

Is There a Doctor In The House?

An old vaudeville standing joke, however, that was a fact of life in Beecher.

If someone was ill, you could be certain that one of the three doctors servicing the citizens of Beecher would be in attendance. Dr. M.R. Miley, Dr. D.D. VanVooris, or Dr. Homer Hiatt would be there.

Before we had all the current convenient clinics, where you could be dispatched for a series of tests and X-rays, the family doctor personally called at your home. They would arrive with their small black bags containing the curealls.

Surprisingly, our family actually utilized the services of all three doctors at one time or another.

We will begin with Dr. Miley, who was a familiar sight in the early 1900's. For a physical description, I can best describe him as looking very much like the comedian Charlie Chaplin. He was a small-statured man with a Chaplin-type mustache and wavy grey hair. His hazel eyes, screened by very heavy bifocal spectacles, seemed to look right through you when you were talking to him.

"Um-um, yah-um," he would say, nodding his head.

He wore a black derby and, before his accident, walked in a very Chaplinized style. He carried a sturdy walking stick, but usually looked as if he had just awakened from a nap. His clothing was wrinkled and his black string tie was usually askew.

The family's first home was located at 524 Indiana Ave., until he moved to the large cement home located at the corner of Indiana Avenue and Catalpa Street. The very large barn at the rear of the house is where he kept his horses and buggies, and his automobile.

The doctor served on the school board for many, many years (in a future story, I will tell you of his visits to the classrooms).

It was not uncommon to see him heading west on Indiana Avenue for a house call on the west side of town. The horse would be galloping and the good doctor bent forward, clutching the reins and urging the horse on. If we saw this, Mother's observation would be that he was answering a confinement case. Just who was confined, I didn't understand, but it was obvious that it was an emergency.

Perhaps the most vivid recollection I have of the doctor was when he was treating our family. At this juncture, we resided in the middle of the block on the west side of Woodward Street. Most homes had been built without outside basement entrances. In our home, you entered the basement via stairs hidden by a trap door in a small room adjoining the kitchen. The room was used as a wash room. It had a dry sink, a bucket of rain water, and a series of hooks for hanging outdoor clothing. When the door was closed, it became a solid floor.

On this occasion, Dr. Miley was treating my mother for some illness and, after a discussion of her condition, the doctor asked to use the wash room to wash his hands before he physically examined her. She was in bed in the bedroom adjoining the dining room. She told him to go into the wash room.

Suddenly, she remembered that she had been down in to the basement earlier in the day and she had not closed the trap door. The doctor, who you recall wore heavy bifo-

cal spectacles, did not see the open doorway, and my mother sat bolt upright as she heard a series of thumps.

"My God, he's fallen down into the basement!" She climbed out of bed and peered into the wash room. No Dr. Miley. She asked him if he was hurt, and slowly he climbed up the stairs.

His derby was flattened on his head. His reply was classic: "I'm not hurt, but I might have been."

She urged him to sit down at the kitchen table and she offered him a cup of coffee. He shook his head, saying "I only drink tea."

She commented on the condition of his hat and assured him that my Dad would buy him a new one; "It's getting old anyhow."

He completed his visit and selected some pills from his battered old medicine bag, giving her instructions as to how they were to be taken. We watched him go back home, limping slightly with his cane swinging jauntily as he walked.

The doctor was always interested in any new mode of transportation and when the invention of the automobile was announced, he was one of the first to order a Metz Runabout in 1909.

There were no such firms as garages and so he ordered the 14 separate packages, each costing about \$25. Completely constructed automobiles were not available, and so the put-it-together-yourself kits were sold.

Dr. Miley read the instructions carefully and produced his car, however, he had missed one important instruction. The chain that propelled the vehicle was installed backwards and, when the doctor started the car, it would only go in reverse.

Fritz Hinze, the town constable, told him: "You can't go backing around Beecher. That's against the law. Don't see why you bought one of them newfangled things. They will never be accepted by the people."

The doctor re-read the instructions and put the chain in correctly...spinning around town at three miles per hour.

At another time, several years later, Dr. Miley decided to trim the trees along the front of his property on Indiana Avenue. I believe he was well into his 80's.

There was a particular large broken branch that he wanted to remove. He placed his ladder against the tree trunk and climbed up to the branch in question.

Now, it was his wish to cut the branch as closely to the trunk as he could. The old man straddled the offending branch and began to saw.

Later, he was to explain that he had intended to climb back onto the ladder before he had completely sawed the branch through. Unfortunately, he had sawed too far. The branch broke, sending the good doctor plummeting 15 feet to the ground.

He was taken to the hospital and suffered a badly broken hip and, due to his age, he was never able to walk without a very bad limp.

He had three daughters, Alice, Bernice and Olive. One of the girls followed in her father's footsteps and became a doctor. Another was a school teacher in a grade school.

Next week we will end our story about "A Doctor in the House".

Is There A Doctor In The House? Part II

In last week's story, we covered the Dr. Miley years and I have received at least 20 calls from people who had been delivered by Dr. Miley, which proved to me that my columns are being read.

I will not list all the callers, but the first was Byron Hinte from Joliet, who informed me that he had been delivered by Dr. Miley; and Gilbert Teske also told me that he had been delivered by Dr. Miley.

But now, we will go on with our story.

Dr. D. D. VanVoorhis had his office in the rear of the house that was recently demolished at the Shady Lawn Golf Course.

I was taken to his office because of a continuing sore throat. We had heard rumors that another doctor might be enroute to Beecher, but Mother felt that the sore throat had persisted too long, and so I was marched over to Dr. VanVoorhis' office.

The moment that you entered his office, you were aware of his all-consuming interest in prizewinning show cattle. The walls of his office were papered with drawings and framed prints of shorthorn cattle. One print that I particularly remember was a large, whitefaced Hereford drawn in the style of a Currier and Ives drawing. It was framed in a heavy gold frame.

The doctor was a very dapper man with sharp blue eyes and a white, Kentucky Colonel-style beard. He drove a very large car, although I did not know its make, but he could be seen speeding down Penfield Street. He always seemed to be in a hurry.

He examined my throat and announced that my tonsils were infected and should be removed. I shook my head. My throat was suddenly cured. I closed my mouth before the doctor had removed his fingers and promptly bit him.

Mother was embarrassed by this and she paid for the visit and marched me back home down Penfield.

The doctor had a large family and I attended school with his daughter, Joyce, who became a registered nurse. But as the years have passed, I have lost contact. His son, Morris, ran the gas station where Becker's Mobil Station is located on Dixie Highway.

Adjoining the station was a hotel, where Morris and his wife lived and they rented apartments to several school teachers who were teaching in the country schools in the area.

Morris' wife, who was ill, loved Pekinese dogs and white Spitzes. One day I saw Morris digging at the corner of the golf grounds, where they have now built a series of new homes. I went over and asked him what he was planting.

He was very serious and I thought I was intruding on something. He lifted a small wooden box that I had not seen before and said "My wife's Peke died and she wants him buried in this corner. This is our cemetery."

I stayed appropriately serious and expected him to at least say a prayer. He continued to dig until the hole was at least four feet deep. Then he carefully laid the box in the grave and closed it.

Over the years, as the older dogs died, you could see him burying them, and he planted a pine tree over the graves. When the excavators began digging, I commented to my Mother that they were digging up the graveyard.

When I watched them fell the big evergreen tree, I felt sad. I remembered all the Pekes that slept there.

We have now reached the arrival of Dr. Homer Hiatt, who arrived in Beecher still wearing his World War I uniform, with all his worldly goods tied on the back of his Model T Ford.

He set up his first office on Hodges Street. My parents met him and it was decided that he would become our family doctor.

I was six years old and I had a severe case of lobar pneumonia. He sat beside my bed through an entire day and night. He went home and told his wife, Ermal, that he would be at our home through the night, as he expected me to reach a crisis point during the night.

My parents told me of his efforts to keep me alive, and when he thought that he had lost me, he shook me so violently that a large piece of phlegm flew from my throat.

Mother said that the doctor was perspiring although he had expressly ordered that the windows be left open even though it was a very cold night in mid-winter.

He laid me down in my bed and smiled. "The crisis is past. Now we can close the windows and cover him with a blanket. He will be all right."

And I was, although my complete recovery did not occur until late spring. Writing this, I am thinking that if he had not been beside my bed, I wouldn't be writing this for you to read. After that episode, Dr. Hiatt could do no wrong in my parents' eyes.

However, a later incident almost cost me a leg. I spent a lot of time at Dad's jewelry store and a second cousin of my Mother's, Mrs. Henry Koch, lived above Emil Koch's hardware store, next door to Dad's store.

They had two little daughters, one named Evelyn and the other Dorothy (Mrs. Raymond Cougar, who resides in Beecher). Evelyn and I would amuse ourselves in Emil's tin shop, behind the hardware store. We dreamt up typical kids' games and we began racing around the inside of the tin shop. I suddenly let out a scream that was even heard in Dad's store. Emil had broken open a keg of galvanized shingle nails, and I had stepped on one. The nail stuck through the sole of my tennis shoe and Evelyn, her face pale, rushed through the store screaming, just as my Mother entered.

"What happened?" she asked.

Evelyn just shook her head and led her back to where I was sitting on the floor, trying to pull the nail out. Louisa (Mrs. Koch) said not to take it out: "Get the coaster wagon and pull him up to Dr. Hiatt's office on Penfield."

Away we went with Mrs. Koch's berating her husband for leaving the nails on the floor. Old Emil listened to her, nodding his agreement, but busy with a customer who wanted to buy a galvanized washtub.

We reached the doctor's office and I hobbled up the

steps into the office. Dr. Hiatt smiled his broad smile and leaned back in his chair. "What's up, Howie?" he asked. That was his usual greeting.

Mother pointed to the shoe.

"That's nothing to step on," he said. He pulled out the nail and immediately pulled off the tennis shoe I was wearing. He brought a basin filled with warm water, into which he poured a bottle of liquid. "Now put your foot in there," he said, after I had removed my sock. "It's going to burn, but it will kill any infection."

All the way to the doctor's office, Mother was scolding, and Evelyn had come along to watch the proceedings. Dr. Hiatt explained the danger that a shingle nail possessed, and that I could lose a foot. I was given a tetanus shot. He dressed my foot and bandaged it.

"You can't walk home on it," he said, and so I hobbled back down the stairs to the coaster wagon and Mother pulled me back to the store. It was Wednesday night and the stores were open for evening business. When Dad was informed that he would have to pull me home, the

resulting series of expletives continued until we were home.

The foot became infected and required several more visits to Dr. Hiatt. However, I respected the doctor and we had many pleasant visits, with Dr. Hiatt sitting back in his big chair, puffing on his long, pungent cigar.

Later, Dr. Hiatt took in a former schoolmate as a partner, Dr. E.H. Kupke. Their offices were at 751 Penfield Street. His practice became so large, attracting patients from as far as Blue Island and Hammond, that he eventually purchased the old Hack Hotel and converted it into his clinic.

We were saddened when Dr. Homer decided to retire, however Beecher was fortunate in that another Hiatt, namely Dr. Richard, was waiting in the wings to take over his father's practice.

And so we have covered the doctors of Beecher and yes, indeed, there was a doctor in the house when he was needed.

