

How I turned into a dentist

TEXT: Lily Moharrami

It's a cliché question, but lately I believe it's worth thinking about. By the way! How did I happen to become a dentist??? Would I be a dentist if I was born into another family or if I wasn't an Iranian? Could such variations have affected my future job?

My dad was a mechanical engineer, expert in dental equipment and units, etc. His working atmosphere and the correlation between his job and dentistry and the issues were transferred to our home, and through that I, as a little girl, was nearly familiar with it. I couldn't understand why, but dentistry was like a holy job in our home! Even all friends were chosen out of the dental society. Heh! I think I sat on the dental unit before I sat on the couch at home.

First trials

OMG, can't forget how I shaped a wasted wire—out of my parents sight—into an orthodontic appliance and inserted it in my mouth! My gums and tongue got injured... oh! How crazy I was, even my dolls weren't out of harm's way in my hands—I used to brush their teeth as much as I could rub their color out and sometimes this attempt led to a hole in their mouth. My poor dolls, I'm sorry. Recently I came across an old composition of mine! I always keep such memorable stuff in an orange box, which was a gift for my 6th birthday. Curiously, I pulled off the paper. The title was a very common topic of those days: what do you want to be in the future?

My answer: "I wanna be a dentist!"

Because with this job I can help people and reduce their pain and because it is a useful job for society. Because nearly all my

parents' friends have jobs related to medicine, and by becoming a dentist I can make them proud of me, and make their dreams come true! Because I love dentistry!!! Because..." Now that I think about it, I see something more than the family I grew up in that has led me to the dentistry world.

Years later

Years passed, I turned 16–17, and the most important issue of those days for the young people like me was to choose our future job. This selection was not based only on our interest or favorite at that time, it really wasn't! In Iran you can find many educated young people who are unemployed. Many employees keep themselves busy with jobs far from the major they studied at university. Plus: many majors were not really what society accepts for a girl to work in! Among all majors, dentistry hadn't lost its stable position yet, offered a secure job. Still, it was a long way until working opportunities became saturated by dentists.

Physics or Dentistry

After my childhood, when I wasn't that affected by my family anymore, dentistry was not my favorite anymore. My whole world was obeying physical rules, my science of love was physics, mechanics. But if I was supposed to have a successful life, I had to be a dentist. Actually, there wasn't any other choice for me if I wanted to have a bright future and I accepted it. So, again I shifted from physics to the medical majors.



The costs of becoming a dental student, for me, was about 13–14 hours of study a day for at least a year, forgetting all my hobbies and living with nothing but my books in order to pass the entrance exam. We Iranians call this important exam “konkour”.

Dental Studies

“Konkour”, the most and—better to say—the only fateful day of my generation, is the name of an important entrance exam, with which one reaps the

harvest that had sown the entire year, as dentistry was in the top flight of the majors list. So, if you wanted to be a dental student, you had to work hard, really hard. “And Yeah...good news, I got accepted... wow.” Starting university, I met lots of studious, hardworking classmates who were like me. They all were in my age and had passed the same process as I to get into university. But at the beginning of the 2nd term, we found some new “Other” students among us, called “Tak-mili”, “Enteghali”, or “Behdashkar”. It is a long story that tells who these students were but, just as a short explanation, I can imply that the students in this group didn’t pass the regular process of entering university and unlike us, either were related to outstanding Iranian families of high rank, or paid—better to say bought—the seats of our dental school or appeared in our classes after a kind of protest against the government. This last group were the rural dental hygienists who, by the help of their parliamentarian, got the permission to spend some courses in university and become dentists, otherwise the rural communities could easily have turned against the government. Anyhow, these students’ marks in the entrance exam were so awful that, if they were supposed to accept, according to their grade they couldn’t even study the lowest majors or even get the minimum mark needed to let the high school students set foot in the university.



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Turning into Aliens

So, we could easily see that our dental faculty students were divided into two groups. And little by little, their number began to grow and actually, after some terms, they outnumbered us. To be honest, in fact, we became the real minority, the “Alien” group. That was the time we found out the painful fact of our society—that talent, endeavor, attempt and other factors are no real options come to choose the successful people of my generation. Anyhow, we all passed those six years and graduated, but of course, as the regular courses of dentistry were hard for the “Others”, they finished a bit later than us, the “Aliens”.

Science or no Science

During those years, chasing my dreams and my real ideal major of science, I tried to make use of mechanics in dentistry, and in fact, resolved the shortcomings of dentistry through a mechanical and, better to say, a biomechanical view. This ideology led me to the beautiful, exciting world of research, at least at that time. I thought that I’m not only a just consumer and can add something to the science world and pay my debt to it. In fact, I believe I achieved what I aimed at, no matter how hard it was. Not only me but also many of my good classmates chose this way and spent a great deal of their life on research. The final conclusion we reached at the end

was the same: “NEVER WASTE YOUR TIME ON RESEARCH IN HERE AGAIN!” Working with no financial or scientific support was like trying to grow a seed in stone. Some of us did it. But how long could we stand it?

Now and later

Like it or not, everything is finished now. I’m not a student anymore and have started the 2 years of “Tarh”; the legal procedure of clinical experience in a public hospital that leads to an official working permission for dentists in Iran. Although again, this rule is trampled for the “Other” students I mentioned and is just mandatory for us “Aliens”. I think what I wrote here, is the mutual feeling of dentists like me, and at least in my age. Now that we all have graduated, some of us still come together every now and then. I’m just afraid to say that the majority of us is looking for a chance to leave the country that is not meant to be for us, the country that we are the real aliens of—but we did try not to be like that.

Brain drain is bad, but inevitable!

