

Teeth - Yet Another Obsession

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Ever since my front tooth wiggled out of my face in kindergarten, I've had an inexplicable fixation on human teeth. I remember standing in the playground tanbark, snarled in a moment of utter hypnosis, as the glossy eggshell-white chomper stared up from the center of my palm. I was stunned that something so permanent and useful could simply fall off my body with a little tug of encouragement.

Fast-forward to high school, when my biology teacher revealed how teeth are some of the first things to form in the womb, and the last things on a skeleton to decay, and also how teeth are unique to their owner, and therefore, more badass than fingerprints because if someone's charred in a fire or decapitated at the wrists, dental records become the coroner's best friend. He didn't say that last part, but that was my takeaway, which deepened my fascination for such robust and beautiful objects farmed out of the human body.

Over the years, I've acquired a modest collection from past paramours. During vulnerable moments of intimate conversation, when asked if there was ever anything I deeply coveted, I'd mention my desire for a lost tooth. Most chatter didn't last long, as few people kept theirs from childhood or surgical wisdom teeth removals, and if they did, when I asked if they would gift me with one (or more), the conversation (and relationship) usually ended there.

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I never understood the issue. Historically, our society has cherished much more bizarre bodily artifacts: cuttings of hair, and the bellybuttons or dried placentas of children. I've even heard people feast on their own tissue at "placenta parties." Who's the freak now? And it isn't like I'm into any of the weird shit like gingivitis-ridden, radioactive yellow teeth whose owner appears to have spent years gargling with ramen salt packets, nor am I into mouths oozing dark, rotting sludge that make a smile look like two juxtaposed gutter grates.

I have standards. I don't throw myself at random boozers who lose teeth in bar fights or boarders who have broken their faces against asphalt, and no, I can't just raid the dumpsters behind a dental office for medical waste like Tyler Durden and his lipo soap fat. The teeth I want must hold significance. Like the quote, "it's not the destination that matters, it's the journey," for me, it's the connection that I've had with someone and the story behind the lost tooth that interests me.

A few partners who have accepted me as I am: a drummer, part-time writer, and collector of teeth, have openly listened to my request and affectionately contributed to my rainbow collection with previously lost molars: one heavy with a silver filling; one stained brown from years of coffee and whiskey baths; another, grey from decades of soot, stout, and cigarette smoke. I don't consider them trophies or "notches on my bedpost," but parts of people who were incredibly significant to me, even if only for a finite amount of time. Although I may not remember why we parted, or much in between like the bad times or even the good, I'll never forget whose mouth each tooth came from.

I recognize a shadowbox of teeth can't be auctioned at an estate sale like silver spoons or on eBay like Buffalo nickels, so like those who elect close friends to toss their porn collection and clear their Internet browsing history upon death, I should probably designate a confidant who's willing to take care of my teeth. Either that, or I need to apologize to the Tooth Fairy for booby-trapping the hallway

to my room all those nights I thought she was coming for my goods
when I was a kid.

