

# The History of St. Helena Hospital

## Chapter VIII

### A Patient's Day Circa 1939

As the Rural Health Retreat grew and became established as a “destination” healthcare resort, its name was changed to the St. Helena Sanitarium around the turn of the century. Moving into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the facility had expanded to include not only the original building, but also the Lloyd Building,

a chapel (located where the swimming pool is now), the Oakhurst Building (located where our Ancillary Building is today), a “new” hospital building (located across the street from Elmshaven Church) and the Crystal Springs building which was built to house the nursing students.

Patients were no longer coming up the hill from St. Helena by horse and buggy, but drove in their own cars to the facility. They were immediately greeted by “call boys” who served as pages and carried luggage to the rooms and answered to their beck and call during their stay.

Fred Hutchinson, plagued by debilitating arthritis, was a frequent guest at the Sanitarium. His first visit here, in the summer of 1939, was chronicled in humorous, descriptive letters he wrote to his family. The letters were printed in a little booklet entitled *Wanderings in a Wheelchair*. Following are some excerpts:

**Chapter 1—We’re off to St. Helena:** “Well, here’s the sign pointing to the sanitarium and I can’t turn back. The little woman is at the wheel and I’m going to the inn whether I like it or not. The country is beautiful and before you know it you are there. It’s a big place, well kept grounds - I wonder why you can’t smoke?”

“The boys gather us in, I register at the desk, they were expecting me. We all go up to the room. Just like the Palace Hotel, everything is grand - beautiful view. We all have lunch and the family leaves. I spend the afternoon meeting all the heads of departments - management, medical, dietitian, head nurse, everybody. Everyone is swell here and I’m sure I’m going to like it.”

**Chapter 2—the Awakening:** “I was awakened at 6:45 a.m. by a young man in white who was there to care for my every need. Now for the loosening up process: He brought two or three fomentations, which, after all, are only steaming hot blankets. These were draped around my back, hips and shoulders, and after I steamed for a while he rubs me on the bad spots with salve. Then he puts on my cast and finishes dressing me. During all this a boy has brought some orange juice containing vitamin C, you know, this is tossed off before breakfast.

“I have a private bath and after I finish shaving, my breakfast is waiting on the writing table. Now there’s a glass, only half full. Smells funny, tastes queer. I wonder what it is - ah, here it is on the menu -liquid Brewer’s yeast in tomato juice. Well, the dietitian said to drink it, so here goes. Sliced figs, poached eggs on toast. Fresh strawberries top off the breakfast, but alas, no white sugar. That’s bad.

“I have been here three and a half days and I’m having a wonderful time. Everyone bends over backward to make my stay pleasant. I never met so many people who are all happy in doing for others. Their mission in life is to make everyone healthy and happy and they sure try hard, and if they don’t get results it isn’t their fault.”

**Chapter 3—The Dietitian Comes to Call:** “Another morning when the sun is late in rising, but everything goes on as usual. From my window I look down upon a courtyard and there each morning, those that are able to, go through their morning calisthenics - with the aid of Miller and

music. Then breakfast, followed by morning worship. These people love to sing.

”Mrs. Lindsay, the dietitian, is next on the schedule and we go into what I can eat. She knows all the answers - just how much you need of this, that, or the other thing; what you can have and what not. She has her heart set on putting some fat on my bones, and I have agreed to help, so when she says something is good I say O.K., but what she means is that it is good for me and not necessarily good to eat.”

**Chapter 4—Miller’s Manly Men Massage Me:** “In looking over my daily program, I find that we just finished with the dietitian. Next comes a Mr. Miller, all in white, with a wheel chair. He puts my cushion in the chair, wraps me in a blanket and away we go over the porches and down to the third floor to the treatment rooms. The massage is preceded by either an alcohol rub or a shower; then he works on the arms, legs, feet, stomach and back. It feels fine and takes about an hour. Then back to the room in my baby carriage and to bed again after a busy morning. It is now about 11:30 a.m. and I rest for an hour before lunch - I mean dinner.”

**Chapter 5—The Sabbath:** “It may be Saturday to you, but here at the Sanitarium it is the Sabbath. Perhaps you would be interested in knowing why so many Christians keep Sunday instead of Saturday, and how the Sabbath was changed.”

Mr. Hutchinson continues in this chapter to quote from an article in the *Signs of the Times*, an Adventist church magazine, about the history of the Sabbath.

**Chapter 6—The Sawbones, Himself:** “After returning from the solarium I again go to bed. Next on my call list is the doctor. In order to get a true picture he ordered a few tests. They sound harmless enough, and in fact they turned out to be simple enough. One fellow stuck a suction pump in my arm and drew out a bunch of blood. The doctor orders my treatments by the He-Man in the treatment rooms. He calls each day and inquires about my general health and all the little secrets that go on between a doctor and his patient.”

**Chapter 7—Look Out for the Elevator:** “Remember, it was time for dinner or getting near that time when I wrote last.

I don’t have to ring for a nurse any more, they show up without coaxing. There is a wonderful group of nurses here - kind, considerate and look after your every need. They do everything for you, including tucking you into bed. But no goodnight kiss. Somehow there seems to be a rule against it in all hospitals, but if it’s ever put to a vote, I’m going to vote in favor of the goodnight kiss.

“Now into my chariot, we’re off in the perambulator, out the door, onto the porch and then to the elevator. I don’t know who is to blame, the elevator or the operator, but the battle goes on every trip. Either the elevator gets stubborn and sticks at the bottom or it refuses to stop when requested to do so, and usually gets above or below the floor. When I get in, down we start. Someone wants in at the third floor. The boy tries to come to a sliding stop - the elevator objects and we miss the floor by six inches. So the boy starts jumping it up an inch at a time. We pass the second floor without a call and everyone gets set for the landing at the first. Well, back to our story - the call boy helps me out of the chair. I head for the dining room. But what, I am too early, the doors don’t open until 1:00 p.m., and it’s ten minutes to 1:00. So we wait.”

**Chapter 8—Dinner at the ‘San’:** “The dining room is made delightful by the hostess, Mrs. Woodruff, who makes sure that everyone is acquainted at each table. As this is dinner (lunch), you look over the menu and wonder what you drew. Now, here’s a hearty meal: *Lettuce with Lemon, Health Salad, Cream of Lima Bean Soup, Savory Bits, Entrée, Buttered Celery, Tomato Juice and Carrot Juice* (with liquid Brewers yeast). Well, having finished dinner, it is time for a smoke, but by this time you have found out that smoking is verboten in the buildings or on the grounds. But they do have a place set aside about one hundred yards from the hotel under a very large Catalpa tree and there one may smoke.”

**Chapter 9—Misery in the Joints:** After describing his conversations with some of the other smokers in “nicotine alley” Mr. Hutchinson continues: “About this time I’m ready for bed again, so I send for a boy and he wheels me back. I close my eyes and float off into dreamland. Around 4:00 p.m. I arise and this is when I sit at my desk and pen these little tidbits. When it is done, I will go back to bed and wait with great anticipation for supper time.”

**Chapter 10—I’d Walk a Mile - Would You?:** “At 5:30 p.m. or thereabouts my nurse arrives. It is time for supper and then a smoke. Each evening after supper they have evening worship or entertainment in the parlor. The doctors lecture on high blood pressure and hardening of the arteries (listed under entertainment, I imagine.) It has been hot as the hinges of Hades, but the evenings are cool. After the smoke, back to the Inn, into the chair, up to the room and with the help of anyone handy, back into bed for a little rest after a hard day at the ‘San.’”

Source: *Wanderings in a Wheelchair*, F. Hutchinson