

# The Kenny Method

It was a sunny day in the Australian Outback. Elizabeth Kenny, a self-taught nurse, was making her rounds visiting patients on farms and cattle stations. At one farm, she was told of a sick child on a neighboring farm. She knew that must be her next stop.

When Elizabeth got to the farm, she found a young girl lying in bed, moaning in pain. The girl was crippled by muscle spasms in her arms and legs.

Elizabeth swallowed hard. Oh no. What is this terrible thing? How can I possibly help this poor child?

"I'll be back as soon as I can," she said to the girl's mother.

Elizabeth telegraphed Dr. Aeneas McDonnell. He was the surgeon who had treated her when she broke her wrist as a child. He also encouraged Elizabeth's growing interest in medicine.

Dr. McDonnell's telegram didn't provide much help though. It was short and to the point:

"Infantile Paralysis. STOP. No known treatment. STOP. Do the best you can to treat the symptoms. STOP."

Elizabeth's heart sank. She went back to the girl and her mother.

"Can you help my daughter? Please!" begged the mother as she wiped tears from her eyes.

Elizabeth smiled and patted the mother's hand.

A fire was burning on a wood stove. Elizabeth grabbed a frying pan and filled it with salt. When the salt heated she poured it into a bag and placed it gently under one of the child's twisted legs. But the girl continued to moan in pain.

Next, Elizabeth tried a linseed oil bandage, but the girl moaned even louder.

Elizabeth lowered her head. "This isn't working," she whispered. Then she suddenly raised her head. "Maybe moist heat is the answer."

She grabbed a wool blanket lying on the bed and tore it into strips. She put the wool strips into a basin and poured hot water over them. Next, she wrung out all the hot water from the strips before placing them gently around the girl's legs.

By the time she had finished wrapping the girl's legs with the strips, the girl was whimpering less.

"Moist heat is the answer," Elizabeth mumbled in relief. She continued to change the strips,

---

replacing cool ones with warm ones.

Finally, the girl stopped moaning completely. The pain had eased. Elizabeth lifted one of the girl's legs. She started to move it through a series of gentle exercises. "This will help keep her leg muscles strong and long," said Elizabeth to the girl's mother.

Elizabeth Kenny had no way of knowing that she created a new, unusual way of treating polio. It would later become known as the Kenny Method.

**Questions**

1. In what country did this story take place?
2. What did the doctor call the disease?
3. What treatment finally worked on the sick girl?
4. What was Elizabeth's treatment later called?