

MY TONSILLECTOMY

When I was three, I seemed to be constantly ill with sore throats. I also was sick to my stomach quite a bit, so my mother took me to our family practitioner, Dr. Bagley. Dr. Bagley was the brother of my mother's Aunt Margaret Piper (Peggy & Jim Piper's uncle). He was from the old school, where he would pat my mother's hand and tell her not to worry about anything. Any sickness in childhood could be cured by a tonsillectomy! So I was scheduled to have my tonsils out, and my mother had the job of mentally preparing me for the hospital.

She borrowed a record from our pastor's wife, something like "Tommy Gets His Tonsils Out," set to happy music. The record made a big deal about having ice cream after surgery. I really liked ice cream, so I thought this tonsillectomy might be fun. I also remember that someone (my little sister?) sat on the record and broke it, so my mother had the unenviable task of apologizing for the mishap, and also discovering that the record could no longer be purchased for us to replace.

I was taken to Mt. Carmel Hospital the day before surgery, with my small suitcase containing my clothes and toys. My mother didn't bring my pajamas because she thought I would be wearing a hospital gown, and I was angry with her when I discovered the other kids in the room were wearing their own pajamas. I had to wear a little hospital gown, and a pair of hospital underwear that reminded me of training pants.

My parents brought me into my room, and my temperature and blood pressure were checked by a nurse. There were two other children in the room, also waiting for tonsillectomies. I sat on the bed, playing with my doll, Nancy, and coloring in my new coloring books purchased especially for the hospital. My parents said goodbye, and I was alone. I wasn't afraid, but I was annoyed when the nurse came in and took away my toys and books and put them in a cabinet. I sat there, bored, seemingly for hours, and then became interested in some buttons on the wall. I pressed one, and it lit up. Uneasy, I tried to get the light to go off, but nothing I did helped. Eventually, a large black woman came in and asked why I pressed the button and what did I want. I was so scared that I just said I wanted to brush my teeth (I don't know why I said that; I wasn't really thinking about brushing my teeth. What I really wanted to do was play with my toys). She said I could brush my teeth later. So I was very bored the rest of the night.

The next morning, I was wheeled into surgery. Dr. Bagley was in the operating room and several other people were standing around, looking down at me. I was on the table, lying on my back, looking up into the bright operating room lights. I told my mother later that someone put drops in my eyes, because I felt like I was looking through tears. The lights danced around with the prismatic colors of the rainbow. It reminded me of looking through a kaleidoscope.

Someone asked me if I knew how to count up to ten. Being a precocious child, I was insulted and said, "of course I could." They told me they would put a mask on my face, like the Lone Ranger, and that I should count to ten. That was the last I remembered of the surgery.

It's funny that I don't remember any pain, or really much about my two-day recovery period in the hospital. I do remember that instead of the ice cream I was promised prior to surgery, I got jello and Cream of Wheat. I hated Cream of Wheat. On the morning my mother came to take me home, the nurse had not yet been in to see me, and I was restrained in my bed with a little strait jacket. Apparently, I had determined I was abandoned, and was listless and untalkative (unusual for me). It took most of a day for me to trust my mother again, and speak to her. But it wasn't long before I was my usual busy self; the tonsillectomy had cured me of the constant sore throat and vomiting. My mother, for one, was grateful.