Jocelyn Krieger

Feverish blush of youth strikes a matron

I couldn't believe it. I left the doctor's office liltingly humming "Here's To You, Mrs. Robinson" under my breath. Snowflakes fluttered but appeared more like magnolia blossoms.

It seemed inconceivable that less than two hours earlier I'd dragged my pain-wracked body through the very same doors, never expecting to hear such a diagnosis. Never did I suspect I was about to make medical history.

One thing should have told me not to put too much faith in this medical genius, especially in my first visit. I have to admit, when you're past 40, you're willing to grasp straws in the wind to keep from drowning.

"I THINK YOU'RE not telling me the truth about your age, Mrs. Krieger," the middle-aged doctor began. It seemed to be — at least I wanted it to be — sincere comment.

"I would never think of you as being in your 40s," he continued. "In fact, not even in your 30s."

This was too much. Demurely, I pulled the sheet around me. Losing 20 pounds must certainly make a difference, I thought.

"Your tonsils look exactly like a 10-year-old's," he finished.

When he made his final diagnosis, I was willing to forgive him as soon as I looked at the lab request he'd written. He explained he thought his diagnosis highly unlikely because it was unheard of in women over 40. Just to be sure, he'd run a test.

THE LAB TECHNICIAN gave me a knowing grin as she jabbed my arm. Never have I parted so willingly with my blood.

"How do you think this happened?" she boldly inquired.

That's when I thought of Mrs. Robinson. Not that I subscribe to Mrs. Robinson's educatoional tactics as displayed in "The Graduate." But I could see my husband would probably ask the same question as the lab technician.

Driving home, I began to recollect other times when my medical history hadn't coincided with my peer group.

At 16, I idiotically treated my 9-year-old brother's "acne," smothering each "pimple" with blemish cream.

We both came down with chicken pox.

At 30, when they say a woman supposedly reaches her sexual peak, I didn't get sexier. I got mumps.

Do you know how much sympathy a 30-year-old married woman, the mother of three children, evokes with the mumps? Zilch.

HOW WAS I GOING to explain this obvious sign of left over youth? Would my husband respond to an aging "Lolita"?

The teenagers! I blamed all the symptoms of my progressive old-age on teenagers. Instead of senility, they'd given me this exotic disease of youth.

The appropriate background music for my homecoming wasn't "Here's To You, Mrs. Robinson." The final theme from the third act of "La Traviata" would have been splendid since I sounded more like a consumptive Violetta, coughing my way into the house. My teenage wit, Franklyn, greeted me.

"HEY, MOM! You don't have the "kissing disease," he smirked. "The doc just called and said your test for mononucleosis was negative. Probably just a 48-hour virus."

I sank my disease-ladened body into the nearest chair. The blush of youth was only fever, easily curable with aspirins.. The accompanying chill was definitely winter.

I should have known better than to believe in a doctor who looks into the eyes of a sophisticated, mature, worldly woman and compliments her on her tonsils.

JOCELYN KRIEGER is a freelance writer and a former actress in off-Broadway productions. As a singer, she has appeared with the Detroit Concert Band and Detroit Symphony Orchestra. She is currently a teacher of piano and voice, and is married to a tax consultant. Residents of Southfield, they have six children.

Sleeping dry on a cold winter's night

Sheila Rosen Seitzman

There were four houses at the end of that street in West Rutland, Vt.. My father told me that, while he was growing up, 48 children poured in and out of those doors. My grandmother had six of her own and "took in" two more. That meant 40 children lived in the other three houses.

My aunts and uncles, along with my father, were paired up to share double beds. Most rooms had two double beds. The extra beds were for company.

During the long cold winters, the childrens' bodies kept each other warm at night. My father slept with a brother who was a bed wetter. The child with the problem was not punished or ridiculed.

Of course, his mother asked him to try and not wet the bed, and he certainly knew that she didn't need extra linens to wash by hand. So a system was devised whereby my father, who was very much involved in the situation (he wanted to sleep in a dry bed), would wake up his brother several times during the night and remind him to go to the bathroom.

SIXTY YEARS AGO in West Rutland, the bathroom was an outhouse in the backyard. A tin basin was kept under the bed for middle of the night "emergencies."

My father, without any obvious resentment, programmed himself to wake up his brother for the nightly rituals which hopefully would guarantee a dry bed for them.

One night as my father was performing his service as sentry of the dry sheets, he witnessed an event that was to go down in family history. It was in the middle of the winter and the other bed in their room was occupied by a visiting aunt and uncle.

The boys had been told not to fool around at night because their aunt, tired from the long trip, was a light sleeper.

My father woke up his brother, who pulled the tin basin from under the bed. The latent scientific figuring in the brain of this young boy, who would later exhibit mechanical abilities, made him realize that the noise he would make while using the pan might wake up the guests and put him in an embarrassing situation.

He walked over to the window but the frosty glass dissuaded him from venturing outside. Without further deliberation, my uncle put his foot in the basin in order to deflect the noise.

What my uncle didn't know was that either the scraping of the pan as he pulled it out from under the bed or his footsteps to the window had already alerted his aunt to the situation at hand.

BEFITTING THE AWKWARD occasion, she closed her eyes and pretended to be asleep. But the noise she heard was so strangely muffled that she squinted in the dark to see what was happening.

She saw her nephew with his foot in the tin basin and was unable to guess a rational reason for it to be there.

That was the night the aunt decided that this boy must be peculiar. And even though my uncle grew up to become a very successful adult, there was always one aunt who shook her head in dismay every time she saw him.

The writer, a resident of Orchard Lake, was born and raised in New York City. She is a speech pathologist and has worked in public schools, hospitals and rehabilitation clinics and has had a private practice. She is the mother of three daughters and is married to a patent attorney. 1980 by Sheila Seitzman