

A Personal Interview With Your Dentist, Dr CARY FRASER

Well here we are with Dr Cary Fraser and what we wanted to do today is just go through a little bit of an interview to give you an idea of who he is as a person and as a dentist; and I just came up with a few questions that I'd like to ask him, but before I do that, Cary how are you going today?

Very well Marc, thank you for asking.

Excellent. Well listen I know that you've been planning to have this interview and I just want to make sure that you're rest assured that this is going to be easy and painless, just like you tell all your patients in the chair.

That would be good.

Excellent; let's get started.

First of all why did you pick dentistry of all the professions that were available to you?

Well that's an interesting question. I remember doing my HSC and not knowing what to choose and a friend of the family who knew me well suggested I do dentistry rather than medicine knowing that I was good with my hands and practically minded and saying that dentistry is a better profession not having to be called out 24 hours a day and the hours were a lot better. She thought I was suited for it; and looking back on it I am.

When you say you're good with your hands, obviously people understand that dentists have to be good with their hands, what made you know that you're good with your hands when you were younger?

I think it was as a boy playing around with Meccano sets and then fixing this and fixing that around the home. Being a little bit of a handyman and always doing something with my hands.

Did you build model planes and cars and boats and all of that?

More the Meccano, I think I did build a model aeroplane, one you could fly and maybe 1 or 2 boats, but not too many of those.

What do you like about dentistry and at the same time why would you add orthodontics to what a general dentist does, why go that extra step?

Well originally it started as just doing fillings and cleans and crowns and dentures and just the normal standard run-of-the-mill dentistry and then I got more interested in people, you know how they were and coming along and saying they have headaches and neck aches and I got interested in that side of things and saw how we could help them and then found that by helping them in that regard I had to move their teeth around to help their jaws, so I had to go learn how to do the orthodontics, moving the teeth to support the jaws, to support the head, to support the body. In other words everything's connected.

So then why not just become an orthodontist, because a lot of people don't really understand the difference between the two. Can you clarify that so that it's clearly understood; what the difference is between a dentist and an orthodontist and you as a dentist who does orthodontics?

That's a very good question. I'm a general dentist who can do orthodontics; I can do orthodontics, I can do root canal, I can do crown and bridge. An orthodontist was a dentist who went off and studied and became a specialist and does orthodontics and that's all they can do; they can't do fillings, they can't do anything else in the mouth except orthodontics.





Why is that important to you with your practice and your holistic approach to dentistry? Why do you think a holistic approach is important, as a dentist who does orthodontics?

Well a holistic approach is important to me in looking at the whole body and not just looking at a tooth with a hole and being a tooth carpenter, but seeing that I can help people in a lot of different ways in their health as well as their teeth.

But most people see a dentist as just someone who takes care of their teeth. Why do you think you having that much of a global overall, and I don't want to just keep repeating the word holistic, but something that's more encompassing, why do you think it's important and critical to how you practice dentistry? In other words other dentists don't have that same approach that you have, or certainly not to the same extent; why do you think it's important for your patients for you to have that level of expansive perspective and unique approach?

Now that's a very interesting question, why do I do what I do.

Yeah.

I think it boils down to I like helping people and by doing this sort of approach I know I can help people more than by just drilling, filling and building their teeth. And I know from experience now that we can help people a lot more than just filling a tooth.

So was this approach something that dawned on you over time, or was it something, was there a trigger event, or a particular patient that was having you know some kind of an acute flare-up or problem or issue that kind of swayed you that way or how did it come about for you to have this kind of perspective?

Well I think I can pinpoint it down to when I was 12 or 13, as a teenager I had some health problems and my mother sought out some alternative holistically minded practitioners who solved my problem and in the back of my mind ever since then I've always looked for other ways to solve problems. And when I came into dentistry, if I saw something unusual it sparked my interest. I am always looking for the unusual rather than the run-of-the-mill style dentistry.

How do you reconcile being trained in the traditional you know dentistry educational system, how do you reconcile that with the alternative medicine, alternative treatment plans, alternative ways of thinking, because a lot of people have that, well you're either traditional or you're alternative; but you in fact have feet in both camps. So on a day to day basis how do you reconcile that?

I think it's important to have both because both compliment each other in a lot of ways, but being able to be in both those camps you can open your eyes and see a lot more than you normally could.

I agree. Switching a little bit to another focus, what do you love about what you do, what drives you and why do you keep doing what you're doing with the passion that you seem to still have after so many years in practice?

Well there is a lot of the things I like. Having been doing this for a number of years now, not only have I seen generations of families going through and watching children from an early age growing up, teenagers, adults and then soon to bring their children. That's one aspect of what I like, getting to know the families and people that I treat over time, but also helping people with their problems. Only yesterday 2 people came in with headaches and jaw problems who I knew we can help and that they come from all spectrums of society.



So one of the things that I learnt about you when we first met is that you actually have a martial arts background; how does that fit into your life as a dentist? One, do you still practice, or have you given that up, and how did that weave its way into your life when you were quite active in your martial arts? First of all what kind of martial arts and how did that fit into your life when it pertains to being a dentist, because a lot of people would not expect a dentist to be a martial arts person I guess.

Well the martial arts style I did was Zanshin Shotokan and I achieved a 1st Dan Black Belt in that. The analogies that you can draw between that and dentistry are, you need focus and discipline, and lots of training to achieve excellence in both those things. Karate helped in that regard. I must say I didn't get into karate originally thinking I would get a Black Belt but I took my 2 daughters along to train in karate, and I just got caught up in it and kept training and enjoyed it not only for the fitness level but for the skill level as well.



What's the one thing that you're left with now from that martial arts training after all the years that you invested in that; what's the one thing that you take away and have in your life, in your mindset now?

The one thing would be the focus and the discipline of karate.

[Excellent.]

In dentistry what would you think your greatest accomplishment has been so far, obviously your career is not over, but at this point what are you most proud of that you've accomplished?

It's an ongoing field so...

But so far what do you feel is your greatest accomplishment, if there's 1 or 2 that's fine, but what do you think out of everything that you've done that you feel most proud of or feel that is the most value to you or to your patients?

Well I suppose there are probably a few things, I mean just being here and helping people and rehabilitating people's mouths and bodies and lives is a big achievement in each and every person. But other achievements.... a lot of the courses I've done, I've become instrumental in a few organisations, I'm currently the President of the International Association of Orthodontics, an organisation for general dentists doing orthodontics around the world and I'm the first non North American, to have that role.

Well there you go; you see that's something that you should be proud of and not only for yourself but obviously for Australia as such a small country amongst such bigger players at least population wise to show the world that we have very entrepreneurial, very forward thinking people in our professions and in your case obviously that's dentistry.

Outside of dentistry what do you think your number one accomplishment would be; obviously beyond your kids because any parent would say their first accomplishment would be their children and then it might be their marriage.

I think you must be a mind reader.

But outside of your family, because I know you're very proud of your children.

A couple of the accomplishments would be probably attaining a Black Belt in karate, taking up cycling at an older age and competing in different cycling events, going into the MS cycle event to Wollongong.

And how far was that?

That was 90 kilometers.

Wow! And how long did that take?

I think about 3½ to 4 hours.

Wow, that's fantastic.

What do you think is the biggest change that you've seen in your profession; first of all how long have you been practicing dentistry since you've graduated?

Twenty eight years.

Over those 28 years what do you think is the biggest change that you've seen to the profession?

I see a few different milestones in dentistry since I've been practicing. One milestone is that mercury amalgam fillings are not being used as much and actually I haven't used them at all in my practice. I was one of the first dentist's in Sydney not to include mercury amalgam fillings in my surgery.

That's a huge one.

Yes; so I've always believed that mercury is not good for you and I took a stance on that early and the profession is catching up but it's not quite there yet.

Yeah, there are still dentists unfortunately around the world that still use it. What else would there have been as a change or a milestone?

Two more things I'd probably outline would be the use of digital technology, having digital x-rays that we can see instantaneously and not have to send people off, we have machines where we can look at things straight away to see if there is any pathology. So that's another main field and using technology of computers and other electronic things; that has come a long way since I first started.



So you're referring to computer modeling?

Yes you can do that as well, using computers to design appliances and computer aided crowns, crowns made by computers. Technology is becoming more and more popular in dentistry.

And how do you find that as a load to learn and acquire those skills, do you find it helps you or it's just another burden that's on your shoulders now as a dentist and how do you see that?

Well just as well I like learning because otherwise it would be a burden, but I like to try and stay at the forefront of things and use the new technology as soon as possible when it's proven, so yes there is a learning component to it but that's all part of it. I like learning, I go to lots of courses, and I do lots of things to keep abreast of what's happening.



When you mention professional development you know everybody would expect that to be a given for you know someone in a profession like dentistry, but you've gone way beyond what the average dentist would entertain as professional development.

We've already talked about the holistic aspect but you have a very strong predisposition to go into a lot more depth and breadth, so in other words you go really deep into something, you investigate and you evaluate a lot more options than most dentists.

Why do you do that from a, how can I say, from a, not just from an intellectual point of view but from a development point of view, how do you see those things contributing to the care that you can give your patients?

Well I think that's the point; it's more to do with my passion for looking after people and their care, so I feel it's necessary for me to see what's out there and investigate what things I can do to improve my treatments to help my patients.

Yeah; I mean that totally makes sense. In all of the courses you've taken you're obviously at the leading edge of technology and innovation; what do you think is the biggest or the next biggest shifts or changes or milestones that you think will happen within dentistry and orthodontics as well?

Well it's starting out there but it's very small; but I see a dentist not just being labeled as a dentist but more of a physician, in looking at the whole person and being able to look at the whole condition and maybe even direct which direction they should go and seek help, from which practitioners they should see.

If that was actually embraced what do you think that would require from an education training perspective to ensure that people had the skills; obviously you have close to 30 years of taking the courses and having the formal education that you have as a dentist, how would you see that affecting dental education you know from a graduate, you know a 25 year old you know coming out of university, how he or she would then take on that added responsibility of just not just treating the teeth but looking at more from a patient care perspective, a physician's perspective?

I think that may be starting to happen but it's, I suppose it's a lot more daunting from a new graduate's perspective in that possibly they thought of getting into dentistry to become a tooth carpenter but didn't even realise that there are other aspects and other areas that they could progress in.

Do you think that there is the potential of having another designation just like you have with specialists, you have dentists and orthodontists that you could potentially have a dental physician who would then have a higher qualification certification or some kind of an accreditation that is designated by whatever authority, do you think that that's the way it's going to go or it's going to be kind of an informal evolution of these kinds of individuals who choose this path? In other words people that have 10 or 20 or 30 years of practical clinical experience, which way do you think it will go?



Well at this stage I probably see it more as an evolution rather than just happening, and already there are certain practitioners who follow this train of thought.

Excellent. Well that's good to hear from a patient's perspective.

What's the best advice that you think you could give parents about their kids' teeth, and I'm thinking parents with very young children, so infants and toddlers and young children that would be in grade school; what are the things that you think parents don't know right from the breastfeeding stage all the way to when the kids have fully formed mouths in more or less the teenage young adult years, even though I know that the teeth keep evolving even as adults, but in those formative years what do you think parents don't know that they should know?

This is actually a subject that I'm very passionate about and I talk to lots of the parents, my patients who are parents and the children. I talk to them all the time about this sort of thing, even when it stems back to when they are pregnant. I talk to the parents about nutrition, and we talk to them about breastfeeding versus pacifiers, dummies and bottle feeding and try to encourage breastfeeding if possible, and the different ways of breastfeeding, good and bad. So I talk to parents about that. And then progressing from breastfeeding on to what sort of foods they should be eating, rather harder more solid foods and not soft foods to help stimulate the growth of the bones, and talk about airway and breathing and posture in the mouth. So children who breathe through their nose and keep their mouth closed their mouth tend to grow a lot better than children who breathe through their mouth. Also the basic and of course important aspect of how they brush their teeth and instill brushing from an early age which you can do, even start from an infant with no teeth getting them used to having their gums massaged to when they get their teeth, instilling the routine of brushing twice a day.

Because the brushing is important, a lot of people don't realize the brushing stimulates the gum; so it's like a massage for your gums, is that right?

Yes absolutely.

Because a lot of people don't really think about that but when you look at problems in the mouth what's the percentage that are teeth related versus gum related, if you can kind of generalise on that.



Well it all starts off with more of a structural problem if we're talking about positions of the teeth and more of a structural problem where the bones are and the teeth will come through where the bone is; so what we try to encourage is more favourable bone growth, then look at how the teeth are coming through and try and prevent problems as early as possible.

[Excellent.]

Are there any myths out there about dentists that you like to bust; a lot of people have you know preordained or preframed concepts of what dentists are like and the job of being a dentist and the profession of caring for people in something that a lot of people just don't see as an attractive profession, again it's all a question of perspective, but what are some of those myths out there that you think need to be busted once and for all?



Well one of the well-known myths or, well actually it wasn't a myth at one stage is that the highest rate of suicide is in the dental profession and I think that's changed over the years.

Yes.

I hope it has.

I believe it has. I'm not sure who unfortunately has overtaken that but I do believe it has changed in the last decade or so. Just in time for you.

I'm still here. One of the other myths that we're all sadists and we all like are hurting people; definitely not so anymore, there are new technologies and it's a lot easier on the patient and they're usually quite surprised by the end of treatments how easy it was.

Yeah. I mean I think I've read quite a few reports that one of the reasons that dentists historically had such high rates of suicides is because they historically you know you're going back 30, 40 years now, dental care was so painful or was less pleasurable than it is now. I don't know if you can say really pleasurable but it involved a little more pain than the day in day out administering of the dental procedures.

Even though it was minimal pain, the dentist would embody that and that's what became quite demoralizing for many of them; and I think that that's part of the reason why dentists now don't have those burdens because of modern medicine which I think is a fantastic thing both for patients as well as practitioners.

Are there any other myths that you want to debunk while you have a chance to do so?

Oh dear, I can't think of any.

All right. Well as we wrap up people who deal with you on a day to day basis, not day to day but on an ongoing basis I should say, would probably be interested in knowing a few things about you that are personal beginning without getting into something that's confidential I just want to ask you just a few questions about what you like.

What's your all time favourite movie?

Well one that sticks out in my mind from an early age is 'One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest'.

Really?

Yes that's a...

That's a classic. Why?

Actually there's a couple of movies now it comes to mind but that one always sticks out in my mind, I was very struck by that movie and it left a big impression on me; looking at how it was set in a psychiatric ward and I think one of the most memorable things in my mind is how they treated people with shock therapy and I think I found that quite shocking, and it's how someone from the inside liberated them all.



Yeah, I think it's an absolute classic movie because it was one of the first that really captured the essence of what was actually going on and today those asylums no longer exist in that form you know as a direct or indirect result of that movie which was ground breaking at the time.

And I have to put a special mention in for one other movie, 'An Affair to Remember'.

Oh yes.

With Cary Grant, my namesake.

Yes.

That's a movie I can watch again and again.

Yes. We all have those movies and it's great to hear what yours are.

What's your favourite all time book, if you have one? Do you have an author that you really like or is there a book that you read that changed your life or shifted your thinking or that you just really enjoy?

I know the book but I'll just say nowadays I don't read as many books because I always read more dental journals and articles and things like that, but I remember in third class at school one book that sticks in my mind, and that's not the last time I read a book by the way...

Sure, sure.



It's called 'The Weirdstone of Brisingermen'; it was sort of a prequel to 'Lord of the Rings' style books.

I've never heard of it; who's the author?

I knew you were going to ask me that.

Is it a well-known author?

I've just forgotten who it is but I'll ring you up at midnight and remind you.

Sure, exactly when you remember. Why was that book something that stood out for you?

I think the fantasy value of that one and just escape in fantasy.

Yeah it's a little bit like the Harry Potter books. I'm not someone who's read any of them but what I really thought was a great contribution to the literary, how can you say, mindset, is that it got so many kids pick up books that otherwise would never pick them up and their escape and their journeys that they had reading the books I thought was just like a resurgence in the love of the book which I thought was just fantastic. So I can totally understand that especially at that age to be affected by that.

Do you have a music, a band or artist that stands out for you or 2 or 3 that you could listen to you know for hours and hours?

I suppose the original one would have to be The Beatles, classic, and I remember getting my first CD, if anyone still remembers what a CD is, Brothers in Arms, and I must admit that was the only CD I had; I played that a lot.

So you played it a lot; fantastic. Last 2 questions, the country you'd most like to visit other than Australia. Either that you have visited or would like to visit.

Well I like London in England a lot and basically because having grown up in Australia living in England, London is a place where you could easily reach the rest of the world, whereas it's a lot harder to do from here. And the history and the culture and the ease of accessing different cultures so easily.

Yeah. I totally agree; it's so essential to, I mean especially with the airports you know, in 2 hours you're just about you know close to I think maybe 35 or 40 countries which is amazing which obviously makes it so popular for so many people as a stepping stone on the way to their ultimate destinations.

As I wrap this up I want to thank you for the time you spent with us today; can you tell us something your patients would not know about you as we conclude this interview?

One thing they may not know is that one of my first jobs was working as a dishwasher in a restaurant, I worked my way up to 2nd chef and I've always had a passion for cooking and I think I'm quite a good cook.

Well I did not know that and I'm pretty sure most people listening to this or reading this transcript are impressed at the wide range of talent that you have. And on that note Cary I want to thank you for taking the time today and I'm sure that the listeners appreciate getting to know you just a little bit better. Thank you very much.

Thank you, Marc.

Thank you Cary.

Interview conducted by Dr Marc Dussault – The Exponential Growth Strategist helping business owners and professionals grow their businesses while maintaining work-life balance without compromising their integrity and results.

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