What are you going to be when you grow up?
This is a question that we have all answered at some point in our lives. Maybe you’ve been answering, “dentist” since you were very young. Either way, I hope you still believe you made a great decision.

There are many factors that might lead you to a career in the dental profession and these paths are neither short nor easy. Being close to someone who is a dentist can be a big influence. My brother and I are the first two people in my family to join the dental profession, but I remember meeting many people in school who had a parent or relative in dentistry. Those relationships significantly influenced their decision to choose dentistry.

I have often wondered if that next-generation influence is as strong as it was when I was in dental school more than 20 years ago.

This year, as part of our annual Townie Choice Awards ballot, we had a few optional questions on a variety of topics. One of the questions was: “Would you advise your son, daughter or close relative to choose dentistry as a profession?”

While the results were not all sunshine and flowers, the overwhelming response was positive. Of the more than 700 dentists who responded to this optional question, only 17 percent indicated that they would not recommend the dental profession to a young family member.

Another 7 percent had family members who have already selected another profession. The remaining 76 percent either had a family member already in the profession or said they would most certainly recommend this profession to their family members if they expressed an interest.

I found that the presence of interest or desire was a common theme in the group who would endorse dentistry as a profession. Essentially, the price you pay, the challenges you face, and the time invested require a sincere desire to join the profession.

This has always been the case, but it seems especially important today due to the enormous cost of a dental education. For those who were not going to recommend dentistry to their loved ones, common themes for dissent include: the influence of insurance companies, and the lack of autonomy.

The sentiment indicated that this profession is not what many people thought it was when they started and they believe there are better opportunities for success in other fields.

This word cloud is a representation of some of the more popular words used in response to the survey question.

As for me, I’ve wanted to be a dentist since high school. I witnessed my own dentist and orthodontist working with smiles on their faces, enjoying a flexible schedule and the freedom to do what they liked in their spare time.

While my life as a dentist is not the same as it was for them, I am still very grateful for this profession and I would not change my decision.

After all, even when dentistry has me down, I cannot think of a better option to provide for my family, make my own choices, work with my hands and help other people. And on top of all that, technology continues to provide new opportunities for better care and improved materials, which allows us to enjoy better outcomes.

I hope you will take this opportunity to reflect on the reasons you selected dentistry as your chosen career, and I encourage you to share your thoughts on this question in the digital version of this article online at Dentaltown.com.

If you would like to reach me, email me at tom@dentaltown.com or find me on Twitter at @ddsTom.