

My Hospital Story...

In 1943, Chuck Chaney, a local businessman and his wife, suffered a heart rending tragedy. Their new born son was premature and died after only several days of life. Determined that this would not happen again, he and his wife made a donation to the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth, so that they could purchase an incubator. The incubator was installed in the spring of 1944.

About the same time, a nurse, belonging to the order, was transferred from Denver, Colorado. The hospital there had also recently installed an incubator and she had extensive training on the equipment. She had asked to be sent to Falls City, so that she could be closer to family. Her skills with the equipment, was just a coincidence.

On June 24, 1944, Harriette Medlock Massin went into labor. The child was not due until September 11. The next morning at 8:06 a.m. a male, approximately two and a quarter pounds was born.

The infant was placed in the incubator. He was the first of many to follow to make use of this life saving device. The nurse from Denver began the task of monitoring the device, which at that time was cutting edge technology. I am told that for decades afterward, it was not unusual for babies to be mentally impaired or blind, due to improper regulation. This was true in even the largest hospitals. Survival was still not a given, under the best of circumstances.

On July 1, the infant was released to the care of his mother and maternal grandmother Mrs. H.B. Medlock.

Had two unrelated events, the purchase of an incubator, whose genesis was conceived out of tragedy, and the transfer of an experienced caregiver, not occurred almost simultaneously, the outcome would most certainly have been different. Perhaps a higher power at work here. Nearly 75 years later that infant survives. I was that child.

Submitted by

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Premature baby unit. Nurse in the 1940s being trained in a US hospital in the care of a premature baby in an incubator. She is being trained in feeding, bathing and diaper changing, all done inside the incubator. The incubator regulates temperature, humidity and oxygen levels. The oxygen cylinder is at right, and the wet-dry thermometer is also visible. The soda-lime cartridge (lower right) is used to purify the air (remove exhaled carbon dioxide). Photographed in November 1942 by German-US photographer Fritz Henle (1909-1933) as part of a US government project that documented life in the USA between 1935 and 1944.