

CHAPTER 10

Albuquerque in 1939

Our little hospital was nearly always bursting at the seams. A bigger building was desperately needed. Plans were underway to build a new hospital and a new staff home. A fairly large plot of land would be required to accommodate the buildings and the sewage system. There was not enough land available for sale in Dixon, so land had been purchased adjacent to the Taos highway about five miles from Dixon. It was on the east side of the highway and about a mile north of the Embudo River. The first building plans were too expensive and had been extensively revised. As soon as the new plans were approved, title to the land had been cleared, a well had been drilled, and the frozen ground had thawed, construction would begin.

We were delightfully excited about all of this and "drooled" over the plans. The staff house would have rooms for two doctors, eight nurses, a maid and a housekeeper. There would be a bathroom between the two doctors' rooms and a lavatory in each of the other bedrooms and a dormitory type bathroom for the rest of the staff. There would be a doctor's living room and a nurse's living room, each with its own fireplace. The building would be in pueblo style with a flat roof, corner fireplaces, and exposed viga (peeled logs about eight inches in diameter) ceilings in the

hall and living rooms. Across the vigas there would be peeled aspen branches laid in a herring-bone pattern.

The hospital would also be in pueblo style, "U" shaped and built around a patio. The entry had a business office window on one side and would lead into a waiting area for visitors, salesmen, and others. A short corridor to the left would give access to the business office, the laboratory, and the two doctors' offices. Each office would serve both as a consultation and an examining room. To the right of the entry way, a corridor went to the patient areas. There would be a six-bed pediatric ward, a six-bed medical-surgical ward, an eight-bed maternity ward, an eight-crib newborn nursery, and two private rooms.

There would be a separate labor room, delivery room, and operating room, each with its own scrub sink. The central area was to contain an x-ray room with an adjoining darkroom, complete with running water and the tanks necessary to develop x-ray film.

Finally, the hospital would have a large dining room and kitchen with plenty of storage space in the basement and a walk-in cooler. Of course the buildings would be modern in every way with running water, electricity, and modern plumbing.

We felt as if we had had a glimpse into paradise and could scarcely wait until it all came to pass. We had studied the plans very carefully, and knew every nook and cranny.

We awaited a visit from the architect so we could discuss with him a few minor changes we thought were necessary.

It was to be my first weekend off, and I had planned to take the bus to Albuquerque to visit my good friend, Frances Fourt. Dr. Bowen had said that if the architect came on Friday, maybe I could hitch a ride with him to Albuquerque. I was disappointed when he came on Thursday afternoon, but then, Dr. Bowen said I could take off an extra day. Fridays were not very busy. She had been going out on clinics that day, and the people were not yet used to having her in and available. She arranged for me to ride with the young architect and his mother, and to leave the hospital car in a Santa Fe garage for its routine check-up.

It was a delightful weekend. The young man was very pleasant. His mother was charming and brimming with southern hospitality. In Santa Fe, they took me around with them to visit her younger daughter, Katherine, who was teaching math in the Santa Fe High School. She was an attractive blonde who served us tea and loaned me her Community Concert Association ticket so I could hear Joseph Hoffman play in Albuquerque that evening. They invited me to have supper with them, and we stopped at a store to buy some "Biddies' Best" (actually the name imprinted on the egg carton). The other daughter, a vivacious brunette who was teaching second grade in an Albuquerque public school, went to the concert with us.

The concert was held in the Kimo movie theater. It was a very interesting building done in an Indian style art deco

design. A frieze of brightly colored red, blue, and yellow Indian shields ran around the outside. Indian motifs—rain and mountain symbols and so forth—decorated the walls and light fixtures inside. I thoroughly enjoyed Josef Hoffman, a magnificent pianist who played many familiar works and was very generous with his encores. After the concert, I got settled into the El Fidel hotel and enjoyed a soak in the bath tub and the pleasures of electric lights.

In 1939, Albuquerque had a population of about 30,000 and was centered around Central Avenue and 4th Street. Most people walked wherever they were going and knew almost everybody in town. Beyond the University of New Mexico there was a fried chicken shack at the end of the 2800 block of Central Avenue with nothing much past that. It is amazing that in 1988 the population of the metropolitan area is around 500,000. The city now stretches for miles in every direction. Where once there was nothing, there are now many homes on the west mesa overlooking the river and quite a few on the lower slopes of the Sandia Mountains to the east of the city.

In my hotel room, I studied a city map and figured out my route to the Methodist Tuberculosis Sanatorium where Fran lived. Unfortunately, in my mind I put south in place of north and east in place of west. I got around all right, but for years I was mixed up on directions in Albuquerque.

Fran was a good friend from Fairfield, Iowa, and was a member of our gang of six who held offices in every high school organization and more or less “ran the school.”

During the spring semester of her second year at the University of Iowa, she had come down with tuberculosis and had been sent to Oakdale, a tuberculosis sanatorium near Iowa City. In my Junior year of medical school, we were assigned a patient to work up—to get the medical history, do a physical examination, and the laboratory work. My very first patient was Fran. She had recently had a thoracoplasty at the University of Iowa Hospital. Antibiotics to cure TB were a long way off.

Getting the history was very easy. Fran had given it so many times that it was like playing a record. I asked the first question and she went on from there. I could do little in the way of a physical exam for she was swathed in bandages from chin to belly button. I was determined to do well with the lab work, but do you think I could stab my friend's finger hard enough to get a drop of blood? I could not! After three tries, I said, "Enough is enough!" and copied the blood count from the chart. Fran was a good sport and would have let me go on and on trying. She actually thought it was funny and teased me about it from then on.

In the fall of 1938, Fran had moved to Albuquerque where she "took the cure" at the Methodist Tuberculosis Sanatorium. There were several tuberculosis sanatoriums in Albuquerque. Hundreds of "lungers" (tuberculosis patients) flocked to New Mexico where it was believed that the dry air and warm sunshine worked a cure. Fran had said that she did not know whether or not the air and sunshine were curative, but she did know that the bright blue skies and sunny days raised the spirits so that people felt better. Some

who came to New Mexico hoping for a cure died. Many who were sent here to die recovered and lived long and useful lives. Fran was one of the latter.

In February of 1939, she was well enough to go out to dinner with me and to see some movies. I took her to La Sala Grande in my hotel. It was supposed to be the "in" place to go, but we were so early we had the entire dining room to ourselves. Fran said later that she had been relieved to have no others around. It was the first time since she had entered the sanitorium that she had eaten at a table with someone. For seven years, she had eaten in bed, alone and from a tray. The next evening, some Iowa City friends of hers took us for a drive and to the "Original Mexican Cafe" for dinner. The food was all strange to me, and I had no idea what I was eating, but I did enjoy it.

The next morning, as I was doing some shopping in a drug store, I met up with a nurse friend, Mabel Corey, from Fairfield, Iowa. Her husband, Ernest, was in the Presbyterian Hospital recovering from an appendectomy. I went with her to see him and had a tour of the hospital. There I met Miss Clara Nebel, the Supervisor of Nursing Services, and Mrs. Marion K. Van Devanter, the Executive Secretary of the hospital and sanitorium. They both knew Dr. Bowen and were very much interested in our work at Dixon.

Mabel also took me to see the University of New Mexico campus. All of the buildings were in pueblo style which made it very unique. I was especially interested in the library building. The ceiling in each of the big reading rooms was

copied from the ceiling of a mission church. One room had round vigas and another had square vigas. They were carved and decorated in different ways. The light fixtures and sconces were Mexican pierced tin work. The woodwork was all in a light beige and looked as soft as suede.

Sunday morning, I checked out of the hotel and went to church. The architect's mother saw me and invited me to sit with her and to go home with her to dinner. She introduced me to many people. It was very good to be hearing a service in my native tongue. After dinner, my new friends decided they needed to return to Santa Fe to take some food to the daughter who lived there. They took me out to say good-bye to Fran before we started back. We ran into a snowstorm as we neared Santa Fe, and they thought I should not start out for Dixon but I did and had no trouble.

When I got back home, I found that the nurses had decorated my room with pictures cut from magazines and arranged with captions to describe a very romantic weekend culminating in a wedding. They kept saying that they had heard "the click" when the architect and I were introduced. This was all news to me, but they did accurately predict the future. The architect was Richard P. Milner, and we were married September 12, 1941.