

J. Eric Selnes

ORTHODONTIST

Diploma in Orthodontics, Toronto 1997
Doctor of Dental Surgery, Toronto 1994
MSc Biomechanics, Queen's 1990
BA/BPHE, Queen's 1988

In his own words: "Highly motivated individual striving for well roundedness in all endeavours. Believes in treating people with respect and places personal integrity above all other personal or professional goals."

Eric Selnes doesn't regret one minute of his 14 years of post-secondary education — it has landed him exactly where he wants to be. A skilled orthodontist in a busy Mississauga practice, he credits his job satisfaction to early career decisions that dramatically affected his working life.

"I love going to work every day. Fortunately, I learned at an early age that it's important to be certain that what you *decide* to do is what you really *want* to do. They're two different things. Some students get locked into a degree and then into a job. Or they're constantly changing jobs, never settling into anything."

Born in Toronto, he lived in various parts of Canada as a child, following the career path of his father, an engineer in the energy industry. "There have been many benefits from moving so often. For instance, my siblings and I developed good interpersonal skills that now help me daily in my job."

He believes a three-year stint in the Limestone City, where he played hockey as a youngster, strongly influenced his decision to

study at Queen's. "I had a number of options for university, yet chose Queen's because of my earlier memories and also because I wanted to attend a smaller university...and they offered me a generous entrance scholarship."

Like many undergraduates, he had definite ideas about his future when he enrolled in the Life Sciences program. It was to be a stepping-stone to a medical degree, but by second year — after he had been accepted into the medical school — he decided that medicine was not the career path for him. He switched into the BA/BPHE program, with a minor in Health Sciences.

It turned out to be a wise choice. "I have to thank the global perspective of the Physical Education program for giving me insight into who I am as a person. I was able to study such diverse subjects as religion, sport and archaeology. It's important not to get boxed into something. Being a part of that program and being at Queen's was a very positive introspective experience that gave me a better understanding of who I was and what I wanted to be."

It was also a time, he adds, when he was stretching himself in terms of extra-curricular activities, participating in intramural sports, teaching, working in the Alumni Office with STAR and tending bar at Alfies.

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He graduated with the Gold Medal in his year and earned a two-year NSERC Fellowship to study Biomechanics. But a year into the Master's program, Eric took yet another hard look at where he was heading.

"I didn't mind the writing part of graduate work but I discovered that I hated doing research. Becoming a professor or researcher didn't appeal to me either, so I applied for and was accepted by the Dentistry program at the University of Toronto. I liked working with my hands and other people, and I also liked the idea that as a dentist, you essentially work for yourself. But I decided to finish the M.Sc. first. I felt a responsibility to do that."

Graduating from dentistry in 1994, Eric completed a residency in pediatric dentistry at The Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto. By 1997, he had completed further post-graduate studies, earning a Diploma in Orthodontics from the University of Toronto. With this specialization in hand, he accepted a position with Village Orthodontics in Mississauga and Georgetown where he continues to work today.

Along with a busy schedule of treatment planning, he also teaches Orthodontics to undergraduate and graduate students at U of T. Clocking an excess of 60 working hours per week, he has a gruelling schedule. On balance, however, he can handle the stress thanks to what he calls an "A-1 staff" and the opportunity to travel several times a year to fascinating places such as Greece, Turkey, Costa Rica and France.

"Travel is one of life's great educations. In my job, the only down side is that, because of my patients' needs, it is impossible to travel for extended periods."

Eric has no doubt that career satisfaction stems from knowing yourself well. He cites his teaching as a prime example. "I never

wanted to be a teacher after doing some teaching during my MSc degree. It wasn't a good experience; I didn't have much control over the job. But now I'm teaching on my own terms, which makes a big difference. The point is that even a bad experience can turn into a positive one if you learn something about yourself from it."

"Be brutally honest with yourself about your strengths, weaknesses and abilities. And don't be afraid to change your mind about a decision and move on. I certainly did. Life isn't static and neither is any career."

His advice is the same to those still pursuing a university degree and those just graduating into the workforce.

"True education is the process of learning and appreciating who you are and what you like, not just what you get out of books and classes. Experience is wisdom. Seek to understand who you are — your own personality and goals. Be brutally honest with yourself about your strengths, weaknesses and abilities. And don't be afraid to change your mind about a decision and move on. I certainly did. Life isn't static and neither is any career." ❖



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