

## AWARD OF EXCELLENCE PRIZE WINNER

### *Mrs. Peckinbaa from Chu-Chua*

Mrs. Peckinbaa was one of a kind in the frontier medical community of Williams Lake, British Columbia, in 1960. She was named Grace—appropriate, as she was a God-fearing, opinionated matriarch with nine children. The family had moved from Chu-Chua, a town located on the North Thompson River, to Soda Creek on the Fraser River, twenty miles north of Williams Lake, and were known as the Peckinbaas from Chu-Chua. Grace and her husband Roy raised children, cows, chickens and sheep on their stump ranch. Roy did a little cowboying, rodeoing and logging between episodes of beer drinking in the Ranch Hotel bar.

As the new Doc in the town clinic I was assigned to families that didn't pay their bills or didn't have any medical insurance. Grace didn't believe in birth control of any kind—she said it went against “her grain.” After I delivered their ninth child, I approached Roy and asked if he would be interested in having a vasectomy. He replied that “No horse doctor was going to geld him for only doing what comes naturally.”

Grace was a big heavy woman who wore GWG red strap overalls—the kind that had metal fasteners and brass buckles. In the summer she wore cowboy boots and only those bib overalls. That way she always had a breast handy, ready to suckle one, two or three babes in the cab of Roy's pick-up truck.

Grace believed in folk cures, herbs and the opinion of Mrs. Charleyboy, the midwife for the Toosie Band on the Riske Creek Indian reserve. Mrs. Charleyboy told Grace that if she suckled her young she wouldn't get pregnant. No matter what I told her to the contrary, she continued to believe the midwife.

Usually the Peckinbaa family arrived at the clinic just before closing on Saturday with sick kids and problems. I remember one summer Saturday in particular. Three of the kids had diarrhea.

“Them kids can crap through an eye of a needle,” said Grace. “They's got summer complaint.”

“Infectious diarrhea? Is that right?” I said.

She went on to say that she felt bloated and loggy and that her breasts were getting bigger than watermelons. Her kids really did have the shitters.

“Doc, you horse doctor, my kids is sick and I'm sicker. I'm not sure if I am bilious from them gallstones of mine or if I have the yellow jaunders. Maybe I got the pregnancy sickness back.”

“Have you and Roy been using any birth control?”

“No, Doc, I'm just nursing the two young ones. The little one is eleven months old now. My belly's been getting big, fast. It's funny, Doc, 'cause I'm nursing the two youngest still.”

“When was your last menstrual period?”

“I don't keep track no more. Probably about three years ago.”

Indeed, Grace was pregnant again. Very pregnant. When I did a pelvic exam her bag of water broke and the baby's head was low in the pelvis.

“Grace, you'd better go up to hospital now. You're going to have a baby very soon. I'll phone the hospital now and tell them that you're coming.”

“Are you sure, Doc? I'm still breast feeding.”

Grace didn't make it to the hospital and the maternity nurse was forced to deliver another ten-pound tow-headed Peckinbaa boy on the tailgate of Roy's truck. In the confusion of the delivery, the placenta was delivered in the back of the truck and then somehow slithered onto the bumper and then oozed onto the front step. It then disappeared from the old shabby Williams Lake War Memorial Hospital step forever. The hospital administrator's golden Labrador dog didn't come home to feed for a couple of days.

After the delivery, Grace and her babe at her breast were moved by stretcher to the maternity wing and nursery.

“Thanks for helping me, girls. Does cutting and tying your tubes stop your milk from coming in, or slow it down? Expect I'll be nursing 'til the kids are all off and away in school. I think I'm going to name my son after my Doc. Sterling Peckinbaa sounds melodic, don't ya think? Maybe I'll get that there horse doctor to clip my tubes, eh?”

Grace's post-partum course was uneventful and I declined to tie her tubes but made arrangements for her to go to Vancouver to have her tubes tied and her gallstones out. Grace finally agreed that ten kids was more than enough and by having both procedures done at the Vancouver General Hospital at the same time, she'd “kill two birds with one stone,” as she laughingly put it.

**Sterling Haynes**

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