Teeth
by Judy Loose

Dan hated his new teeth. Just uppers, not lowers. He still had his own bottom choppers. The plate fit improperly and hurt when he chewed, so he liked to remove it when he ate.

Living alone, he often dined out or picked up something to go rather than cook. On this particular hot summer night, coming home late from work, he decided to stop for pizza. The pizza shop was full, so he took his food with him. Enticing smells rose from the seat beside him in the car — mushroom, pepperoni, extra cheese. He could almost taste it. For a while he resisted, but it was a long drive. Opening the box, he grabbed a slice.

Of course, the teeth were extracted before the first bite.

Cruising down the highway, he continued eating. Not the safest way to operate; worse than texting while driving. Soon the pizza box sat empty. Almost home, he spotted a Dumpster behind the grocery store across the street. He lifted the empty box and tossed it. Perfect shot, right into the trash.

Home at last, he collapsed in front of the television before his nightly ritual — shower, dress for bed, clean his teeth…

No teeth!

Dan pulled a pair of jeans over his pajama bottoms, found a flashlight, and headed for his car. He searched the seats, under the seats, in every crack and crevice.

No teeth!

There could be only one answer. He drove back to the grocery store. Did he really want to go Dumpster diving? What were his choices? Forget it and get another set of teeth? But teeth cost big bucks. He didn't have money to throw away. Child support for five boys, two in college, helped make the decision.

Dan looked around to see if anyone was watching. The store had closed and no people roamed the streets. He tried leaning over the side of the container, shining his flashlight to see.

No teeth!

He hoisted himself up and dropped into the nightly trash. Luckily, it held mostly boxes and not much food. His pizza box sat on top, wide open and empty, so he proceeded to rummage through the debris.

No teeth!

He heard a blip of a siren and a blue light flashed against the wall of the store. A head peeked over the top of the Dumpster, and a light blinded him.

"Police."

Dan climbed out and brushed himself off. "Looking for something I lost," he tried to explain.

"Dan?" The policeman lowered his flashlight and laughed. "What are you doing in there?"

Dan recognized Sam, his niece Marcy's father-in-law.

"I threw away a pizza box and tossed something with it."

"Why no shirt?"

"I was ready for bed when it dawned on me."

"What did you lose?"

Dan hesitated. He didn't want to tell him. Embarrassing!

"Come on, man. What's so important you'd go digging through the garbage in the middle of the night?"

"My teeth."

Sam doubled over, his laughter escaping like hiccups. "Oh, man. Wait 'til I tell the guys."

"Don't tell Marcy."

Still chuckling, Sam went back to his cruiser and drove off.

Dan decided to give up and go home. Walking back to his car he spotted something shiny in the middle of the street. Taking a closer look, he realized...

His teeth!

He leaned to pick them up, but they were imbedded in the asphalt. Apparently, they'd been run over a time or two. He found a screwdriver in his trunk and dug out the teeth, only to discover a crack down the middle. He was tempted to toss them, but changed his mind.

Asphalt covered the broken teeth, but stubborn Dan dropped them into a jar and filled it with paint thinner.

The next day he examined the dentures and decided the crack could be fixed. He found some crazy glue at work, glued them together, and clamped them in a vise.

It worked. They felt better than before they broke, but a faint taste of solvent lingered for a few days.

Dan wore those teeth for three more years before getting new ones.

Note: This is a true story as told to me by Dan, who is no longer with us, so the story can't be verified. Any embellishments on the truth are his. I did see the teeth with the crack that had been crazy-glued. No sign of the asphalt, but the teeth looked a little gray.