

Notes of a Mad Girl #1 - Mom Doctor

I knew it was going to be a bad night when my mom told my sister Pam to get the old tank vacuum sweeper from the basement.

The year was 1966, around nine in the evening, and it was on the back of my neck low near my shoulder. I still don't know why they call them "boils." It reminded you of the top of a volcano with the cap on. But I do know that you have the urge to pop the top off the one-inch lesion in hopes of releasing the pressure and the pain that radiated over a much larger infected area.

So when Mom got the idea to suck the boil from my neck with the canister tank sweeper I made a dash for the kitchen door. I was almost through the screen door when Dad appeared and quietly said, "Karin, do what your mom says."

My blond headed sister was four years younger than I and had me beat hands down in the beauty category. I had to make up for her "pink-and-creamy complexion, beautiful-sad-eyed, ready to cry on a dime" look by using every brain cell crammed into my olive toned skin and what my brothers called my "pea sized head." Pam's job was to turn the vacuum on and off at the plug since the switch for the machine was inoperable. While Mom held the pipe to my neck, I begged for Pam to pull the plug. But Pam would patiently and stoically wait for Mom's voice command to turn it off.

Mom couldn't get a good suction with the vacuum because the one and a half inch opening to the metal pipe was dinged and dented. Its sole job was to clean kid crumbs and junk from the orifices of our station wagon. After about thirty minutes mom gave up on the vacuum.

What she lacked in medical skills she made up for with home remedy creativity. She sent Pam to boil water. With tongs and a whiskey glass immersed in hot water mom was ready to execute her new plan. With her hands safely tucked into oven mitts she applied the small, steamy glass to my neck. It was immediately apparent that mom's plan had a glitch. The glass created a vacuum making it impossible to be removed

from my neck. Once stuck, the heated glass filled completely with my dark blood. Her solution was to sterilize a butter knife in the hot water and pry the rim to free the glass from my neck. Mom repeated this process for over an hour but was angry and disappointed that the boil was holding fast.

At two in the morning my dad walked out of the bedroom. In a really quiet voice he said "Lee, just take her to the doctors". Mom was tired and she was ready to admit defeat.

Next morning we went to see our family doctor, Dr. Donofrio. He softly asked my mom why I had a third degree burn around a common boil. Mom proceeded to enthusiastically describe her medical treatment in detail as if she were a doctor conferring with a colleague. His response was to ask my Mother to leave the room.

I was completely stymied when he asked me, "Does your mother do this often?" Clueless as to what he was implying, I immediately answered, "No, this was my first boil."

I have no recollection of his medical magic on my neck, but I do remember our conversation. He told me to immediately call him, day or night, if I ever have any type of medical emergency.

Two years later my cousin Bob Staney threw a stone at my head after our cousin Kathy grabbed the ball out of Bob's hands. With animated eyes my mom raced to find a sewing needle and thread. She fondly recalled the time when she sewed up what sounded like an eight-inch gash on my Uncle Paul's arm with only some whiskey for his pain. This time I grabbed a large towel from the bathroom and sprinted out the door. About a quarter of a mile up High Park road Dad drove along side of me in the station wagon. Holding a saturated, bloody towel on my head, I told Dad that I was heading to see my doctor and was not going to let mom touch me.

Dad looked hopelessly sad when he saw my long hesitation to get into the car; saw the abject fear in my eyes; and for the first time in our daughter/dad relationship knew with certainty that there was some major mistrust.

I got in and we silently drove the mile and a half to the hospital.