

I don't have a "normal" face. My youth was spent in and out of doctors' offices, and I often wondered if I would ever find a girlfriend or a wife. When you look different and endure painful stares from strangers, you gain a different perspective on life. While I sometimes cried, "Why me," I can look back with confidence and say my "abnormal" face shaped me and my career. If four years ago you were to tell me I would be applying for orthodontic training, I would tell you to get your head examined. However, I know orthodontics is the right path for me. Because of my family history and personal experiences with orthodontics, I am highly motivated to contribute to the field by continuing purposeful orthodontic research, giving back to the community, and using my personal experiences to help treat patients.

My grandfather was born with a cleft lip and palate in 1900. The doctors did not attempt to repair his palate until he was 21 years old. Despite the doctors' best efforts, his speech remained nearly unintelligible; thus, he lived a reclusive life, which impacted his relationship with his family.

When my mother was born with a cleft lip and palate, better treatment was available. Fortunately, after many painful surgeries, doctors successfully closed most of her palate and gave her a normal smile and restored function with the help of an obturator. I am so grateful and amazed that just one generation later the doctors had the skills and knowledge necessary to help my mom function normally in society.

I also inherited a bilateral cleft lip and palate, and I underwent many surgeries and treatments causing me to develop anxieties so commonly found in children with craniofacial differences. During this time, my orthodontist was fixing my smile by giving me a new arch form, but more importantly, he treated me well and helped me gain confidence as a young man. After my Lefort surgery, at the age of 21, for the first time I could take a bite out of my sandwich and actually cut through the whole thing. Although at the time I didn't fully understand, my experiences with my orthodontist caused me to deeply appreciate orthodontics and dentistry in general, leading me to my career path.

Initially, I had aspired to be a general dentist; however, during my second year of dental school, I had another life-changing experience that solidified my final career path. My daughter was born with a bilateral cleft lip and palate. I worried how to teach her to be confident despite having a different face. While I no longer let rude comments and stares about my nose and face bother me, when those comments and stares were directed towards my daughter, it was heart wrenching. I worriedly began researching the best treatment options for repair, leading me to Dr. Patricia Glick, an orthodontist.

Dr. Glick directed us on how to perform amazing Pre-Surgical Infant Orthopedics (PSIO) on my daughter and prepare her for surgery by molding her cleft and nostrils. It was HARD. But after seeing great results, all of our hard work was worth it. Dr. Glick's contribution led to a great surgical outcome, and my family is profoundly grateful for her skills. Since then we have had another girl with a cleft lip and palate, and the PSIO care again yielded amazing results. Caring for my daughters helped me realize that of all the

specialties of medicine, I am most grateful for orthodontics. At that moment, I knew I wanted to help others with all facets of orthodontic care.

Since that time, I have worked to make my skills match my desire. I have engaged in several cutting-edge research projects that will make an impact on the field of orthodontics. During my time working as an orthodontic intern at Barrow Cleft and Craniofacial Center, I shared some of my experiences and encouragement with a mother of a patient. She was in tears because she felt that I understood her and could help her son. As an orthodontist, I hope to help others gain stable occlusion as well as increase their confidence by straightening their teeth and helping them love their smile. I am currently in a Pediatric Special Needs Fellowship in Tucson that specifically addresses treatment in patients with autism. I hope this training will put me in a position to offer compassionate care while treating complex and difficult patient management cases. I accepted a position to work as a hospital staff dentist on the world renowned Barrow Craniofacial Team in Phoenix, bringing me one step closer to fulfilling my desire to be there for those vulnerable patients with craniofacial abnormalities, just as some of my doctors were there for my children and me.

I have now experienced the benefits of orthodontics from the perspective of a patient, a parent, and a practitioner. I plan to build a strong foundation in orthodontics through my residency education, and afterwards emphasize in craniofacial issues. My passion for orthodontics will drive me to tackle all orthodontic work from basic to more complex issues in an effort to help others as orthodontics has helped my family