

Monkey Magic

Category: Hope

written by Ronna L. Edelstein | November 29, 2016

Although I was an unpopular adolescent—never invited to parties, never asked on a date—I still had dreams. I wanted to become a teacher, a wife, a mother. Then a medical issue threatened my mother dream and, possibly, my wife one as well.

Shortly after I graduated from high school and a few days after I turned eighteen on August 8, 1965, I entered the hospital for surgery. A chronic pain on the left side of my abdomen had intensified, making it impossible for me to leave my bed.

When I awoke from the surgery, I was surprised to feel a bandage across my entire abdomen, not only on the left side. “Cysts covered your left ovary,” the surgeon told me. “I removed the ovary.” Then, after a heavy silence, he added, “I also had to remove seven-eighths of your right ovary. I am sorry.”

I was numb. I barely noticed Ma holding my right hand and Dad holding my left. My cheeks felt wet, but I had no awareness that I was crying. I lay in the hospital bed and realized that my future was as barren as the dull white wall across from me. My hope to become a mother was shattered. My hope to become a wife was destroyed; no one would marry a woman with only a minimal chance of becoming pregnant.

The next day, Ma and Dad brought me a gift: a plush monkey, my favorite animal. Like me, my monkey wore a bandage around its tummy. Unlike me, my monkey grinned a grin of hope.

For the rest of my hospital stay, I clutched that monkey. I whispered my concerns to it. It always listened—and always answered with a smile of hope. When the nurse removed my bandages, I removed the bandages from my monkey. Together, my monkey and I went home. Every time I had dismal thoughts about my future, I would hug my smiling monkey and feel hope.

That monkey traveled with me to college, graduate school, my marital home, and the delivery room—twice—when I gave birth first to my son and then, two years later, to my daughter. It went with me when my “female problems” led to a hysterectomy.

Although my medical problems were real ones, which threatened to erode my hope, I had the best medicine ever: a cuddly monkey with a hopeful smile.

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