

CHAPTER 7

Never a Dull Moment

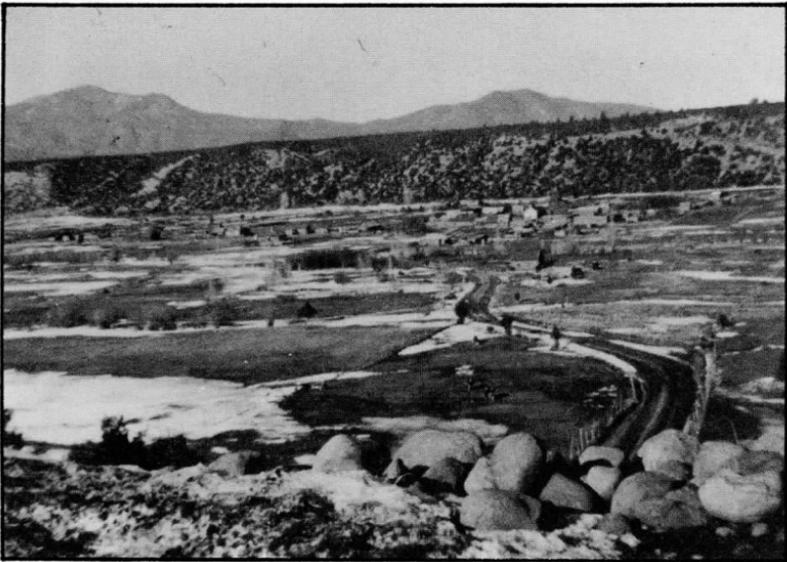
About a week after I arrived in Dixon, I was sent out on my first clinic. It was at Llano, a Spanish plaza (village) about twenty miles away. Miss Maisch went along to do the driving and help with the patients. (I did not yet have a New Mexico driver's license. I had been to Espanola to get one but the only person who could issue it was sick in bed at home.) The day was bright, sunny, and cold, with snow on the ground. Our road went through Dixon, and then east through a canyon and along the Embudo River. After a few miles, we left the river and drove to the far side of the canyon. There, via a road with six sharp hairpin curves, we



Road up Penasco hill, one of six hairpin curves

zigzagged up the side of the mountain. On the mesa, the road went up and down and up and down and around through snow-covered forest and over barren stone until we came to Penasco on the edge of a broad valley. There we left the main road and took a smaller road. After about two miles, we crossed the valley and climbed up to another mesa. From there it was about another two miles to the village.

Llano was a small plaza. Most of the families lived on outlying small farms. The church and several houses were strung out along a ridge. More houses lined the valley below. All of the houses were adobe with corrugated metal pitched roofs. There was too much snow in this high area to make flat roofs practical. Some of the outbuildings were made of gray weathered logs with wooden roofs.



Llano Valley

When Dr. Bowen first started holding clinics in Llano, she had held them in the church. However, the building could not be heated, so she told the people she would have to stop coming unless a better place could be found. Mrs. Gonzales offered the use of her house. The patients could wait in her kitchen and the clinic could be held in one of the bedrooms. We had a cot for an examining table, a bench for our clinic box, and a few chairs. Mrs. Gonzales had a fire going in the fireplace, and it certainly was welcome on that very cold day. Mr. Oteniel Lopez and one of the women patients took turns interpreting for us. No one else spoke English.

Mr. Lopez lived in Chamisal, not very far away by a trail over the mountain, but a good many miles off around by the road. He had attended Menaul School in Albuquerque and was fluent in English. He had interpreted for Dr. Bowen for so long that he knew what came after the first question and would go ahead and ask the whole sequence, and then give the answers.

For instance, Dr. Bowen would ask, "Are you having any trouble to pass your urine?"

He would then proceed, "Do you have any pain or burning?"

"Do you have to get up at night?"

"How many times?"

"How often do you go in the daytime?"



Mr. Oteniel Lopez

“Has there been any blood?”

“Please, get me a urine sample.”

We saw twenty-one patients that day with the usual run of winter illnesses—sore throats, chest colds, bladder infections, and so forth.

Mr. Lopez was really a great help. He usually would be at Llano waiting for us. As soon as we arrived, he would ring the church bell to announce us. One time much later that year, we got there before he did, and I thought I would go

ahead and get things started. I rang the church bell just as I had heard him do—so I thought. Suddenly it seemed that the whole village was rushing to the clinic. As I was thinking, “We’re going to have a busy day!” Mr. Lopez came running furiously and breathlessly, and hastily begged me to stop my ringing. I had tolled the bell which signified a death, and all these villagers were *not* coming to the clinic but to find out who had died.

We saw all kinds of cases at the clinic, everything from broken bones to ingrown toenails. One time, the patient was a goat belonging to Rev. Julian Duran in Chamisal. I was asked to examine her and determine whether or not she was pregnant. I could feel no movements, nor could I hear a kid’s heartbeat. She was my first goat patient, and I really did not know where to put my stethoscope. She looked pregnant. I concluded that she was, but I could not be absolutely certain. Eventually she did have her kid.

At each clinic, after we had seen and cared for all of the people who could come to us, we made home visits to see those who were too ill to get out of bed. There were no such requests on my first trip to Llano but the next winter, I was asked to make one. In reply to my questions, I was told that the house was more than a mile away, and that I could not possibly drive there in our car. I was also told that the road was steep and muddy. Half-jokingly, I said I would go if they could get me a horse. After a hurried consultation, a boy was sent off for a horse. When he returned with the animal there was nothing for me to do except go ahead and ride. They brought a kitchen chair for my mounting block,

and so, clad in a dress, fur coat, lisle stockings, galoshes, and a wool head scarf, I climbed up onto the blanket saddle and the boy and I set off with the boy leading the horse and carrying my doctor's bag. The house turned out to be in the valley just below Mrs. Gonzales' house and at no distance at all. I could easily have walked. True, the path was steep and muddy, but I was embarrassed to have insisted on a horse. The person who had come to request the home visit could have pointed out the house and path quite easily. However, I had asked for a horse, and the people, being anxious to please, had provided one.

The patient, Mr. Antonio Mondragon, was about 45 years old and of average height and weight. He was suffering from sciatica. Mr. Mondragon was obviously a very important man in the village. He was propped up in a big bird's-eye maple bed in the front room of the house. He was surrounded by papers, and people were running in and out, asking him questions, and taking his orders. What he wanted from me was to certify his medical need and fill in the forms necessary to get him admitted to the Veteran's Hospital in Albuquerque. He had been admitted there on at least one previous occasion. I began asking questions. He spoke no English. I spoke almost no Spanish. Finally, he simply handed me a sheaf of papers to read through, and I was able to fill in the forms. Among the papers was his military discharge paper. During World War I, he had been in the service for six weeks and was discharged because of "mental incompetence." I feel certain he had no idea what that paper said. He was certainly no dolt. His apparent "mental incompetence" was his inability to understand or speak English.

There were no restaurants in these little villages, so we always carried a lunch with us. After we had seen all of the patients, we would drive for awhile, find a place to park, and eat. In the winter, this would be somewhere along the road, and we ate in the car. During the other seasons, from Llano we could drive into the National Forest into a canyon called Santa Barbara for our picnic. It was one of the most beautiful spots I have ever visited. The narrow road was not much higher than the stream bed and followed along the stream bank. There were tall pines, scrubby oak, and many wild flowers. Higher up on the mountain sides were groves of aspen. We loved going there.

My first clinic happened to be on Valentine's Day and we were pleased to get home in plenty of time for our party. We always held parties in the dining room so the nurses on night duty could get in on some of the fun. We had invited the mission teachers and they came. Decorations and refreshments had been made and games had been planned. We were divided into pairs, and each pair had to put together a valentine which had been cut up like a jigsaw puzzle. There was a time limit, and my partner and I won.

The highlight of the evening was the shows we had to put on. We were divided into two groups. My group pantomimed "Little Nell" while I recited the words in a singsong voice. I got a glimpse of Dr. Bowen's sense of humor and fun. Her group did a belly dance and she wore a white turban made from a towel with a bottle brush for a feather and a sheet for a shawl. They chanted a belly dance tune. Hilarious!

For the next and last bit of entertainment, we were given an eight page booklet in the shape of a heart. We were each provided with magazines, paste, and scissors. We were asked to write and illustrate the life story of a certain guest. Some of the books were quite clever. We finished the evening with ice cream and a white sheet cake, decorated with hearts cut out of red jello.

There were no public entertainment facilities in Dixon. We had to make our own fun, and we celebrated every possible occasion with a party. For birthdays, Wally (Miss Cole) cooked up an extra special meal. The birthday girl would receive dozens of packages. There would be one very lovely gift from everybody which was meant to be kept. The other packages were jokes—toys, games, clothes, and crazy things we had picked out from the “missionary barrels” sent to us. They all had to be returned to the storeroom.

Fairly often we would load up the car and drive the twenty-five miles to Espanola to go to a movie. These trips were usually combined with some hospital errands. When they weren't, we chipped in to pay for the gas. The movie house was in an old store building. It was heated by two stoves, one on the main floor, and one on the stage. Periodically during the movie, more fuel would be added. The walls of the movie house and the light shades were decorated with Indian designs. Plain seats cost 30 cents and cushioned ones cost 35 cents. None of us had much money so we always took the plain seats. I never knew how much any of the others were paid. My salary was \$80 per month plus room and board.

On Sundays, at noon, Miss Cole would give each of us a sack lunch for our supper. We could eat this wherever we pleased, but most of us gathered in the sitting room at our house. We had a battery powered radio and we would listen to the "Telephone Hour" and "Charley McCarthy." The "Telephone Hour," sponsored by AT&T, was a musical program. An excellent orchestra, conducted by Donald Voorhees (a very distant relative of mine) played classical, semi-classical, and popular music. Sometimes there would be guest artists like Jeannette McDonald, soprano, and Nelson Eddy, tenor. They were very popular movie stars.

Charley McCarthy was ventriloquist Edgar Bergen's dummy. Charley always appeared in a tuxedo with a monocle. He was very outspoken and said outrageous things. The act was extremely popular and Charley, who completely overshadowed Edgar Bergen, was widely quoted. We really missed that radio when the battery had to be taken to town to be recharged. Sometimes, after our radio programs were over, we would play games like Chinese Checkers by the pale light from the kerosene lamp.