

Sick

The pain in my side was so sore I doubled over and started to cry.

Some of the other guys told my teacher, Brother David, who took me outside the class, made sure I could still walk and then sent me home. I hobbled home where mum was minding Fergal and Paul, my youngest brothers. She sent me to bed. The pain had eased by the time dad came home from work but mum took me to the doctor next day anyway.

“Growing pains” Doctor Giles said and prescribed more food and plenty of exercise. I never liked to go to see him after that. Mum wasn’t convinced. I wasn’t a complainer. She kept me off school that day. I felt fine and helped mum by pushing Fergal on his trike up and down the back entry.

Two days later I was again bent double in class and sent home from school. This time when my dad came home I was running a temperature and not eating. My side was sore all night and so mum and dad moved me into Bronagh’s room next to theirs.

The next morning, 5<sup>th</sup> May 1966, the doctor was sent for. Doctor Donnelly came this time and immediately sent for an ambulance to get me to hospital. I didn’t come out of hospital until Christmas that year.

In the Children’s hospital I was put into Musgrave Ward, a ward for ‘medical patients’. A doctor came to see me and spoke with mum and dad. It was the first time I realised that someone else was bigger than my dad. I don’t know if it was what the doctor said that caused my dad to physically look smaller than this man or whether it was that he just was a much bigger man. It was a strange sensation. One that I have never forgotten.

When I heard them say they were taking me for an operation I was having none of it. I had had an operation before on my sinus and that was enough I told them. The doctor promised I wouldn’t feel anything and that he was only going to take a small look inside because they saw something they were not sure of. He even got a pen and measured out one inch on my sore side and marked it. At my mum’s pleading I allowed it.

I don’t remember being taken up the main corridor in the Children’s, nor my entry into the operating theater but I sure remember coming back down again! I woke up momentarily and saw the drips, the tubes and felt the pain. I saw Aunty Jean Quigg bending over me as they wheeled my trolley along. It was the first time I really ever remember cursing badly, “Ah Fuck!” I said and remember seeing the shock on Aunt Jean’s face as I slid back into unconsciousness.

I was taken to the surgical ward and took many weeks to recover from the surgery. I had TB, pleurisy and a collapsed lung. Some sort of hard crust had formed around my lung and they had scrapped it off. There were drips going into me and two

shunts, one in my chest and another in my back draining fluid out of me. Any one of those conditions could have killed me and so my mum and dad were distraught.

The following weeks were agony. I kept feeling that my side was going to open up again. They eventually took out the shunts but having that done it felt that my whole insides were coming out with them. They got me out of bed and made me walk. I was like Quasimodo hunched over to my right side.

Worst of all was the medication. I had three injections a day and had various other small tablets to take. At first I didn't mind those but then they insisted that I take two huge, rice-paper covered, tablets three times a day also. That nearly choked me to death! Apparently the huge "horse tablets" as I christened them were a new drug called penicillin used to kill infections and especially good, they told me, for TB. I had to swallow them fast because if they opened in my mouth the taste was revolting, so much so that I gagged and coughed and spluttered the stuff back up again.

Three injections a day and they soon ran out of places they could find to inject me. Both thighs were solid and bruised as were my buttocks! It took the poor nurses ages to poke my legs and bum to find a soft spot to stick a needle in.

It was also felt that I needed 'the air'. Everyday the nurses would wheel my bed out to a partially covered balcony and leave me there for several hours. I wasn't allowed out of bed and it didn't matter if it was raining – out I went. Out there none of us ever wanted to get out of bed. We only had pajamas on and it was freezing – even during June!

All during this time in the Children's hospital I was x-rayed, prodded and examined by a range of doctors. My health went up and down but my energy levels were generally low.

Finally they felt that I needed to 'convalesce' and so they shipped me off in an ambulance to Lissue House Hospital outside Lisburn on the way to Ballinderry.