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## From star student to star dentist

Jennifer Peddle is following in her late father's footsteps

By Joel Jacobson BRIGHT SPOT

Fri. Jul 4 - 5:39 AM



ACCORDING TO A new graduate, a good dentist has to interact well with the public, have good dexterity, know what he or she is doing (of course) and be strong academically and clinically.

Jennifer Peddle fills the bill.

The Porters Lake woman, newly crowned the top student in the 2008 class of Dalhousie University's school of dentistry, was also top student in all four years of dental school.

She received the University Dentistry Medal at the May graduation, the same medal her late father, John, earned 29 years ago. She's strong academically and clinically, but Jennifer is much more than an ace learner.



Jennifer won various prizes through her dentistry years, proving that her dexterity and knowledge were strong. Her captivating smile and ease in chatting show a charming public persona that will attract and hold patients.

Yet she is, first and foremost, doing something she loves.

She smiles, showing teeth that never had orthodontics and would make a toothpaste manufacturer proud. "I loved going to the dentist as a kid. It was never a threatening environment for me."

Jennifer grew up in Kentville, but even after she moved to Halifax as a young child she returned to the Valley for dental appointments because of the care she received, until she started dentistry school.

"When I look back, I snacked on healthy things, like cheese, never pop and sweets, and I still don't. I recall my mother (Jeannette, a former hygienist) lining us (four kids) up in the bathroom to brush our teeth and even, at times, brushing them for us."

Jennifer recently started practising at the Porters Lake Dental Clinic, after debating whether to continue her studies. She's happy, after eight years of university, to be working and not studying.

"I've thought about oral surgery (her father was an oral surgeon)," she notes. "I worked two summers in oral surgery at the VG (site of the Queen Elizabeth II Health Centre) and liked it, so may eventually go back (to school)."

She knows, however, that continuing education is part of her career. "We have to do 90 hours over three years, and I'm certainly anxious to keep learning as methods change for the better."

She chose dentistry after weighing that and medicine as careers. She admits health care was always uppermost as a pursuit but family is also very important.

"Dentistry seemed conducive to having a family and career in health care," she says. "If I didn't have to work, I'd rather stay home and have kids. Dentistry will give me more of that opportunity."

Jennifer was an honours student at Dal, earning a B.Sc. in microbiology and immunology. She volunteered in the teen lounge of the IWK Health Centre and for a few months with the Help Line.

To receive the award as the top dental student award "gives me a sense of accomplishment," says Jennifer. "I've seen children of dentists get into dentistry school because a parent was a dentist, but I think I proved I got in on my own merit."

In 1989, when Jennifer was seven, her father and two of her sisters, Julie, 8, and Jessica, 4,

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#### From star student to star dentist

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were killed in a hayride accident at a family reunion in New Brunswick. She and her sister, Jacqueline, one year younger and now a teacher at A. J. Smeltzer Junior High School in Lower Sackville, survived.

"I've learned you have to live life for today but plan for tomorrow," Jennifer says. "Enjoy life now and live it to the fullest."

Married for about a year to Jeff, an RCMP officer from Newfoundland, Jennifer says she's religious and a strong family person.

"I know there's a plan and (the accident) was what was going to happen. At that family reunion, many of our family members had work commitments and couldn't be there but within hours, many were there to offer comfort and assistance. My mum is very strong and her family has been very supportive, too, over the years."

Support was something she received at university, too. "The faculty at Dal dentistry is excellent. They make you feel like family. They help you through any problem, even stay after hours to explain things. One of my classmate's sisters goes to a dentistry school in Ontario and says it's nothing like that there."

She says Dal is known for the amount of clinic time students spend. "I worked on fake teeth in the first week of first year," she says, "and put in many, many hours working on live patients all through school. Patients like it. They're not rushed and we take our time. In third and fourth years, I had 60 patients with varying needs. God bless them. That's how we learn."

She concludes, almost wishing there were no more patients. "Our big job is to convince patients that dental decay is preventable. Passing on education is so important for us to do."

Those earlier prerequisites of a good dentist? Jennifer has them all.

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Joel Jacobson appears Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Sunday.

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