

We older folks are always talking about the Good Old Days, but, of course, not everything turned up roses. I was a typical youngster growing up in Old Erwin in the 1940s and 50s. Sometimes I brushed my teeth when told and sometimes I didn't. Play often seemed more important than the correct brushing of teeth. I'll never forget my first visit to a dentist, Dr. A. A. Dobbs, whose office one reached, I believe, by going up stairs beside the Capitol Theater. Anyway, his office was over what was then Erwins, a clothing store on the northwest corner of Gay and Main. I was of primary school age and this wasn't a good report. I was so disappointed and I was soon shocked by the drilling and fillings required because of my many cavities. These dental misadventures continued throughout my grade school and high school years. The location of my dental correction changed from Dr. Dobbs's office to Dr. W. R. McGowen's office which was eventually where the *Erwin Record* is now located. The results were always the same, more and more cavities, more and more needles, and more and more drilling. I was sure by the time I graduated from UCHS that I wouldn't have any teeth left by the time I reached the ripe old age of fifty. Meanwhile, I had one close friend who carried a tooth brush with him, and he brushed his teeth faithfully after every meal, regardless of where he was. He escaped my continuous parade to the dentist. While I'm sure he's had a few cavities through the decades, he still has almost perfect teeth after all these years, and yes, he still carries his toothbrush and he still uses it after every meal. Well, my friend didn't do me any good, but something else did. By the time my children were brushing their teeth in the early 70s, Erwin Utilities had been putting fluoride into our drinking water since 1951. From a recent investigation of fluoride web sites, I've learned that the fluoridation of drinking water not only stops acid from causing decay, but it also allows teeth to repair damage from early decay. I wouldn't have believed it because I don't think my boys brushed their teeth any better than I did, but both boys went all the way through high school without one cavity. Something else happened. My teeth stopped decaying also. Although trips to Dr. J. G. Moore in the 70s and 80s continued to refill old cavities, pull wisdom teeth, and repair broken teeth, I basically stopped having cavities. Fluoride in our drinking water had saved my teeth. Do you know that fluoridation of drinking water is listed as one of the ten great public health achievements in the past century. I found several references which stated that fluoride reduces tooth decay by 20 to 40 percent for most folks. Now according to the *Wikipedia* research machine, 60 to 90 percent of school children and the vast majority of adults still suffer some tooth decay, but I don't think it's as frequent as in the past. At least, I don't think as many senior citizens have bridges and dentures as did those older citizens in the 50s and 60s. I can still see my Dad's dentures laying in a cup every night. He was a funny looking critter without his teeth. Without the use of fluoride, I would have my own false teeth smiling back at me today. On my latest visit to my dentist to get my teeth cleaned, he remarked how pretty my teeth were. I had to laugh. I've got a mouth full of fillings and crowns. Maybe they were beautiful to him because he saw the excellent work of past dentists, however, he had made a good point. I still have my teeth. Kids, you'll be sorry if you don't brush your teeth. I need to thank Marsha Edwards of Erwin Utilities for her help on this story. That's WEMB Looks Back for this week. I am Lou Thornberry.