

GRANNY NUNN REGAINS USE OF HER HANDS

By Paul M. Riley MD: FACS

“Dr. Riley, I am of no use to my family anymore. After I retired I looked forward to cooking, knitting, sewing and crocheting for all my children and grandchildren. But my hands have become so numb that I burn them when I try to cook. I drop my knitting needles because I can’t feel them. I have become useless to my family. I wish someone would take me out into the bush and shoot me!”

The year was 1970. I was examining a patient on the private ward at RFM Hospital in Manzini, Swaziland, when I heard a lady sobbing her heart out behind the curtain on the other side of the room. I had seen many family members going and coming from that area. When I went over and asked why she was crying, I recognized Granny Nunn. She was the matriarch of a large extended family in Swaziland. She then told me of her problem.

After the First World War the British Government had bought unused land in Southern Swaziland for Scottish War Veterans. Mrs. Nunn’s father had been one of these veterans. He died leaving many children and grand children. Now his daughter was a grandmother with children and many grandchildren.

Granny Nunn continued: “My doctor admitted me to the Hospital. He says I have arthritis in both hands. He is treating me with cortisone injections, but it is not helping!”

As soon as she mentioned numbness, I was alerted. “Mrs. Nunn, arthritis does not cause numbness. Let me examine your hands. I may be able to help you!” I replied. I noted that the first three fingers and half of her fourth fingers were numb. The muscles at the base of both thumbs were shrunken. “I am sure I can help you,” I told her. I had a hard time convincing her doctor that she had “carpal tunnel syndrome”. He had never heard of the condition. Reluctantly he agreed to let me operate on his patient.

The next morning surgery was done on both wrists. The ligament crossing both median nerves were very thick and hard. The nerve was very narrow under the ligaments and very swollen beyond the ligament! The ligaments were cut, completely releasing the pressure on the nerves. Amazingly, the day after surgery the patient had some feeling in her hands. Within a month she had good use of her hands! When I left Swaziland twelve years later Granny Nunn was still busy attending to the needs of her numerous family members.

Several years after I left Swaziland, Daisy Holmes came from Swaziland to visit her daughter, Faith, who was married to a neurologist (Tad McClure) at Loma Linda. She brought me a tablecloth and several doilies plus other items crocheted by Granny Nunn. Her hands were still working well! After so many years she had not forgotten that I had helped her to again become a useful member of her family!

