

Family Illnesses

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Part of what I now tell I have not seen myself but heard from my older sisters.

My father was involved in an accident at work with power lines. He was climbing up on a power pole when it broke. My father fell down with it, but fortunately he ended up on top, so he survived.

He had a broken right collarbone, and a shoulder injury. He went on sick-leave and remained there for quite some time. It was time for haymaking and mother and elder sister and brother, 12 and 10 year old, got ready for the tremendous work. My brother, just ten years old, had to drive the horse. It was then that my great grandmother lived with us and was able to care for the house and the smaller children.

Father recovered but after the accident, he could not straighten his arm properly. He received a small, small annuity for life. He had no pain in his arm later .

In 1923, when one of my sisters was 6 months old, something happened which had repercussions throughout her life and of course for the whole family. A measles epidemic raged, and all children had measles, including her, though she was so small. Then we thought she was well, no one thought in particular about it, but it turned out that she was afterwards very susceptible to infection. When she started school she often had spiking fevers and had to stay home. She was X-rayed and of course tuberculosis was suspected, but whatever she had could not be identified. Eventually, it became more serious and she began to spit blood. I remember the district nurse came and put ice cubes on her tongue and we were afraid she would get lung hemorrhages. She did not, but it became clear that something serious was going on. Something must be done.

At this time it had happened, as I told you in the story about common foods, that Father had pulmonary edema and had to go to the sanatorium in Sandträsk. It was arranged then that my little sister could go there with him for a better study at the same time. It revealed that she had what was called bronchiectasis, extensions of the tips of the airways. There was mucus and inflammation. The news was that she should have surgery at Sabbatsberg in Stockholm.

They had developed a new surgical technique, done by Professor Crawford and she could be helped. My parents felt horrible and at the same time, of course, very grateful.

There were several cases in Norrbotten and four of them, under the protection of a nurse, took the train to Stockholm and Sabbatsberg. After many inquiries, surgery was done and the lower left lobe of her lung was removed. It was a long and difficult operation, and she stayed in Sabbatsberg for seven months.

When she came home she was still coughing and after a while mother

wrote to the doctor in Sandträsk who had referred her for surgery. The answer that came was not encouraging. She had these lesions also on the right side. What would happen to her? Would she somehow be able to support herself? Well, it did go well. She started working in business and her health was relatively good. Then of course came penicillin which averted major infections. And now, in 2004, she is an active eighty-year-old.

There were several other trials and tribulations, not necessarily in this order. I write as they come to mind.

When I was around eight years old came the worst thing in our family, mother nearly died.

My eldest sister, then 17 or 18 years old, had come home after a job as a maid in Luppio. Mother reported that she was pregnant, but she did not seem to be well. The next day she said that there would not be another child. She had had a miscarriage. It was just that the bleeding did not end, but continued and accelerated. The midwife was fetched, but she could not do anything to stop the bleeding. The night became cold, with wet snow.

The fear was not far away -- would she bleed to death? The phone was switched off at night and the only thing that father could do was to ride the twenty kilometers to Karungi where his colleague had a car and maybe he could get a doctor. Father managed to get to Karungi and his friend took the car and they set off another thirty kilometers to Haparanda to bring Dr. Mörtberg. He was willing to go with them to try to save Mother's life.

When they came to us, Dr. Mörtberg needed to cleanse the uterus. In those primitive conditions and without anesthesia, he went to work. Mother was put on a table, and father and his colleague held her. My sister tried to keep Mother calm, but probably could not. The young children were awake now and then. I understood that something dangerous was happening, for the excitement was very real. I woke up abruptly when the mother gave a scream that went to the marrow of my bones. Then I remember that my sister ran to us and said that it is over and mother will be healthy soon.

The bleeding stopped and the mother was taken to bed. There could not be many red blood cells left, but her life was intact.

It is said that Dr. Mörtberg and father's co-worker drove to the doctor's farm in Risudden to rest and that they took a big drink.

Mother was sick a long time. Dr. Mörtberg ordered medicine from Germany for her and eventually she improved.

My oldest sister had to go out to help earn their livelihood and the second oldest girl was a very big responsibility and everyone was helping each other. My grandmother was a rock as usual; although she never complained, I knew she also had ailments, particularly her hip bothered her.

One early summer, it must have been 1940, Mother and another sister had scarlet fever. At that time, they had to go to the Epidemic- dispensary in Övertorneå for seven weeks.

It became almost panic in the family. The cows were out to summer grazing and increasingly difficult to handle. Who could take responsibility? My

older sister was ill and I was only 14 years and the older girls had left home to earn a living . There was no other way but for the sister who worked in Haparanda to quit her job and come home. She was not happy about it, of course, but necessity has no justice.

remember we would bake biscuits and it did went well, but then they would be dried in the cooling oven overnight. I was to watch them so they not be burned, but I could not stay awake but fell asleep. When morning came, the cursts were burned . There was weeping and gnashing of teeth! The oven was too hot of course when the crusts wese put in, but we did not know how hot it got to be.

After Mother had scarlet fever, she had rheumatism in her fingers. She thought she could get the disease to slow down by holding her hands every day in hot water with hay in it. Who knows, maybe it was so.

hen my brother was 16 or 17 years old, he followed his father on various jobs. At this time he was very interested in cross-country skiing. After work, he wanted to go for a training run. My father went home by himself. Time passed and no son came home; concern rose . What could have happened to him? My father went off to get people together who could look after him. They found barely conscious, suffering from hypothermia. From Hardell in Bäckeästa they got a horse and sleigh to take him into the warmth. A district nurse took over and she knew that he must be heated slowly. I remember that his body temperature was 35 degrees and they tried to warm him with heated pot lids and furs. Eventually his temperature rose, but he could not come home until the next day .

other, who was at home all this time, was quite beside herself with worry, despite being informed by phone. The joy was great that the boy survived. He himself did not know what had happened to him and he just wanted to go out and train again. I remember that Father had to take a stand and forbid it. A few days later he got jaundice and had to go with father to the doctor in Haparanda. The jaundice disappeared by itself eventually .
Life limped on.