

Jane Doe: "High Valley gave me my mother back"

Jane Doe remembers the exciting day in the early 1950s when she proudly climbed on her two-wheeled bicycle to show her mother that she had learned to ride. At the time, Jane's mother, Debbie, had been a patient at High Valley Hospital on and off (mostly on) for several years, under treatment for the highly contagious disease, tuberculosis.

"My mother contracted the disease either in college or shortly after graduating, but it took until she was in her late twenties to diagnose it," says Jane. So, while her husband was overseas serving in World War II, Debbie Doe spent much of the time in and out of High Valley. "When the War ended, my father and mother lived with her parents and aunt in Westerly, Rhode Island, and I was born a year later. When I turned two, my mother's tuberculosis flared again, so back she went to High Valley."

The challenges to the family were profound. "My father had just started a business and been elected to political office, so he had many demands placed on him," Jane reflects. "Fortunately, we lived with my grandmother and my great aunt, who became my second mothers." Despite a nearly 100-mile round-trip from Westerly, Jane's father and grandmother took her for regular visits. "I remember High Valley as a most beautiful place, especially in the winter."

Because tuberculosis was an airborne disease, these visits did not include the normal hugs, kisses, and other signs of affection. Rather, Jane stood at a screen door and talked or played outside as her mother looked on from a cottage porch. Poised on her bicycle that special day, Jane pushed off and, giving the pedals a few tentative pushes, plowed straight into a flowerbed. Then another set of plantings. And finally, momentum achieved, rode straight down the sidewalk to her mother's proud applause.

"I can't even imagine what it was like for my mother to be separated from me for nine months to a year at a time," says Jane. "But I do know that she formed incredible, lifelong bonds with two other women -- Nina Tuttle, and Paulina Garrand -- who were in the same situation. The three of them, and others, suffered a unique trial at a unique time. They helped each other keep going."

All three would eventually be cured. Jane's mother, who had an annual checkup at High Valley for the rest of her life, died in 2001 at age 89. Her dear friend, Paulina, died the following year. At that point, Jane was visited with a strong desire to reconnect with High Valley. "High Valley gave me my mother back," she explains. "Only in my later years have I come to realize how much I owe this wonderful place." Jane has chosen to follow in the footsteps of her mother and her two close friends, all of whom left something to High Valley in their wills, and to include High Valley in her estate plans.

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Imagine being a young child and not being able to hug or kiss your mother.

That was me.

It’s not that my mother didn’t love me. She adored me, and I her.

But she had tuberculosis, and the risk of close physical interaction was too risky. So beginning around age two, most of my interactions with my mother took place at a distance. She would sit on the porch of her cottage at High Valley and watch me play in the yard.

I’ll never forget the day I showed my mother I had learned to ride a bike. It was the early 1950s and I was so proud of myself. I pushed off, pumped the pedals a few times . . . and plowed straight into a flowerbed. I gathered momentum . . . and crushed another set of plantings. And then, at last, I rode straight and steady down the sidewalk. My mother applauded from the porch. I beamed. If only I could have run into her arms and *felt* her pride in a hug and a kiss.

My mother spent several years on and off at High Valley—mostly on. I can’t even begin to imagine how difficult it must have been for my mother to be separated from my father and me for nine months to a year at a time. My father had just started a business and been elected to political office, so he had many demands placed on him. We lived with my grandmother and my great aunt, who became my second mothers. Even though it was 100 miles round-trip from their house in Westerly to High Valley, my father and grandmother took me there for regular visits. It was an extraordinarily challenging time for my family.

Then came the day when High Valley gave me my mother back.

In 1968 my mother was cured of tuberculosis. And as a 12-year-old, at last I got to hug and kiss her as much as I wanted.

I’m 59 now, and it’s only in my later years I’ve realized how much I owe this wonderful place.

My mother passed away in 2001 at age 89. During her time at High Valley she had formed lifelong bonds with two women who also had tuberculosis and were separated from their families. The three of them had helped each other keep going through their time of suffering.

I knew my mother and her two friends had all made plans to include a gift to High Valley in their wills. One year after my mother passed, one of those dear friends also passed away. I decided to follow in their footsteps and make a special gift to High Valley.

High Valley gave me my mother back. I am eternally grateful—and a gift in my estate plans is a way I can show my gratitude and honor my mother’s memory.