

## Medical Memories

1950

In rural North Dakota my parents had to travel 50 miles for the benefit of a hospital birth, which was in vogue even for farm families by the 1950s. Visits to a doctor had to be well justified. I remember a neighbor nearly cutting her leg off when the blade of her lawn mower flew off. (To this day, I am phobic around lawn mowers. I swear it is not an excuse and regardless of the climate I fully embrace low-no water landscaping in which rock replaces grass.) The roads, back then, were gravel which is why medical emergencies were discouraged during seasons of rain and snow. The roads were generally straight with a few gentle curves and sloping, corrugated hills. On the drive home we would crest one particular hill and see 5 lights ahead of us, obviously not the same as the stars in the unpolluted sky. Yard lights indicated we were approaching a settlement. My brother would always say, "Oh look, there is the thriving metropolis of Center." (our home town). We would all crack up. .. even my mother.

1960-1970

I had dropped out of high school to seek my fortune as a waitress in varied positions including one of the last old fashioned, genuine soda fountains. Trading typical high school for making my fortune as a soon to be extinct soda jerk makes it all worthwhile even now. Since there wasn't anything much better to do I also got married to save my boyfriend from Viet Nam. He was in the Air Force. The summer after we married we drove 50 miles to picnic and swim from the sand bars on the Missouri River. There were no shade trees on the sand bars and we got horribly sunburned, blistered and sun sick vomituous for several days after. I learned that military doctors, at that time, did not treat conditions that resulted from self inflicted stupidity. The following winter I went to the Air Force Base Clinic again because I had a terrible flu. The flu lasted for 9 months and if I went into detail about birth control practices at that time it would have been another example of self inflicted stupidity... but they treated me anyway.

1970

Puerto Rico. The country bumpkin's big adventure.

Air Force Base... Tropical Island... Golf Course. Yes, our military at work. Our house was near the runway and traffic always revved up towards Fridays and Mondays with planes coming and going, flying quite low, weighed down with a lot of brass that would be rapidly exchanged for golf attire. At times, my husband was hired to chauffeur the very people who held our national security in the palms of their hands, along with their golf clubs.

Our daughter was born in Puerto Rico. Having had a second child in a typical hospital I can tell you now that having a baby in a military hospital is different. As "enlisted" we had our baby after which I was promptly deposited in a ward of other newly blessed parents. As a result, I had around 20 roommates. The woman next to me had an 11 lb boy who, quite frankly, looked like a small adult and had the shoulders of a foot ball player in full padded gear.

There were memorable moments in the ward. The first was watching my feet return to their normal size. The other... standing at the window watching the mostly male military staff efficiently care for our babies. 42 years later I recall, vividly, the tall, thin black soldier gently looking into my baby's face rocking her in a rocking chair that could barely contain his long frame. Manly men who are tender with children and animals make me all soft inside. There is a prayer of gratitude for him that I keep in my heart, that he has a good life and that he was spared from war.

Post 1970 memories: Well, the one doctor who was inserting an IUD and found himself to be missing a particular tool handed me all the equipment to hold carefully between my bared legs while he went looking for the necessary tool. That was weird.

And the birth of my second child. In this pregnancy I studied. I read. I was well educated. I was prepared for her birth. I had gone to the natural child birth classes. I chose a doctor who would honor my wishes for a natural birth and no episiotomy. On a Saturday morning I got up to use the bathroom and couldn't stop peeing. As my water broke my body slammed straight into mega labor. There was no easing into it like the first baby. The hospital was prepared, too. Now they had machines to monitor everything and my baby was going into distress. .. unless I lay on my side. This resulted in a battle between the nurse and myself. She wanted me to lay on my back so she could continue to watch the monitor telling her that the baby was in distress. I kept telling her, the baby would not be in distress if lay on my side. I knew if I didn't win this argument we were headed for surgery and a cesarean that was especially popular with doctors on weekends.

I won and shortly thereafter asserted myself again. "Give me the shot!!" "I know I said I wanted a natural birth. Now, I DON'T. I want the shot now. I want the shot NOW!!" "It will interfere with your instinct to push.", the nurse said. "GIVE ME THE SHOT!!!" So, as an educated pregnant woman, I made it 50/50 with the plan. No episiotomy but caved into "the shot". Whew, what a day!! And the sweet little prize at the end of it made it all worth it.

2009 Taiwan. After getting my age plus years of service into the state retirement system I did everyone a favor and created a job opening for someone else. I accepted a position teaching core subjects in English to wealthy Taiwanese kids and adults. It was a stressful transition and after about a month and a half I found myself barely able to get out of bed... sick and feverish with a terrible upper respiratory infection. I called the school to tell them I needed a sub and had to go to a doctor. Culture shock... there were no subs. Sick teachers ... teach... with a face mask... and don't expect others to do their job for them. Personal issues, like doctor appointments had to take place after work was fully completed at the end of the school day. I was sick but Chairman Mao's edicts were healthy and well in Taiwan.

A neighbor had given me a business card for an English speaking doctor. I had the doorman at the apartment call a cab for me. When the cab driver came I showed him the card and off we went. The doctor was very nice, took quite a lot of time with me, diagnosed my illness and explained the medication he would be giving me. In Taiwan the pharmacy is adjacent to the doctor's office so I was sent next door to collect the 4-5 medications that came packaged and sealed in little pillows already sorted into daily dosages. Payment for the total bill for the doctor visit and medication takes place in

the pharmacy. My first experience with socialized medicine: medication and the doctor visit came to under \$30. US dollars because I was not yet on the national health plan. Once I got on the national plan the cost was \$0.00 to \$5.00 US dollars.

2012

Some medical interventions bring to life the addiction inherited from my forebears. After clipping mistletoe out of a scrub oak in New Mexico I fell out of the tree and broke my wrist. My step daughter drove me to the emergency room. An angel appeared in green scrubs with a syringe pointed in the air..."This will pinch a little bit but will help with the pain." Ahhhhhh, yes. It did. About 3 years later I fell out of bed, don't ask. It is as embarrassing as it sounds. Anyway, I broke my collar bone. Once again the angel of mercy appeared with syringe pointed in the air..."This will pinch a little bit..." Ahhhh, yes.

In 2012 my doc discovered a n enlarged parathyroid gland... that I never knew existed until, like Sarah Palin, it went rogue and unlike Sarah Palin, had to be surgically removed. I won't lie to you. When I woke up I waited and watched for my angel with the syringe. No one came. I laid there for what seemed like forever. Finally a straight backed nurse marched into my recovery cubicle and threw back the curtain. I started to tell her about my non-existent pain and she said, "You can take some tylenlol when you get home. HOME?? And she started to pack up my things! I didn't want to be too obvious and ask about the morphine shot so I didn't say anything and before I knew it, I was packed off and sent home. It was a sad day for my inner addict.

2014

The wreck.