

The Americanization of Natalie

This is the story of a miracle.

I must have a reputation for being an absolute sucker for a good sob story. Some time ago, a local charity organization called me, asking if I could please provide free dentistry for a needy client. It seems that a young newlywed, Natalie Chernovsky, had emigrated with her husband, from Russia, to join her husband's large family, already living in New York.

Unfortunately, one week after arriving, her husband rediscovered an old flame and unceremoniously dumped Natalie. Completely alone, frightened, divorced, not eligible for Medicaid, not able to speak a word of English, unemployable, and having developed a bleeding ulcer, Natalie also had severe dental problems.

I willingly undertake to reconstruct her mouth. I treated her periodontal disease, performed root canals, redid all her fillings, and fabricated numerous crowns and inlays. I even learned how to say "Open, please," "Close, please," and "Rinse out, please," in Russian.

Upon completion of her treatment, Natalie smiled at me and said the only two English words I had ever heard her say: "Thank you." As she left, I wondered if I would ever see her again.

Many years later, Natalie showed up at my office, completely transformed. She looked, dressed, and spoke like any American-born citizen. She had taken courses in computer programming and had a good job.

I did a thorough check-up, and discovered one small cavity. My receptionist gave her an appointment for the filling, and informed her that the filling would cost \$55.

When Natalie didn't show up for her appointment, my receptionist called to ask her if there was a miscommunication about the date of the appointment.

“Oh, no,” replied Natalie cheerfully, “I had the right date and time, but I decided not to keep the appointment because I found a dentist who can do my filling for \$45.”

Where is the miracle in this story? It is in the fact that I somehow continue to accept needy patients, free of charge.