

Reflections

1950 - 1954

They were interesting, enjoyable, invaluable, and memorable years of my life. Whether they are called the good old days or stepping stones to what medicine is today, I learned a lot working for Dr. Edgar J. Willke during those years.

There was no formal job description outlining my duties and responsibilities. I functioned as receptionist, nurse, and bookkeeper. On rare occasions I filled in as groundskeeper, handyman, chauffeur, or assistant in whatever situation we found ourselves in. It added a touch of spice and variety to the job.

During the first weeks of my employment, Julie Albers continued working for Doc. She was a pleasant, reserved, knowledgeable individual who did a great job. I learned a lot from Julie and I tried to continue the job as she had done it. Being a young and new nurse who thought she knew it all, I had to interject some of my own thoughts and ideas here and there. Doc was always open-minded and willing to listen which made me feel good. Whether or not I really contributed anything worthwhile is not the point. I felt like I was part of the professional team during those years.

Dr. Willke was always a professional. I'm sure his patients saw him as such. In his general practice he

functioned as internist, surgeon, gynecologist, mental health counselor, and emergency physician. Injuries and illnesses which were not within the realm of his capabilities were referred to the proper specialists. Besides being a very knowledgeable and capable physician, he was not just my employer; he was a coworker and friend, an advisor and surrogate father.

Doc shared his medical knowledge and taught me a great deal during the four years that I worked for him. He showed me how to identify rashes and skin eruptions associated with communicable diseases and infections. He taught me first aid and suturing techniques. He pointed out signs and symptoms and diagnostic procedures as he encountered patients requiring treatment. When he left for professional trips or vacations, he allowed me to see his routine patients, refill prescriptions, assess patients and treat those with problems that I felt capable and confident in treating. I always announced to a waiting room full of people that the doctor was on vacation but I was there to help those who cared to stay. Amazingly very few would leave the room. I felt this indicated the confidence the patients felt in what their doctor had taught his nurse.

During one of Dr. Willke's vacation trips our parish priest accidentally cut his hand. Although he was aware that Doc was gone, he came to the office and asked me to suture the wound. When all attempts to take him to the

hospital or another physician failed, I checked for severed tendons, cleaned and anesthetized the area, and sutured the laceration. Thank goodness it healed nicely. This was another example of how well I'd been taught by my boss, the Doctor.

Before Doc left for vacations he would take me with him on any home visits he was making at the time. One of the routine house calls of his has remained a vivid memory of mine. The patient was an elderly individual with severe leg ulcers. The first time I helped him remove the dressing, the wound was full of maggots. I had been told in nursing school that maggots were used to clean out wounds in the early days of medical practice. Although they were not intentionally used for that purpose in this case, I could see credence to that theory. The wound was nice and clean. However we removed all the creatures and applied sterile medicated dressings as our mode of treatment. It required several dressing changes to rid the wound of the hungry varmints. I don't remember any antibiotic therapy in conjunction with the vitamin ointment dressings but the wound healed beautifully in time. After thirty or more years the sight of the maggots is still quite visible in my memory.

Chemical abuse was not as prevalent during those years as it has been during the last decade or so. However on one occasion someone did break into the office to steal money and narcotics. Shortly thereafter Doc left for a short trip. During that time I carried the office cash

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home with me at night for safekeeping. One evening during office hours I spotted a stranger sitting outside in a car. Instead of waiting to leave the office alone after everyone else had gone that night, I asked the last patient to wait for me. The stranger was gone when we left the building but I carried the cash home in my shoes that night.

One day a woman came to the office to get her ears pierced. She said she had worried and fretted about doing it for over a month. In our conversation later we discussed the lady's fear and apprehension. I said "I guess I'll have to have that done someday if I ever want to wear ear rings because my lobes are too small to wear the others." About a week or so later we had one of those rare slow days. After Doc had seen the last patient and sent him on his way, I heard him messing around in the treatment room which I had already straightened up. A few minutes later he called me in. "I'm going to do your ears now," he said. And he did! I never really had a chance to decide if I wanted pierced ears but I was very happy about it after it was done.

I remember a sad encounter to which Doc reacted with professionalism and humanistic feelings. A mother appeared at the back door carrying a small child who had suffered severe burns. Doc dropped everything and saw the child immediately. He applied first aid treatment to the burns, wrapped the child with a sheet, and drove mother and child to the hospital. I was left to carry on alone that day but no one minded. The child survived.

I never had the opportunity to learn to drive until I returned home upon completion of nurse's training. The ink on my driver's license was barely dry when I went to work for Doc. Marilyn was a student at Miami University at the time. My first long drive was a trip to Oxford with Doc's car to pick up Marilyn on a Saturday morning. I'm sure Doc didn't realize it then but his confidence in my driving ability made me feel great.

Early one spring day while I was mowing the grass around the office, I found verbenas growing wild in the yard. I decided to transplant some of them into the flower beds between the shrubs. They thrived and blossomed beautifully. I'll never forget the compliments we received on the flowers that year.

Some of my happiest memories are associated with Doc's function as "the stork". Those pregnant women would come into the office beaming, "I think I'm pregnant." During the final months Doc would check the fetal heart tones and then he'd let me listen. It was like sharing the happy anticipation with the mother. I also started a prediction service which was probably close to 50% accurate. I knew I could never predict a boy if the parents already had several girls or vice versa. I knew no one would be unhappy if I proved wrong in such instances.

Although expectant motherhood brought great joy and happiness on most occasions, it was one area of my position which demanded the strictest confidentiality. Never did any such announcement come from my lips. I remember

the expression of disbelief on the faces of several close relatives and friends when they realized my mother had not been made aware of their forthcoming blessed events. Perhaps I carried it a little too far when I failed to tell Mom that Doc had delivered twin boys for a neighbor on Father's Day.

Away from the job our association continued. Although Doc's profession demanded much of his time, he found time to give to others. He coached the "Gint", the girls' softball team for several years. He really got into the games. His excitement and enthusiasm, along with disappointments, were as great as any member of the team. He may not have been as demonstrative as some, but his heart and feelings were there. We all appreciated his involvement very much.

Doc and his family took my family on as part of their own in a sense. We were invited to participate in some of the family functions. I remember a back yard picnic and visits to their beautiful home. They took my family and me to see our first hockey game at Hobart Arena in Troy.

The sad situation we encountered following one pleasant event will never be forgotten. We had spent an enjoyable Sat. afternoon watching a football game at Culver Academy where Bill was a student and a member of the football team. On the way home Doc stopped at the hospital to see his patients while we waited in the car. Within minutes he returned to the car and asked me to come inside with him. There I was told about the tragic accident and ensuing loss suffered by my now brother-in-law, Sylvan. I spent the night at the hospital with him. Doc took me home on Sunday after completing his hospital rounds.

I have yet another recollection of Doc's generosity and feelings for my family. It occurred on a Sunday afternoon. I had gone to a bridal shower for a friend. While I was gone Mom had a severe gallbladder attack. She called Doc who came to the house to give her an injection for pain. Instead of calling me home he said, "Marilyn is at home studying. I'll send her over to stay with you until Martha comes home." And he did! Such thoughtful gestures were greatly appreciated.

In closing I'd like to reiterate: the four years that I spent working for Dr. Wilke were happy, memorable years. They formed the groundwork and foundation of my adult life. Perhaps those years, in some small way, have contributed to my happiness and success as a wife, mother, and professional member of Good Samaritan Hospital's Health Team.