

Dentist did the impossible: Making patient visits fun

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COLLEYVILLE – If more dentists were like Dr. Fuzzy, people wouldn't be afraid to go, patients say.

For starters, Keith Hudson gives his patients milkshakes after each appointment.

He asks them about their lives.

And he gives them his home number in case of emergencies.

But Hudson – nicknamed “Fuzzy” for his beard – is retiring Wednesday after 42 years in the business, because of problems in his neck, back and right shoulder.

He will be missed. As patient Caylie Babb, 18, of Colleyville, says: “I hate going to the dentist, but if it wasn't Dr. Hudson, I would try to avoid it. He softens the experience. I don't think I'll trust a dentist as much as I trust him.”

He listens

Hudson opened his offices on what is now Texas 26 in 1970, and with its wooden paneling, the building seems stuck in that decade.

The yellow and green building – painted so patients could find it – has been among the longest-running businesses on Texas 26.

On the walls are many awards he's won for writing “table clinics,” or medical papers on new techniques.

There's a picture of the dental identification team he was part of after the 1993 Mount Carmel fire at the Branch Davidian compound in Waco.

During that time, he worked in his office in the morning, then drove to Waco and worked in the morgue from 11 a.m. to midnight.

His generosity with his time extends to out-of-town visitors.

When a visitor from Switzerland needed dental work, he didn't charge the foreigner.

Brenda Bogan, 60, had just moved to Fort Worth from Chicago a month ago when she cracked a crown. Hudson thought the case could wait until his replacement arrived, but then he found out her insurance was about to expire. So he treated her.

“I got tears in my eyes,” Bogan said. “I never had a doctor – or dentist, certainly – who cared. What a concept to treat your patients like a human instead of a case.”

Dave Herrington, 62, of Grapevine, said his jaw was acting funny several years ago. Hudson ordered him to be at the office at 6:45 a.m. After Hudson saw him, he told him to go to a doctor.

Herrington ended up having triple bypass surgery. He could have had a heart attack.

“He saw the preliminary signs,” Herrington said. “Keith is the closest thing to an old country doctor. He’s always taken the time to listen.”

Growing up

Hudson grew up on a 30,000-acre ranch in the Palo Duro Canyon with a 100-acre lake that his family built. His family ran a seven-room hunting and fishing resort with a café while he grew up in a 21-foot-long trailer.

“People asked if I got bored. How could I? I had a hundred acres,” he said.

His father, Willard, a banker, was nicknamed “Lightning” because he was so slow.

His mother, Peggy, looked and acted like Lucille Ball.

“I get the mix of both of those,” Hudson said.

Hudson rode the school bus back and forth to the town of Claredon for six hours a day until he was 14, when the school district paid him \$100 not to ride.

So his parents let him live in town by himself. He learned how to cook, and he excelled at school.

His high school report cards – displayed in a frame – showed that he made 90s in physics, trigonometry, English, biology, algebra and chemistry.

But he received a 64 one term in chemistry.

He made a zero on one test because he got the cations and anions backward. The low grade kept him from being salutatorian.

The school board considered giving him the title anyway, but his chemistry teacher, W.W. Cooper, said the grade shouldn’t be changed.

Cooper’s quote to the board is pasted on the frame with the report card: “He is going to be a doctor. I want him to remember that a decimal point can kill someone. I know, and he knows he made a 98.”

Hudson's teachers told him he could be a doctor, lawyer, or engineer.

But he said he didn't have the temperament to deal with the life-and-death pressure of a doctor. He felt he could be more creative as a dentist.

Plus, he said, "I didn't like dentists, and I thought there had to be a better way."

Milkshakes

Hudson lives out in the country, on a 400-acre ranch in Star, about 75 miles west of Waco, when he's not living in his Hurst home.

When patients look up at the ceilings, they can see pictures of the ranch and his family.

He also has a "Texas Room" decorated with the colors of his alma mater, the University of Texas. His UT letter jacket – he was on the wrestling team – hangs on one wall. The carpet is orange. And the office has the milkshake machine.

His staff fetched milkshakes for the patients at a nearby restaurant until it closed down, creating much fuss from the patients.

So Hudson bought his own machine.

The shakes come in a yellow and green cup, with an illustration of Hudson and his ranch brand.

Patients need a milkshake, Hudson figured, after they've been leaning back in a chair for two hours.

"It's probably the most powerful drug I have in this office beside the laughing gas," he said.

He knows his patients eat sugar all the time, so he looks at it this way: "If you use dental floss, you get away with anything."

Other things that stood out: Halloween.

Hudson was Snow White to his female assistants' Seven Dwarfs, Hot Lips to their *MASH* workers and the Little Red Riding Hood to their Big Bad Wolves.

But after his father died on Oct. 31 eight years ago, Hudson lost enthusiasm for the holiday and quit dressing up.

Hudson's office will be taken over by Dr. Stephen Parker until Parker moves into his own office under construction in Grapevine. Hudson's building will be replaced by a strip center.

Hudson will live at his ranch, spending time with his family.

Since his retirement announcement, the office staffers have shed tears. He's received many cards and letters from patients. He read one letter from a local 53-year-old banker who had been using Hudson's services since his 20s.

"God knows going to the dentist will never be the same," the letter said.

At one point, Hudson's voice quivered when he read the letter.

"We never know when we touch lives," Hudson said.