

95 and Not Dead Yet: At Least I've Beaten Nunmacy

by [Reg Green](#) (November 2024)



From Dentist's Chair (Leo John Meissner, 1927)

"I have nunmacy," I said breezily as I walked into my office

at the *Guardian*.

"No such word," Bill Pilkington, commercial editor and my boss, growled. His certainty shook me—he had a formidable command of the language—but I couldn't stop now.

"I've just come from the dentist and he said I had it and that it was a very good thing at my age," I persisted.

Pilk turned back to writing his daily column and we left it there. A couple of hours later, checking the proofs of his article, he suddenly burst out, "None missing," he said, "You've got none missing." Yes, that was it. I'd misheard the dentist.

All this was in 1954. I was 25, and I was unusual in having all my teeth because, when I was a child, dentists in northern England were tooth pullers, pure and simple. This was long before the days of orthodontists, endodontists, and periodontists—as well as the ubiquitous braces that disfigure our young teenagers so that a couple of years later they smile radiantly and expensively for holiday photos.

A few days ago, when I had to have a loyal but much worked-over tooth taken out by—you guessed it—a maxillofacial surgeon, the incident at the *Guardian* came back to me in all its details. Yes, I thought, technology has seen a wonderful series of changes—I scarcely felt this tooth being pulled out—but affectionate memories last a lifetime and I'd give my front teeth to be able to tell good old Pilk, "Okay, I'll admit it, there's no such thing as nunmacy. But how about going out for a beer so we can talk about my manymacy?"

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