

Dr. Happy Tooth

Dentist entertains the kids while teaching hygiene

By Cynthia Sanz
Staff Writer of The News

"Dr. Happy Tooth
"That's my name,
"Taking care of teeth,
"That's my game."

Run-D.M.C., it's not, but then Dr. Lorin F. Berland didn't intend his rap music to be a chart topper. The 31-year-old Dallas dentist created the ersatz rap routine to teach children how to care for their teeth.

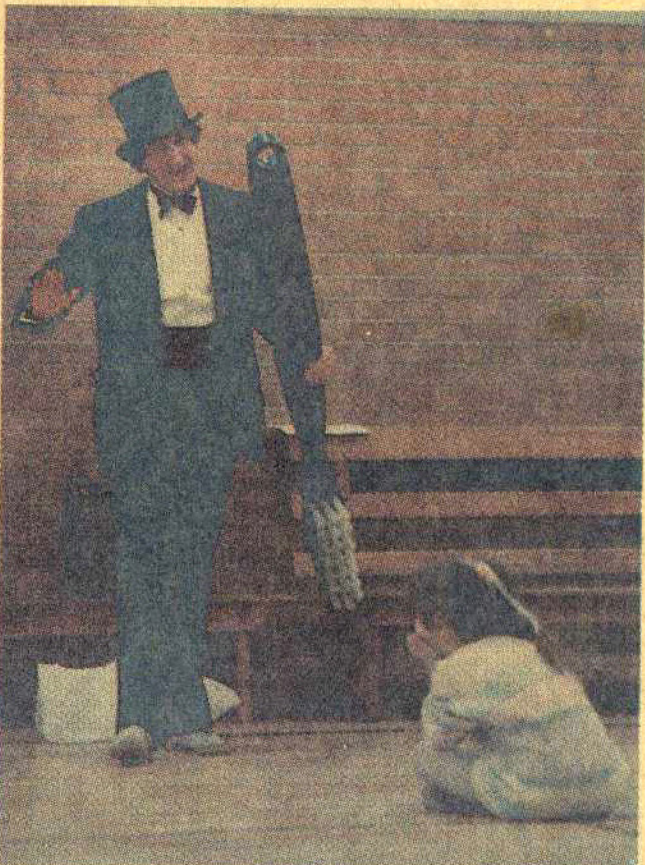
"I thought maybe if I could teach kids how to take care of their teeth in a fun way, I could prevent a lot of the problems these kids were having," Berland says.

Dressed in a tuxedo and top hat, Berland takes his show to area day-care and after-school centers every Friday afternoon. There, he discusses good dental hygiene and answers children's questions about their teeth.

"If you brush your teeth real good and floss them once in a while, but you still got cavities in your back teeth, how do you get rid of them?" asks Marques White, 9, during a recent visit by Berland.

"Will I lose any more teeth?" asks Jason Reese, 10.

"Most of the time, they just want Please see DR. HAPPY on Page 7C.



The Dallas Morning News: Nuri Vallbona

Dr. Lorin Berland: "I started out just doing day-care centers downtown, but I guess word got around."

Dr. Happy Tooth teaches hygiene

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me to look in their mouth and tell them they're normal," Berland says. "But if they've got specific problems, I'll try and explain it to them and tell them to see their dentist."

To help explain the basics of proper dental care, Berland brings with him a five-foot-long toothbrush, a stuffed Dr. Happy Tooth and a furry Muppet-like creature he describes as "the Plaque Monster, Dr. Happy Tooth's archenemy."

"A lot of parents don't know what to tell their kids about going to the dentist," Berland says. "If they tell them anything, they tell them the bad things. I'm trying to get kids thinking about taking care of their teeth and thinking about going to the dentist but thinking about it in a positive way."

Berland says he got the idea for the program after his office was inundated by patients suffering from "nursing bottle syndrome," which is decay that results when children are allowed to go to sleep with bottles containing anything but water.

"I was so bummed out seeing all those kids with holes in their teeth,

when it was all preventable," he says. "These were well-educated parents, but they got lost in how to prevent nursing bottle syndrome."

In addition to putting only cool water in a child's bedtime bottle, Berland also recommends brushing in the morning, at bedtime and after meals; flossing at bedtime; cutting back on sweets; using a fluoride supplement daily, and seeing a dentist regularly, beginning at age 2.

Berland originally began donating his time last month as a special way to mark February as Dental Health Month. But after visiting a couple of day-care centers, he began receiving calls from centers throughout the city.

"I started out just doing day-care centers downtown, but I guess word got around," he says.

But he adds that he wouldn't really mind giving up Friday afternoons permanently if it would help prevent cavities in children.

"As long as people keep calling, I'm going to keep doing it," he says. "I feel like if I can save one kid's teeth, I'll be doing something."