

Braces: Change We Can Believe In

It is the year of the underdog. In our films, in our leaders, in our sporting events, we are witnessing dynamic changes to the status quo. A bright but little known African American made his way to the White House. The historically unsuccessful Arizona Cardinals found themselves in the Super Bowl. The Oscar winning film Slumdog Millionaire detailed a street child from the slums of Juhu who won twenty million rupees.

Perhaps the biggest underdog of all was my smile. It rarely showed itself in the public, for fear of shame and rejection. Determined to come out on top, my teeth went through trials and tribulations. For weeks, they trained with the best of metal wires, rubber bands, and plastic retainers. One summer day when the metal and wires were removed, a smile shone forth and my teeth saw the fruit of their labors. What was once a crooked and asymmetrical set of molars transformed into a majestic smile, the platonic form of orthodontic beauty! Through regular check-ups, daily flossing and frequent brushing, my smile can maintain its perfect form for future generations!

For all those who feel they are the slumdogs of dentistry or the pariahs of the tooth industry, know that I once was there too. But through the work of Dr. Gartner, I look forward to any opportunity to showcase my pearly whites and my handsome jaw line. And what does this mean to you? It does not matter where you came from. It matters where you are going. With the work of Dr. Gartner, I assure you will witness real change you can believe in.

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“I’ll never get my braces off! I’m gonna be thirty-five and teeth will still be strapped with metal!” My thirteen-year-old sister has just returned from her orthodontia appointment. I smile; although I’ve had my braces off for three years, I still remember that seventh-grade feeling. It’s similar to the one you get when you find out Santa Claus isn’t real. You wait and wait for some obvious difference, a change you haven’t noticed. You search the nuances of your smile, waiting for some sign that all the ‘hardship’ you have gone through is worth it. Day after day, morning after morning, going to the bathroom mirror excitedly, ready, waiting, and disappointed. Your anticipation grows, and you think to yourself, *how long does it take? A week, two months, five years? Shouldn’t I be noticing something?* And then, just with that little thought, a seed of doubt begins to grow in your mind. Are they really doing anything? Will my teeth ever change? And then, just like in Santa Claus, you’ve lost faith.

I’m sure it happens to all of us. For some, our disbelief was provoked and came out sooner. But we’ve all had that moment when we’re just not sure if it’s all worth it. In that moment, who can honestly reverse your thoughts? It’s not your orthodontist, telling you that if you abstain from a piece of Hubba Bubba your teeth are magically going to straighten. It’s not the older kids at school, all sporting clean complexions and perfect teeth. And it’s not your mother, informing you that a glowing smile is necessary for life. There’s no one really who, as a kid, I could turn to. There was no one who could make me see the truth. So, as my little sister griped about the pain, I realized that she would just have to take her medicine, literally. I went into the kitchen and pulled from the cupboards a glass of water and two Advil. Realizing that nothing I said would change her perspective, although it made me sad, I knew that the best policy was quiet understanding. Besides, I wasn’t sure if I was capable to express the thoughts running through my head.

I flashed back to the day that Dr. Gartner had finally removed my braces. I was sitting in chair number three, waiting impatiently for him to come over and release me from the doom of the past four years. When I felt my teeth being freed from the barbs of medieval torture, the hallelujah chorus rang in my ears. I jumped out of my seat and ran to the mirror. The difference was amazing. I realized in that moment that this is a change that you can truly believe in. And I know now, even though my thirteen-year-old sister may not believe me, Dr. Gartner will work his magic and someday she’ll have the perfect smile. And that’s the change I’m counting on.