

CHAPTER 21

Birth in the Waiting Room

Miss Ludlow was reveling in the spacious business office and enjoying the new duplicator machine in our sparkling, modern hospital. She was still dotting all the "i"'s and crossing all the "t"'s. At one of our mountain clinics, Dr. Bowen found that one of the maternity patients had high blood pressure. She brought her down to the hospital, and because the maternity ward was full, the patient was put to bed in the medical/surgical ward. The woman went into labor and delivered twins—the first set in the new hospital. I was conducting the delivery and one of the nurses skipped through the hospital telling everyone, "Dr. Voorhies is delivering twins." Miss Ludlow immediately came to the door of the delivery room. I can see her yet, standing there wringing her hands and shrieking, "But she *can't* have twins. She's a medical patient." It just was not proper for patients in the medical/surgical ward to have babies.

When I think of Miss Ludlow, I can also see her at the door of my room at the old place, wringing her hands and wailing that her lighted flashlight had fallen through the second hole of the privy. "What shall I do? What shall I do?" The only practical suggestion I could make was to let it burn. The batteries were new and it glowed for several nights.

Late one afternoon, Mr. and Mrs. Lopez came to the hospital. Dr. Bowen and I had already left the hospital and gone to our house. The man approached the business office window and said to Miss Ludlow:

“My wife. He wants to see the doctor.”

“What is your wife’s name?” asked Miss Ludlow.

He answered politely and said again, “My wife. He wants to see the doctor.”

“When is her birthday?” was the next question.

His wife had sat down in a chair facing the business office window. Once again he answered politely and repeated,

“My wife. He wants to see the doctor.”

Miss Ludlow continued with her questions—his name, his birthday, where they lived, and so forth. He answered each question politely and each time again repeated, “My wife. He wants to see the doctor.”

Suddenly, the wife made a big grunt and that sound was quickly followed by the lusty cry of a newborn baby, born right in front of the business office window. Miss Ludlow yelled for help. Years later, I was telling one of my daughters about this incident and she said, “Well, Mother, did she get the information?”

Even in the new place, we were not free of trials and tribulations. One day our pump went out. Can you imagine running a hospital without water? We carried buckets of water for drinking and cooking from a well. No baths were given, and the well water was used for flushing toilets only when necessary. We used paper plates, cups, and so forth. Mr. Donaldson sent up a repairman from Santa Fe. He took the pump away and promised to have it repaired and returned the next day. He made good on his promise. Thank goodness!

One winter day when I returned from a mountain clinic, already quite tired, I was informed that there was no heat. There was some problem with the furnace. With Mr. Archuleta, our janitor/handy man, I went down to the basement to check things out. The automatic stoker was stalled. Fortunately, we had the manual that came with the furnace. We turned off the current that went to the stoker, and I had Mr. Archuleta shovel coal into the furnace. Then he had to get the coal out of the stoker. I sat on the edge of the furnace pit, read the directions, and instructed him. He *spoke* English quite well, but reading a technical manual was beyond him. We found the broken part. The next day we phoned the furnace dealer in Albuquerque. He put a replacement part on the morning bus, and we received it that afternoon and soon had it in place. In the meantime, Mr. Archuleta had to fire the furnace by hand, day and night.

Earlier in this account, I mentioned that the Spanish people who had moved up into the mountains years before

had maintained their old customs and continued to use hand farming methods. I watched them harvesting the grain with scythes and sickles. Late one August, I had stopped at the weavers in Chimayo.

One of the clerks said, "There goes our 'threshing machine'."

I looked where he pointed, but all I saw was goats.

"That's it," he said.

A little way out of Chimayo I saw their "threshing machine" in action. The threshing floor was a big circle of hardened adobe. They placed several layers of sheaves on it. Then they drove the herd of goats round and round over the sheaves. The sharp hooves popped out the grain. They removed the stalks from the threshing floor. The women gathered up the grain and chaff into big flat baskets. They winnowed it by tossing it up into the air, the wind blew the chaff away, and they caught the grain in the baskets. I knew I was viewing a process that was hundreds, and probably thousands, of years old.

I came to love the Spanish people. They were kind and gracious and extended warm hospitality. They were tolerant of errors and too polite to correct us. One time I tried to use my Spanish to direct a patient to use two drops in each eye three times a day. I got my words confused and actually told her to use "two cats in each eye three times a day."