



## The Tooth Fairy Comes to Life

by Louisa Drouet

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For most children, losing their first tooth is quite exciting and unforgettable — the anticipation of what it will feel like, what it will look like, whether their tooth will grow back, and whether the mystical tooth fairy will find her way underneath their fluffy pillow, take their little treasure, and leave a shiny gift in exchange. As adults we know this story is not quite true, yet we are also aware of the magical fantasy it plays in a child's mind, giving a sense of ease to what might otherwise be a bit scary, or for some, even traumatic.

The irony in this is that later in life many will experience losing their teeth again, due to factors other than youthful development. Then our legendary tooth fairy will not appear with anything fun, such as a lustrous coin, but with a dental bill. That is when we ask, "Does she really exist?" One local certified dental technician (CDT) would say, "Of course, just a bit in reverse."

Chuck Little, owner of Little Dental Lab, has been in business as a certified dental technician in the Four Corners region for more than 21 years. Over the decades, he has worked with a variety of local dentists, and if you have been in the area for any amount of time, there is a strong possibility you are strolling around with a smile developed from his artistic engineering.

"After being in the industry for more than 30 years, I've designed thousands of crowns and bridges for my dental clients," said Little. "Funny thing is, I used to find it challenging to explain to people what I do for a living. Therefore, I decided to develop a little hobby outside of my daily work that has become an incredible passion for me and trademark of my dental lab."

Nearly a decade ago, Little took his dental artistry to the next level and started creating actual tooth fairies — miniature, delicate, one-of-a-kind porcelain figurines that are less than three inches high.

"The original idea for creating these porcelain fairies came from the constant reference to the tooth fairy when I tried to explain the responsibilities of a dental technician," said Little. "Our work is very important for the health and aesthetics of people that



Chuck Little works on his most recent creation. An engineer as well as artist, Chuck uses the same materials to create his tooth fairies as he does to create the dental prosthetics he makes for his clients.

we are constructing dental crowns and bridges for, and I take that responsibility very seriously — the tooth fairies are a fun compliment to what I do."

Each one of Little's tooth fairies are made from thin-gauge wax wire and then cast out of precious metal using the lost-wax technique developed centuries ago; Little said the wings alone can take 10 to 12 hours to construct. Once the cast is complete, the frame is sandblasted and the metal finished down, after which the process of bringing the fairy to life begins. That is accomplished by using modified dental-porcelain powders that are delicately applied by hand with a small #6 brush. The figure is then placed into a porcelain oven and fired. Sculptures must be able to fit within the small furnace chamber and conform to the strict confines of the materials, which is very similar to the engineering and construction of the crowns and bridges that Little creates for actual human beings.

"I really enjoy the whole process of making these tiny tooth fairies," said Little. "For most people, it would make them crazy, but I'm in my element when working on the minute detail of them. It's probably why I love my profession so much — it fits my personality, and I know I'm helping people."

Having worked with some of the most respected dental technicians in the world, spending years in the business and using the mystical story to describe his talents, we might just say Chuck Little is indeed the tooth fairy himself — he just happens to give your teeth back to you.

"There is nothing more important to me than making sure I'm designing high-quality, safe and pleasing crowns and bridges for my customers," said Little. "And since everything is made here, locally, with American Dental Association-approved products and materials, my clients can be confident that their work will be completed quickly, accurately and with a little bit of magic." ☺

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