce myself. I'm Katie's retainer. A mere two days ago I was happily residing in the depths of Katie's mouth- with perfectly straight teeth, I might add. Then, the unexpected happened. One minute, we're out to lunch at Burger King, and the next thing I know- SPLAT!- I'm in a pile of ketchup next to some stale french fries.

Now I know what you're thinking. "Big deal, it's just a stupid retainer. You can buy another one!" How wrong you are my friend. Think of the dreary days you'll be without your retainer, waiting for another one to be made. Think of those devious teeth trying to move out of their places. Think of the lost relationship between you and your precious retainer! Not only will your mouth suffer, but also your parents' wallet. I'm not cheap, you know! So, how did this disaster happen, you ask? It all started on Monday morning....

When Katie woke up at 7 o'clock, I wasn't in her mouth. I was so lonesome in my case, just waiting to be cleaned and powered up for some intense teeth straightening! Regretfully, Katie had been ignoring me all morning. My case wasn't even opened until I heard her mother's ranting and raving about the importance of retainer use. Something was up. She didn't seem as delighted as usual to clean me and put me on her teeth. After she pretended to put me in her mouth and slipped out the door quickly, without her mother knowing, I knew it was going to be a long day.

Then, at last! After what felt like days, Katie came home from school! I wanted to yell, "Katie! Hello?? I've been home alone all day!," but sadly enough, retainers can't talk. I began to hear Katie and her father, and I realized that we were going out to eat! Katie's dad promised her to take her to Burger King for dinner as long as she promised to wear her retainer all the time- for the next week, at least. What a Dad! Before I knew it, I was pulled out of my case, washed thoroughly and put back on duty to fight the enemy: moving teeth.

We arrived at Burger King a short time later, and after much debate on what to order, Katie and her Dad sat down to devour their meals. Of course I had to be taken out so that Katie could enjoy her Burger King, but the deal was that she had to wear her retainer all the time for a whole week in exchange for the delicious dinner at Burger King. I thought, "This next week is going to be like heaven!" What happened a few minutes later wasn't what I had in mind.

I was resting in between two napkins on Katie's tray. (Although I am very helpful, I'm not something you want to look at while you're eating). When Katie stood up to throw out her tray, I was still on it. I guess Katie just forgot about me, and let me go with her six or seven french fries, and the bite of cheeseburger that was left on her tray.

Was this appalling act just an accident? Or was Katie planning it all along? No, Katie wouldn't do that to me, she treated me so well! She'll come for me, eventually, when she realizes that her mouth can't do without me.

My only piece of advice for you: be kind to your retainer; we do a lot for you!

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"Well how does it fit?" Dr. Gartner asked, sneering at my tight facial gestures, almost as if he had premeditated my soon to be suffering.

I could not answer. My teeth were trapped in a clear, plastic suffocating contraption. Saliva was congregating around my upper molars wondering who this new stranger was and waiting for it to leave. Unfortunately, I was doomed to wear this retainer for the rest of my life. Upon my heyday, events of celebration, school dances, class elections, college interviews, I would consistently be sporting a clearly fashionable retainer. Future incidents of humiliation and eventual demise soared through my mind. Meanwhile, Dr. Gartner and his assistants all seemed to be staring at me, snickering at the thought of my pain. This was not the first time they ruined a kid's life with a retainer---but I was sure to make it the last.

Walking home from the orthodontist I had a beautiful realization. How would Dr. Gartner know if I continued to wear my retainer? Surely, I could just pop it in the week before a scheduled appointment, wear it the day of, and escape any exhortations of misuse. My mom's face was waiting in the window, slyly calculating jabbing questions to poke at me.

"How does it fit, honey?" she lovingly asked. I could see past her friendly façade. Why was everyone so concerned about the retainer? Wasn't the fact that I had just gotten my braces off a tad bit more exciting? My newly recovered teeth were being put to shame under a retainer. There was only one way out.

"Oh, it's fine. Dr. Gartner said I only have to wear it once a month, since my teeth are already in such great shape. He said he hasn't seen a case like mine in over twenty-five years. Can you believe that? Well, I'm just gonna put the retainer in this pink case thing til next month." I walked out of the kitchen, dodging any form of disbelief. I escaped my mom and the retainer. Now I only had to live out my conviction of a retainer-free lifestyle.

About a month or two later, I remembered my appointment with Dr. Gartner. It was tomorrow! I hadn't worn my retainer in over a month and a half! I searched my medicine cabinet for my pink case. Finally, under some sticky hairspray bottles, I found my retainer, stained a violet hue from some lavender-scented hair product. I hurriedly washed it under hot water, scraping any gunk that was adhering to it. Now the moment of truth: I forced my retainer onto my two front teeth and then my back molars. Pushing it with both thumbs, as soon as the back end fit my molars the top end would pop downward. Why wasn't it fitting? Warming it under water, I figured the heat would excite the plastic atoms and make it a bit more pliable. No such luck; my appointment was in a half and hour. I practically ran down Northwest Highway, probing my teeth into my retainer.

In the burgundy chair, I reclined waiting for Dr. Gartner to scream and shout at me. Yet a sense of revolution flared through me. I had gone over a month and a half without the plastic prison confining my teeth. He walked over to me, looked down, and noticed my discolored retainer swimming in my sweatshirt.

"Have you been wearing it? Your teeth look awfully crooked. You are going to need braces again." My dignity crushed, my revolution banished, I was a victim to a conviction of ignorance, not freedom. Metal braces would be mine all over again, with cuts and scrapes, blood and food particles. Suddenly, the simple beauty of the retainer danced in my face. I should have worn my retainer.