

**Dr. Jeffrey Galler**

## **Blood Curdling Screams**

“I know you’re highly recommended, but I really don’t know what you can possibly do,” insisted Rachel’s mother.

The blond-haired, blue-eyed, freckle-faced six-year old did not look so tough. Her mother was telling me that four previous dentists had tried unsuccessfully to fill her daughter’s two cavities. “None of them could get anywhere at all,” she related, “and they practically threw us out of their offices! They said I have no choice but to take Rachel for general anesthesia.”

I was never one to shrink from a difficult task. My mind recoiled at the thought of subjecting this child to the potential dangers of a general anesthetic. A difficult patient? Ha! I hadn’t yet met a pediatric patient that I couldn’t manage. I saw this child as a challenge that I could not resist. And, besides, she looked so positively angelic!

I told the mother that I’d like to try, and would like the mother to sit near the child in the dental operatory during treatment. I loved showing off to parents, just how good I am.

“Okay,” sighed the mother, “but I’m warning you! She’s absolutely unmanageable!”

I seated the child, and with great verbal and digital dexterity, charmed my way through administering an injection of local anesthetic. As soon as Rachel realized that she was getting numb, she began screaming.

Blood curdling screams. Wave after wave of ear splitting, blood curdling screams, without let up. The child inhaled and screamed, inhaled and screamed, inhaled and screamed. I had seen it all before, and waited a few moments for the child to exhaust herself. Five minutes passed, ten minutes passed; I admired the child’s stamina.

The mother began to look concerned. I winked and nodded reassuringly. While I sat behind and to the right of the supine patient, Ronnie, a brand new dental assistant, sat on the patient’s left, and Rina, a more experienced assistant sat near the child’s legs, attempting to restrain their wild kicking.

“What’s Dr. Galler going to do?” whispered the very pale and shaken new assistant. “Don’t worry,” soothed Rina, “he’s very good with kids. He’ll know what to do.” I noticed, however, that her left eyebrow was arched and her lips set in a grim, straight line.

Meanwhile, the child continued to inhale and scream, inhale and scream.

I tried every trick in my repertoire. I tried the Tell-Show-Do technique. I held up her wrist and demonstrated. “See,” I explained, “Mr. Tickle Tooth is going to wash all the dirt out of your tooth, and Mr. Thirsty here is going to vacuum up all the dirt and water.”

The dramatic, blood-curdling screams intensified; inhale and scream, inhale and scream. I noticed that the receptionist raised the volume of the office’s elevator music and closed the door to my treatment room tightly.

I leaned close to the child’s ear and whispered, “I know why you’re crying. You’re crying because you’re afraid. But, once you see how easy it is to clean your teeth, you’ll never have to cry or be scared at the dentist, again.”

No effect, the screaming continued.

I warned her that if she continued to scream, her mother would have to leave the room and wait outside. No success.

I sent the very apprehensive mother out of the room. There was no discernible let up in the screams. My receptionist came in and whispered that if I was trying to empty out our waiting room, I was doing a pretty good job of it.

I tried intimidation. Bribery. Pleading. Logic. Threats. I tried physical restraints. Nothing. The screaming continued unabated. It was cool in the room, but my forehead was covered with perspiration.

I was exhausted and at my wit's end. Suddenly, inspiration struck me. "Okay, Rachel," I announced, "I'm going to clean your tooth now, and I want you to scream as loud as you can, and kick your feet as hard as you can!"

The child turned to me suddenly and said, "Huh?"

"That's right," I continued, "please. I need you to scream very, very loud now while I clean your tooth."

Rachel folded her arms defiantly and pouted, "No! I will not!"

A warm glow passed over me. I grabbed my instruments and dove into the tooth. My assistant suctioned as I cleaned and shaped the cavity, all the while urging the child to please, please scream, cry, and kick.

"No, no, I won't," insisted the stubborn child, through cotton rolls and numb lips.

I invited the mother back into the room. She looked stunned as I continuously implored the child to scream, while my assistant and I worked at super fast motion, and the child refused to utter a single sound.

I completed the procedure. The mother stared in disbelief at her daughter.

“Now, Rachel,” I begged, as I pulled off my gloves triumphantly, “please promise me that when you come next week for your other filling, you’ll scream loudly and kick your feet up and down.”

“No,” insisted the child, “I’m not going to make any noise, no matter what you want!”

I strode out of the room as the assistants and mother stared at me with their mouths wide open.

For the rest of the day, I was like a god to my staff.