

## CHAPTER 14

### Man With A Rifle

July 1939 came. The five months I had agreed to stay in Dixon were up. My application for a residency in Obstetrics/Gynecology at Woman's Hospital in New York was rejected. "Try again in January," they wrote. Dr. Bowen was sure the Mission Board would be glad to have me stay, and she certainly would be. So I stayed on at Dixon.

I decided I should register so I could vote in the fall elections. I went to an official in Espanola to have my application notarized. When he saw I was registering as a Republican, he said, "I'd advise you to send this by registered mail with return receipt. Otherwise, up in Tierra Amarilla, when they see you are registering as a Republican they'll just drop it into the wastebasket." Tierra Amarilla was the Rio Arriba county seat. Fortunately, Dr. Bowen saw the envelope I had addressed before it was mailed. I had spelled phonetically "Terra Maria."

Come election day, I was properly registered and allowed to vote. The election was held in the public school house where each person sat at a desk to fill out the ballot. People roamed up and down the aisles looking over shoulders at the ballots. Much to their annoyance, I kept folding mine so they could not see how I voted. It was said that in Rio Arriba county if the party man was not winning, they would say,

“How many votes does he need?” and they’d go out and get them.

There were no entertainment or recreational facilities in Dixon, i.e., no movie house, no bowling alley, no skating rink, no tennis courts, no golf courses. We had to make our own fun and leisure-time activities. Since my days in medical school I had taken Wednesday afternoon off, and I continued this practice at Dixon. During the fall, I would explore the canyons and barren foothills to the east of our house. One autumn day I looked down from the top of a hill into a beautiful canyon and saw a big patch of verdant green. I was curious and wanted to investigate, but it was growing late. To begin a descent into the canyon from where I was would have been difficult with treacherous footing and would have taken me until past sunset. I spent the next several free Wednesday afternoons exploring canyons that led off from the arroyo, about one half mile east of our house, one canyon for each Wednesday’s hike, but I saw nothing but gray, sandy canyon walls.

About mid-December, as I was about to enter my fifth canyon, I met a man who was the husband of a recent obstetrical patient. He was carrying a rifle and axe. We spoke. He asked if I was looking for a Christmas tree.

“No, just hiking,” I said. I assumed that he was hunting. We each went on our way. He headed back toward the arroyo. I kept walking up the canyon. Something made me look up, and I saw him walking along the rim of the canyon to my left. At its head, he leaped across a break in the

canyon wall. Then I lost sight of him. I came over a slight rise in the canyon floor and there, still quite a ways off, was the big patch of green.

I was too far away to discern what was growing there. It seemed like a lot of trees, and I assumed the patch must be watered by a spring. I looked up again and found the man's rifle aimed right at me. I shouted and waved and turned to retrace my steps. He came scrambling down and joined me.

I said, "Why were you aiming your rifle at me?"

He said, "I thought you were a bear."

Well, I was wearing a brown fur coat, but I had a brightly colored head scarf.

We walked back toward the arroyo with the rifle across his shoulders still pointing at me. I decided it would be healthier for me if I showed interest in a Christmas tree. He cut a small piñon tree for me and carried it as far as the road. The rifle was aimed at me all the way. I asked him to point it in another direction, but he said it was better this way. Now, in retrospect, I suppose the green patch was marijuana and he was the guard. Goodness knows I wouldn't have known marijuana from any other green thing, but he had no way of knowing that.

After that incident, I gave up exploring canyons but still roamed around the hills. One afternoon when one of the nurses, Nellie Wyncoop, was with me, we came to a little

stream. The water was clear and there was a nice sandy bottom. It was just right for wading. We took off our shoes and stockings and Nellie stepped in. She had taken a few steps when suddenly she was in quicksand! I was still on solid ground and just barely able to reach her, but I did manage to pull her out. We were both frightened, and she said that the hymn that goes "from sinking sand, he rescued me" had taken on new meaning for her.

Summer came and Wednesday afternoon recreation changed to fishing, swimming, and horseback riding. During the summer of 1939 we had several new young nurses who came for the experience of working in a small mission hospital. They also filled in for our vacationing regular staff. We also had a nurse, Matilda Smith, who was going to Guatemala as a missionary and another, Lucy Bestwick, who was on furlough from the Guatemalan mission field at Quezaltenango. Both of these nurses felt a need to know more about obstetrics. They were in the right place to see a lot of patients! I undertook to teach them how to do simple laboratory procedures; how to recognize obstetrical emergencies and what to do about them; and, of course, how to manage a normal uncomplicated labor and delivery. They said it helped. After they left we had a few letters from them but eventually lost touch.

That same summer, Gladys Plekenpol left the hospital in Dixon to become the director of the House of Neighborly Service on Lawrence Street in Denver, a position she admirably filled for many years. "Plek" had done many, many things at the hospital, had always pitched in and

helped where help was needed, and we really missed her. I especially missed her because she had always stood ready to help me with my wood burning stove. As a result of her absence, one of her many jobs had fallen to me. It was to open the numerous boxes the hospital received from missionary societies and individuals and to write the thank-you notes. It was easy to thank those who sent beautiful layettes, wonderful dolls, and toys. It was also easy to thank the young ladies of a New York City missionary society who sent lovely lingerie and smart dresses (used but nice). But I did have trouble thanking the lady who sent a box of rags and another who sent a big box of tea bags with a note "used once."