

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, November 21, 2016

Before Antibiotics and the Salk Vaccine: I was told I had Scarlet Fever when I was three years old, but I don't remember that one. However, at the end of March 1932, as we left Southern Pines (NC) to come home after our three-month stay, I had a case of whooping cough with a sore throat, low fever, but not much more. More serious, on December 18, 1932, the last day of school in the fourth grade before our holiday vacation, I came home with a very high fever that soon developed into pneumonia. My mother, a registered nurse in World War I, and her lifelong friend Mary Glenn, a practicing nurse in Baltimore who was visiting, put me to bed, and there I stayed for nearly a month! Before the advent of antibiotics, pneumonia was always a dreaded disease.

Dr. D. Duer Reynolds of Kennett Square came to see me daily, but I got progressively worse for a week. Ipecac, a colorless, sweet-tasting liquid was supposed to induce vomiting, so that was tried. Mustard plasters were applied to my chest; I remember how they burned. I was too weak to get out of bed. On Christmas morning, my father carried me to my playroom, where he had set up the Lionel trains and helped my mother decorate a Christmas tree. We stayed just long enough for me to have a quick look, and then it was back to bed. Dr. Stigler, an osteopath from Wilmington, came on Christmas afternoon to give me a treatment; they had tried everything else. Immediately after the treatment, I was even worse, but better times were around the corner.

My father sat in a chair next to my bed during the night and tried to doze. He said later that about 3 a.m. he could tell there was a change in my breathing; I was taking deeper and longer breaths. The lung infection was starting to recede, and the fever soon broke. By New Year's Day, I was much improved, and about a week after that I tried to walk. At first I couldn't, but strength soon returned. I got back to school about February 1, attending initially for only one-half day. About three weeks later I contracted Chicken Pox, as did half the children in my class.

My Aunt Helen Shallcross, wanting to help take care of me when I had pneumonia, came the last week in December, and within a couple of days, she came down with the dreaded disease. We isolated her in a 3rd-floor bedroom and hired a young nurse named Margaret Moore Keene to care for her. Aunt Helen's brother, my Uncle Ned Shallcross, married Margaret during World War II. The marriage didn't last, but they remained close friends for the remainder of their lives. Aunt Helen was sick at Auburn Heights for a month, but she finally recovered and went home to Middletown on January 30, 1933.

Also in 1932, Sara D. Rodney, five years older than I, was one of my playmates at Rehoboth during the summer. There were at least ten of us, within six years of each other in age, who had fun playing together. They formed the nucleus of my father's picture shows, described in the Weekly News of 9/15/08. Sara D. (as she was known) came down with infantile paralysis (polio). It was never known what caused it, but Dr. Baer (or Bare) from Baltimore was called to look at her. He was a specialist in treating polio and had a summer cottage on Columbia Avenue in Rehoboth. The first thing he did was to quarantine all the kids within two blocks of the Rodney cottage. I think we could go out of the house into our own yard, but not beyond. I was eight years old, and this seemed a harsh and endless penalty. Emily Seaman and I had no siblings; it hit us the hardest. I remember quarantines at Auburn Heights as well, but they never seemed to apply to adults. Sara D. recovered without paralysis, was graduated from Wilmington Friends School in 1937, and later married Attorney Ned Cooch. The Salk vaccine, which practically eliminated the threat of paralysis from polio, was not available until 1955. This soon ended the annual campaign for the March of Dimes, which was started each year on January 30, Franklin D. Roosevelt's birthday. Roosevelt was completely paralyzed from the waist down from 1921 until his death in 1945.

Boys and girls in my age group had to wear short pants or skirts with bare knees most of the year. Skinned knees on gravel playgrounds occurred on a regular basis. Mercurochrome was a favorite remedy. My mother never liked it, as she said it permitted fast healing when the wound was not properly disinfected. She liked a disinfectant called S.T.37, a colorless liquid with no odor, then covered the area with Obtundia or the better-

known Unguentine. The W. D. Caulk Company of Milford, Delaware, manufactured a pleasant salve called Mercerox. For poison ivy, a good case of which I had at least once each summer, Phenol-Sodique (terrible-smelling stuff that would stain clothing) and Calamine Lotion (to reduce itching) were the prescribed remedies. Rubbing alcohol and Witch Hazel were comforting. Water was believed to spread poison ivy, so taking a bath was out.

In mid-October 1945, I cut a hunk out of my forefinger opening a can of C rations on Okinawa. I went to our Flight's medic, a fellow named Philatore, to get it repaired. He said he just received a new powder that he hadn't used before and suggested we pour it on the wound. This he did and then put the "hunk" back in place and wrapped it up. It healed in no time. The powder was called Penicillin. What a difference in our lives antibiotics have made!