



# My DIARY of Three Years with the DIONNE QUINTUPLETS

by Nurse YVONNE LEROUX



A movie nurse and her real life prototype—Actress Dorothy Peterson (left) and Nurse Yvonne Leroux, photographed during filming of "The Country Doctor."



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A scene from "The Country Doctor," in which the quins starred. Left to right are Slim Summerville, Jean Hersholt and John Qualen.

## Part IV

IN the spring of 1935 the interest which the outside world was showing on the quintuplets began to force itself on our attention in a way we could not ignore. Witness my diary:

"April 2. Visitors coming by the hundreds. They come in and look at the babes through the observation window in the hall, and go out by the kitchen door. The babes are beginning to notice them and in spite of our warnings—'No tapping on windows, no calling, no funny faces'—people forget themselves and scream with joy every time they even move. The visitors are very impressed with the healthy appearance of the quins and one woman went so far as to say to her companion: 'I'll bet that coloring isn't natural—they must use rouge.'"

The next day's entry records a minor mishap to the good doctor.

"April 3. Dr. Dafoe's car was stolen last night. He came chugging in in a broken down old model which could hardly make the grade. . . . The babes are slightly cranky today."

Further entries:

"April 8. The babies seem to feel the excitement of the visitors and are very agitated after the hour is over. They do so try to be entertaining that it makes them tired."

"April 10. Visitors have been stopped. It is such a blessing all round. The children are quieter and we can at least sit down for an hour. We spread blankets on the floor and let them roll around. It is funny to see the positions they get into and to see them roll around the floor until we have to bring them back again."

"Mr. and Mrs. Dionne have come over once or twice and sat on the floor with them."

Then developed another of those crises that were forever popping up in the first year of the little girls' lives.

"April 17. Emilie has a cold. No visitors of any kind are allowed. She looks so pathetic with her running nose and her bleary eyes—but she still laughs."

"April 18. The babes are all developing colds. We have put them all to bed. We have been busy making extra pillows and finding enough nighties to go around. Their poor little noses are sore from running, and they have such difficulty in swallowing and breathing—at night I'm afraid to nap for fear of them choking."

"In spite of being sick the children are still grand little angels. We find them all over. Cecile insists on going down to the foot of the bed, under the covers. I think we pull her up at least a dozen times a day."

"April 20. Babes are still sick but Marie seems very much worse than the



The quins had a grand time at their first birthday party. "They all went after the cakes," writes Nurse Leroux, "and once they tasted the icing—well, we just had to remove the cakes."

others. She is restless and whines—her temperature is high and nothing we do seems to make her feel better.

"APRIL 21. Easter Sunday—but no dressing up. We did try a bonnet we received for Yvonne on them all, but their pale little faces look too pathetic. They are all better, though, except Marie. Emilie is apparently normal."

"April 22. Marie is still sick and has us very worried. If she could only talk. . . . The doctor phoned his brother (Dr. William Dafoe, of Toronto) and Dr. Allan Brown; they will be here some time during the night. The doctor thinks Marie's ears are troubling her, and wishes to have a specialist look at her."

"April 23. Dr. Allan Brown and Dr. William Dafoe motored down from Toronto to examine the babes. We had to waken each one in turn, take her out to the kitchen and let her be thoroughly examined—and each behaved splendidly. They all went back to bed and went right to sleep. Marie's ears were troubling her. They did a paracentesis; she cried, but seemed so relieved when it was all over, and slept so well. The doctors went back to Toronto, leaving at 6 a. m."

"The parents refuse to believe the verdict that except for Marie's ears the babes are all normal, and insist on having one or two of their doctors examine them. So Dr. Smith is coming in the morning."

"April 24. Dr. Smith was in this morning. He states that the babes are in perfect condition and a credit to the staff. The only thing wrong is Marie's ears, which are running very little and

which he thinks are of no concern."

"April 25. The babes are all better, and went out today. They do so love going out, and had much more pep when brought in."

My diary seems to lack day-by-day entries for May, 1935. Instead it contains one rather long undated entry, written at the time that the little girls finished their first year of life. It follows:

"It is just one year since the babes were born. To see them now, looking so big and healthy and beginning to take a great interest in their surroundings, one can hardly believe that they were so small and so frail that we could hardly breathe when near them."

"They look so very pretty when we dress them in light dresses and sweaters, with frilly bonnets. They smell so wonderfully good (of course, with the care we give them, they should!) and their skins are so delightful. Their eyes are getting more beautiful every day."

"WHEN the birthday pictures were taken they had a grand time. They all went after the cakes. Yvonne had two fistfuls and couldn't decide which fist to suck on. Marie was very dainty, taking pinches instead of fistfuls. When they saw themselves in a mirror they smiled and were pleased because the 'bebes' smiled back at them."

"Madam de Kiriline, who is very tired after a year of strenuous work—and of wonderful organizing—has decided to leave. It is now deemed necessary to have a French Catholic nurse, too."

And so the first year of the youngsters' lives ended and a new one was begun. Miss Lamoureux replaced

Madame de Kiriline and the summer began smoothly.

"June 15. We are showing the babes on the veranda now. We take them out one at a time and hold them up. The crowd goes wild, but we try to make the girls pay little attention to them."

"June 28. Babes are making much progress. Yvonne and Cecile can stand now, and take a few steps. The heat is very hard on them all—and we still have trouble with mosquitoes."

"July 3. The heat is terrible. The babes have no appetite and are losing weight in spite of all our precautions. . . . They are very good, though, and do very little crying."

"July 15. Am leaving for a month's holiday, but can hardly bear to leave the babes."

"Aug. 15. Back at work. The babes recognized me after a few minutes. They look thinner. I'm told they weren't well."

"Aug. 21. The doctor is convinced that four shows a day are too much for the babes. They are so nervous and irritable, and don't sleep as they should."

"Aug. 22. Shows cut to two a day. We already notice a difference. The babes are quieter, and slept much better today. They seem peppier, too."

"Sept. 1. Walking lessons continue and everyone is gaining in strength and confidence."

Before 1935 ended the quintuplets, who were radio stars already, took another step upward and became movie stars as well. None of us will ever forget the making of that picture, "The Country Doctor." My diary entry for Dec. 5 remarks:

"Production started—what a lot of work! Noses sprayed—gowns—masks—'Quiet, please'—orders to troupe very faithfully carried out. The babes like it. Yvonne and Emilie were especially cute."

"Dec. 6. The babes are having a good time. Sleep well. They enjoy Jean Hersholt and Dorothy Peterson."

Lots of funny things happened during the filming. Marie took a liking to Cameraman Clark, and used to crawl out of camera range to go over and see him. Cecile repeatedly tried to take Jean Hersholt's glasses off. The youngsters made fine actresses; as a matter of fact, the real actors and actresses were a lot more nervous than the babes were.

NEXT WEEK: The quins emerge from babyhood and become children.