



ORTHO2

# Around the World for Braces

by **Rosemary Bray**

**A**pproaching my 50th year anniversary in orthodontics, I find myself taking more time than ever before to reflect on those numerous years, the extensive travels, the treasured friendships, the many practices visited, and the valued things learned. Fifty years! Was I really only 2 years old (as I love to say) when I began this journey? I would sure like to think so. Looking back, I was merely a child though, right out of a dental assistant program and into my first job in an ortho office, welding strips of metal into bands, handwriting appointments by pencil on the huge green Colwell appointment book, and taking periapical film X-rays to place into that plastic full mouth mount. Young ortho team members today have no idea what that means.

The last 19 years of this journey have been gloriously spent travelling the world teaching and speaking about ortho and patient care. Though that often sounds remarkably "glamorous" to many of those who hear this, the reality of it is also grueling on one's health and stress level.

I have forced myself now to take care of me in all of this hectic, and sometimes, non-stop life I have come to adore; there has got to be "me time" to preserve myself in order to serve others. I did not think about that for a very long time.

After logging 2 million miles with United Airlines, I have come to understand the value of perhaps actually sleeping on the plane ride, or playing a mindless card game, or reading a novel in lieu of the business book. Now I understand the value of the back and neck massage to alleviate what I call, "computer neck". Now I treasure the moments spent with my small grandchildren reading Dr. Seuss or making pancakes instead of working at the computer or writing this article.

In the last 12 months, I have been blessed (I think that is the right word, some days I say cursed instead) to have been in 12 countries. United Airlines loves me. A pilot

actually came out of the cockpit on one of my longer international trips, stooped down near my seat, handed me a hand written note, and thanked me for writing his paycheck. That was both funny AND great customer service, yet it was also an eye opener to me. How much time am I spending sitting on the plane to get here and there? Am I walking enough on that plane to keep the blood flowing? Am I doing leg stretches at my seat?

Without being overly cautious or obsessive, we all need to take care of *us*, especially when our call in life is to take care of others. Just as those of you who work all day long in the practice, taking care of patients, and then you go home to care for your families, **YOU** need to be aware that **YOU** have to be a priority, too.

Over the years, I have taught teams something which I call "Doctor Preservation". I believe teams are there to preserve their doctors, to allow the doctor to make the diagnosis, to do the actual treatment, and create the beautiful clinical and aesthetic smiles that only they can do. Everything else can be done in full or in part by the well-trained team. "Preserve your doctor," I tell them, "and help to keep your doctor out of court, off of drugs and alcohol, free from burn-out, and seated at an ortho chair wearing gloves that are wet!" That's a happy doctor! Important as this is, we also all need to preserve ourselves. I applaud the ortho team who has the masseuse come in now and then for neck massages, who does yoga together at lunch time or who heads off to the gym right from the office after a full day of patients. I applaud the financial coordinator or treatment coordinator who takes a 30-45 minute rest in the private op on a fully reclined chair in order to re-charge the batteries for their busy afternoon.

And finally now, I have learned to applaud myself for

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taking breathing time for me. A real vacation taken this year with no work involved, next year's vacation already booked well in advance, more relaxing time with family and friends, walks in my beautiful San Diego sunshine – all of these combine to alleviate stress, keep the momentum going, and prevent the burned out lack of energy which all of us should be trying to avoid.

Thank you ortho for having changed my life and giving me a hint at a future wonderful career and profession. Thank you ortho for a career which I have loved and treasured and for which I am eternally grateful. Thank you ortho for the dear friendships I have around the world and in every state in America.

I am promising to take care of me so that I can be here to see that 50th anniversary and to speak at my 25th consecutive AAO Annual Session, and to share my knowledge and passion for this profession with the young people who have still never

heard of me! Let's all commit to taking care of ourselves (mentally, physically, emotionally) for our families, for our ortho team members and doctors, for our patients and also, for OURSELVES. ☺

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## About the Author

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Rosemary Bray has spent nearly 50 years employed in the dental profession, both in clinical and administrative roles, with experience in general dentistry, periodontics, and 18 years in orthodontics – all in San Diego.