

# Dad's scary hospital experience

BY EVELYN BYRNE WILLIAMS WITH JANEEN SATHRE

When I was about eight years old my dad was in bed for several days with a bad cold or the flu. Our family physician, Doctor Heckman, no longer made house calls as he had when my older brother and two sisters were born in 1916, 1918, and 1920. He would stay overnight and perhaps enjoy his favorite pastime of fishing the Squaw Creek or Applegate River before returning home the next day.

This time Mother had to take Dad to Medford, where Doctor Heckman promptly sent him to Sacred Heart Hospital. Poor Mother returned home late that afternoon, very worried, and said for me to hurry and feed our chickens and gather eggs while she milked the cow. My brother and sister were not there to help—they were living with my Aunt Clara in lower Applegate so they could ride the school bus to Jacksonville High School.

After our chores, Mother and I crossed the Applegate River on a footbridge and walked the quarter-mile upriver to the McKee (my maternal grandparents) home, where we could make a phone call to find out about Dad. It turned out he had a serious ear infection requiring mastoid

surgery. I was so frightened! I thought any surgery in those days could be fatal and had heard so many stories I thought my dad might die.

**Mother assured me that Dad would be all right**, but told me that she and Grandma were taking Grandpa's car to the hospital and might not return until the next morning, so I would have to stay with Grandpa. I liked Grandpa, but I was very upset to be left behind.

The next day Mother said I could go with her to see Dad. It was a cold day so we had to bundle up, especially since our old car was "open air" with no top. It had only a front seat with a wooden bed built on the back for hauling things like firewood and sacks of chicken feed.

**I thought we should have taken Grandpa's car**, a Durant sedan that Uncle Ernest (mother's oldest brother), a car salesman, had helped get for Grandpa. I first rode in it after my uncle moved his family to Klamath Falls and Grandma wanted to visit them, so Mother drove Grandma, my sister Gladys, and me to my uncle's for an overnight stay. I wanted another ride in that car and kept begging

Mother to borrow it, but she refused.

**So I pouted for most of the drive** to Medford in our old car. When Mother had to stop at a stop sign, she found out that our car brakes were barely working. My pouting then turned into real fright. Mother drove in low gear all the way up the hill to the hospital. I wonder what was going through her mind about all the debt—the doctor, the hospital (no insurance in those days), and an old car in need of repair.

**At the hospital we entered a large room**, called a ward, filled with male patients. Dad was propped up in bed in the middle of the room and very glad to see us. A nurse came in and angrily told my dad that he was not to move his bed. She ignored Mother and me, keeping up her tirade at Dad as she shoved the bed back against the wall.

When the nurse left, Mother asked Dad what in the world was going on. He explained that he was very cold, so had moved his bed away from the cold brick wall and a window. My dad was of a gentle nature and avoided trouble. He



*Photo, above: John Byrne and cousin Patrick Folley making a living.*

*Photo, right: Pearl and John Byrne aka Mother and Dad.*



had probably never been "chewed" out so much. I could not believe seeing my mother so calm about the incident and Dad, still in some pain, beginning to see some humor in it. Dad was still cold, though, so mother found a kindly nurse to help get Dad get warmed up. It took a long time before Dad thawed out and became more comfortable. When he got drowsy, we kissed him good-bye and quietly left.

Mother went slowly down the hill through Medford, always in low gear. I kept telling her she should have taken Grandpa's car.

Evelyn Byrne Williams  
with Janeen Sathre  
541-899-1443