

My DIARY of Three Years with the DIONNE QUINTUPLETS

by Nurse YVONNE LEROUX



Part II

LOOKING back, it sometimes seems as if that first summer of the quintuplets' lives brought just one crisis after another.

On July 17 I gleefully wrote in my diary that the five little girls had broken another record of medical history by living longer than any single member of a quintuplet birth had ever lived before them.

Three days later I made the following entry:

"July 20. Marie has a red mark on her leg—quite raised, about the size of a nickel. It doesn't bother her to any extent unless she lies on it for some length of time, and then we notice that she seems relieved when turned."

This was diagnosed as a tumor. On July 24, Dr. Curtis Burman and Prof. Max Broedel, both of Johns Hopkins University, examined Marie and prescribed radium treatments. These were begun shortly afterward by Doctors Howard A. Kelly and Edmund Kelly (his son), also both of Johns Hopkins and ultimately dispelled our worry.

The difficulties of caring for the children in the Dionne home, which had never been designed to house five feeble infants in addition to one healthy, active family, had long since convinced everyone that the children must have a place of their own where their care could go forward without disrupting the Dionnes' normal routine. So, on Aug. 6. I made this welcome entry in my diary:

"The hospital is under way. The excavation is started and everyone is excited, wondering what it's going to be like. It will be a great relief to know that we don't have to risk the winter in the farmhouse."

In speaking of the coming winter I was looking a long way ahead. But the babies had us all much encouraged by now.

Nurse de Kiriline, photographed with bandaged hands and leg, after averting a tragedy in the nursery by seizing burning pads and carrying them outside.



The quintuplets' hospital finished and occupied in September, 1934.

More diary entries:

"Aug. 7. Yvonne and Annette had their first soap and water baths, and did they squirm! They are lost in the big basins. We had to work fast as we were afraid of their getting cold.

"AUG. 8. Calamity in the nursery today. Madam de Kiriline was puncturing holes in nipples over an alcohol lamp and upset the alcohol. It went all over the pad and of course caught fire. She grabbed all the blazing pads to her breast and ran out, and thus prevented a fire that might have burned the house down. I didn't know what had happened until I heard her call 'Yvonne!' and as she was on fire I caught a spread off the bed to help beat

out the flames. Luckily, nothing spread in the nursery.

"Her hands and legs were burned. The doctor arrived to find us sitting on the porch; me wringing out bandages in milk of magnesia. Nobody in the house had any idea of what had happened until Madam de Kiriline had to go home. I'll go on day duty and Pat (Nurse Pat Mullens) will come on nights."

The babies were getting healthier—and hungrier. Witness my diary entry for Aug. 12:

"We get 108 ounces of milk a day from Toronto and use most of it—in fact we often wonder if it will carry us through. The babes certainly drink it up. Cecile takes her bottle in about two minutes and then goes off to sleep with

a very contented look. Marie is the slowest and Emilie gets very impatient. Yvonne and Annette love to linger about the middle of the meal, but eventually take it all.

"Aug. 13. Pat and I laid the cornerstone of the new house. That certainly was a thrill."

Then comes a minor red-letter day: "Aug. 31. All the babes are out of incubators. The room looks so big! We have kept only one incubator, in case one should have a relapse or something. . . . Marie and Emilie had their first baths today.

"Sept. 6. The babes are 100 days old. Their weights: Yvonne—7 pounds 11½ oz. Annette—7 pounds 5½ oz. Cecile—6 pounds 9 oz. Emilie—5 pounds 7 oz. Marie—5 pounds 4½ oz.

"Marie is so very tiny compared to the others. She has a very delicate bone structure and is not fleshy. Yvonne is very fleshy and looks like a small



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Everybody laughed, wrote Nurse Leroux, when Dr. Dafoe donned Santa Claus get-up for the quintuplets' first Christmas.

mountain compared to Marie and Emilie. Cecile is very quiet; she usually takes anything we give her and waits her turn quite well. Emilie is a cheerful little thing, too. She will probably be mischievous. Yvonne and Annette are rather good-natured, with Yvonne leading. They all love being talked to, even at this early stage."

THEN comes bad news. After leaving my diary pages blank for nearly a week, I made this entry:

"Sept. 11. The babes are sick. Came on duty at night and found Yvonne and Cecile with temperatures. Had very high temperatures at 9, with rash. Sent Mr. Dionne out to doctor's. Dr. Dafoe came, ordered enemas, baths, warmth and mustard baths for convulsions. Wonder what can be the matter? All the babes will probably be sick.

"Sept. 12. All babes are sick. Pat is on nights with me. Babes have intestinal toxemia."

The hospital was finished, at last; it was ready before we were.

"Sept. 14. The official opening of the hospital; finished at last but not furnished—grand opening. Babes still sick; the smallest ones look dreadful. They are waxen and their faces are drawn. If they *only* pull through this."

And then, a week later, a very red red-letter entry:

"Sept. 21. In spite of everything—no supplies, no furniture, no electricity—Dr. Dafoe has decided the babes must go over to the hospital. We prepared all day yesterday and all morning today, taking over the babes' clothing, blankets, medical supplies, and preparing the room as much as possible. This morning we fixed the beds and then took the babes over in a car.

"Sept. 24. Babes all over crisis. They seem to be picking up already and their color seems much better. Appetites much better.

"Oct. 29. The babes got their first glimpse of snow today. More important, they were changed over to cow's milk.

"Oct. 30. Today the babes were christened. They wore little white dresses and petticoats, pink and white sweaters and booties and looked perfectly adorable. They made faces when the salt was put on their tongues."

How swiftly that fall passed! My diary contains few entries. On Dec. 3, I made this note:

"Christmas photos were taken today. Mother and Father Dionne were over, very thrilled with the pictures, examined everything, played with the babes. They put little Marie in the doll carriage and wheeled her around. They laughed—and so did the rest of us—at Dr. Dafoe dressed up in a Santa Claus costume."

NEXT WEEK: A plot to kidnap the quintuplets is discovered and foiled.