

The miracle of Donny Morton



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An Account of W.M. Branham on this article is also included.

The story of a father's light to save his son, against heartbreaking odds.

The Miracle of Donny Morton

Condensed from Chatelaine

Alma Edwards Smith

ON A POVERTY-STRICKEN farm near the little village of Archerwill in the bleak bushland of northern Saskatchewan lives Arthur Morton, whose desperate search for a miracle that would save his four-year-old son from a hopeless brain condition is a shining epic of devotion, faith and courage.

The Mortons, Arthur and Ella, already had two children, a boy and a girl, when Donald was born on April 25, 1947. But from the day he arrived a special bond of emotion drew him to his father. They were together every possible moment, while Arthur did the farm chores, called on a neighbour or worked in the garden.

"Donny wasn't like our other children," Ella Morton says, eyeing them affectionately. "They have temper tantrums and get into all sorts of mischief. But Donny was always happy and gay and patient. And he had a wonderful sense of humour for such a little fellow. How he laughed when we played little jokes on him!"

Then one day when Donny was two the Mortons noticed he was limping. They took him to the doctor in Archerwill, 13 miles away. But, as Arthur Morton explains, "the limp was only noticeable right after his nap. By the time we got him to town the doctor couldn't find anything.

"Winter closed in and the Morton

farm was all but isolated from the outside world. As the weeks went by the limp grew worse, and the handsome, well-built little chap began to lose weight. In the late winter his worried parents saw Donny reach for things and miss them by inches. He couldn't handle his toys, and he'd run into the furniture and knock things over. Then he developed a severe intestinal infection. Deeply anxious, the Mortons decided they must chance a trip to the Rose Valley Hospital, 11 miles beyond Archerwill. And so one wintry night Arthur Morton milked the cows, did the chores and set off in the sleigh over rough, snow-blocked roads. It was bitterly cold.

Ella Morton's heart broke a little that night. She longed to go with her husband and son, but the other children needed her and she was expecting her fourth baby in a few weeks. So she wrapped Donny in warm blankets, made sure there was plenty of wood for the stove in the tiny caboose built on the sleigh, and wished them Godspeed. Down the road Arthur stopped to get a neighbour woman to come along and hold Donny, while he drove the team.

A few miles from home the bright moon which had been lighting the way disappeared and a raging blizzard struck. Arthur tried to turn

back, but his trail was completely covered. The wind threatened to topple the caboose and cutter. When matters seemed at their worst, Donny had a convulsion. Arthur gave the horses their heads and turned full attention to his son. By the time the boy was sleeping, the snowdrifts were so high that the animals couldn't push through them. Arthur Morton went out into the blinding snow, urging the horses through waist-deep drifts, keeping the sleigh from tipping, and praying that they were going toward town. About six in the morning, far-off lights blinked through the flying snow. Fearing the cold wind on Donny if he opened the caboose door, the exhausted man clung to the back of the sleigh, trusting the horses to make their way alone. The next thing he was aware of was the flash of lanterns and strong arms helping them all into warmth and safety.

The 11 miles from Archerwill to the 14-bed Rose Valley Hospital were covered in comfort by car, on the open highway. There the doctor recommended that Donny remain a few days for observation. "It was hard for me to leave the little tyke there alone," Arthur Morton says. "But when I said I'd be back soon, he gave me a big kiss and a grin. He was a plucky kid."

Donny's hospital stay lengthened into weeks. He contracted pneumonia and was desperately ill. But his days were made brighter by

the arrival of his mother, who presented him with a baby sister.

It was while both parents were at the hospital that the doctor told them the boy's brain tissue was deteriorating; he would die within six months. There was no treatment he knew of that could help. He suggested they leave Donny in the hospital, but the Mortons would hear none of it. As soon as Ella was strong enough, Donny came home. He was spastic, had frequent convulsions and so much difficulty in swallowing that he ate practically nothing. Ella gave him a few spoonfuls of baby food or cooked cereal every 20 minutes or so, and Donny began to gain slightly in weight. He could not walk, but he could crawl at a great speed. He had wonderfully happy times with his family, laughing over amusing little games. When the roads were passable he loved to go to church.

Yet the gain was only temporary. "The hardest thing to endure during those weeks," says Ella, "was to watch Donny, who had always been so robust and healthy, going back to being a baby. Soon the new baby was eating more than he was." Summer came, and after the crop was in, the Mortons dipped into their meagre savings and took Donny from doctor to doctor in Saskatoon, and then to Regina. Always they gave the same verdict; a hopeless brain disease which would gradually paralyze him more and more until death came.

The Mortons would not accept the word "hopeless." "When we looked at those trusting blue eyes, we knew we could never give up." In April 1951 they sold three of their eight cows to pay for a plane ticket to Rochester and the Mayo Clinic. After extensive examinations the verdict was discouraging.

An almost beaten Arthur Morton, and a boy more dead than alive returned to the prairie homestead. But once again, under Ella's constant care and her gentle coaxing to drink a mouthful of juice or swallow a spoonful of porridge, the boy rallied.

Then Arthur remembered a faith healer, the Rev. William Branham, who had accomplished wonders for two deaf friends with whom he had worked several years before. The Mortons located the evangelist in Costa Mesa, California, near Los Angeles, where he was reportedly curing the sick by prayer. With hopes renewed, they sold more cows; they now had a total of \$250. Once again Ella sent them off - the dogged father and the trusting child, now barely able to breathe, and wasted to a frightening 20 pounds. Arthur took \$240, leaving Ella \$10 with which to manage the family. At Yorkton, Sask., Arthur found that a plane ticket cost nearly double the amount he had. "Everyone I met said, "Go home, you have done all you can." And then I'd look at the little tyke in my arms and his eyes would search my face as much as to say,

'We can beat this thing, the two of us,' and I couldn't go home." So he bought a bus ticket, and started off on a nightmarish journey. He chose the back seat where he could cradle Donny in his arms more easily, or lay him on the seat and massage the tiny wasted limbs to ease the muscle spasms. The supply of baby food soon ran out. At village stops Morton would slip across to a grocery store for suitable food for the lad, but when they stopped at larger centres he had to rely on depot restaurants. Twenty-minute stopovers were too short for the father to choose something his son could swallow, rinse out diapers in the washroom and get lunch for himself. More often than not Arthur went without food or drink.

"Donny couldn't cry to let me know when he was in pain or needed something," says the quiet Morton, "so I had to watch him constantly. When he grew restless I tried to guess his trouble. After a lot of trial and error I became quite proficient." In spite of hardships Arthur Morton looks back on that 2800-mile bus trip with happy memories. "We were so close together all the time. Even though Donny couldn't smile, when I told him funny things that happened along the way his eyes would shine, and I knew that even if we didn't find our miracle we were both happier than if he had stayed in the hospital waiting to die."

Morton arrived in Los Angeles in

June 1951, 18 months after Donny's condition had been pronounced hopeless. Now the unflagging faith that had carried them through so many adversities began to be rewarded. Bewildered and nearly penniless, Morton asked Travellers' Aid to help him find the faith healer. They phoned the Los Angeles Times for information.

The editor asked, "Why in heaven's name would anyone come all the way from Saskatchewan?" And Travellers' Aid answered, "Because this man believes that if God helps to heal others He will help his son." Here was a rare and wonderful devotion! A reporter was immediately assigned to drive the Mortons to the evangelist's meeting at Costa Mesa.

At the revival tent people were waiting in line for an audience with the man they hoped could heal their illnesses. But when they saw the slight, haggard man clutching the wasted little form they moved aside and motioned Morton into the tent ahead of them.

The healer asked no questions, but his eyes searched the boy's wide blue ones and saw his emaciated, twisted body. "Your son is suffering from a serious brain malady," he said to Morton. "But do not give up hope. With faith in God's power, and help from the medical world, your little son will live." Then, while 2700 persons bowed their heads, he prayed to God to save the child's life. Donny managed a smile for the first

time in weeks.

Unbelievably, Arthur's miracle began to take place. In response to the Times story of the Mortons' pilgrimage, letters arrived at the newspaper office, among them one from a physiotherapist and child educator. She recommended a noted Pasadena surgeon, Dr. William T. Grant, who had saved her after three years of helplessness following a brain injury, and she offered to assume expenses for his services.

Arthur Morton will always remember the doctor's words after the examination: "I think this is far from hopeless- if the boy can live through the operation."

That night Donny was admitted to St. Luke's Hospital in Pasadena. Doubtful that the undernourished, dehydrated child could survive, a small army of specialists stood by with oxygen, whole blood and emergency equipment during the delicate operation on the following morning.

Hours later Donny was wheeled out of the operating theatre, still alive! As Arthur Morton joyfully walked beside the stretcher, his eyes greedily devoured the little face, relaxed at last after months of painful, taut expression. There would be many hard days ahead, the doctor cautioned. The boy would need more operations and expensive medications - though the doctors had donated their skill. Arthur only shook his hand gratefully

and grinned. "I don't know where I'll get the money, but I will - I promise. After one miracle it's not hard to believe in another."

The doctor, in response to dozens of phone calls, issued a statement. "The child had a subdural hydroma, a layer of clear fluid that compresses the brain. This morning openings were made in the skull, and a subdural hydroma of moderate size was released from right and left sides. He withstood the operation well."

The story was flashed across the country by news services. Letters of admiration, sympathy and encouragement poured in to the hospital and newspaper. Most of them contained checks and cash to help with the staggering medical bills. Never once did Arthur Morton ask for a financial handout. He was fighting against desperate odds for his son's life, and he was willing to pay for victory with years of backbreaking labour if necessary. A brittle, sophisticated city saw a picture of a dying child, with trusting eyes and a lopsided smile, tenderly cradled in the arms of a poverty-stricken father who clung tenaciously to the belief that God is good, and the city's heart warmed with a desire to aid these strangers. Extra help was needed at the hospital to attend to the phone calls and mail. One of the desk clerks said happily, "We need two switchboards, one for regular calls, and one for Donny."

Said Arthur: "Last week we came to a strange city, a strange country even, where we didn't know a soul. Now when I walk down the street folks come up to me, shake me by the hand and ask me, 'How's the boy?' When they walk off, I look down and there is money in my hand."

During the anxious days, Arthur was always at the boy's bedside, encouraging him in a constant flow of chatter. Donny's eyes, when open, never left his father's face, and his frail hand, when he slept, still clutched Arthur's.

The crisis came Saturday night. Donny showed signs of weakening and the doctors were summoned. But once again the combined forces of a father's faith and the wonders of modern medicine coaxed the tiny life back from the valley of death, and the lad fell into a healing slumber just as dawn broke over the city. The anxious staff of St. Luke's Hospital uttered a little prayer of thanksgiving for the plucky little fighter. Then came the wonderful day when the doctor said with cautious optimism, "Donny Morton is going to get well." The Los Angeles Times put through a call to Archerwill. "Donny is going to get well," Arthur cried to his wife 2800 miles away. "He weighs 23 pounds now." Sobs of joy and relief were Ella's answer. A second operation to relieve pressure was necessary, and after the child spent six hours on the operating table another long vigil

began. When the boy became restless Arthur would take the fumbling hand and murmur, "I'm here, Donny." His constant presence was considered a vital factor in the child's survival.

Western Airlines decided the best reinforcement for a little fellow facing his third brain operation would be his mother, and they flew her to Los Angeles. The other children were left with a relative. Warm-hearted Saskatchewan neighbours took care of the haying. Four days after his third operation the boy was pronounced out of danger. In mid-September a gay leave-taking was held in the St. Luke's Hospital sun room. Donny could now sit up and reach out his arms to his parents in the first definite response since his surgery. He weighed 35 pounds. But his leg muscles were so badly atrophied, and the tendons so shrunk from inactivity, that another operation and many weeks of costly treatments were still needed. Donny was left behind, in the capable hands of the Pasadena physiotherapist who had first befriended him.

At home, radio station CKOM launched a "Donny Morton Fund" for the leg treatments. Children brought change from their piggy banks; a blind man gave five dollars; two orphans gave their birthday money. More than \$900 was raised, not as charity but as a medal for the shining glory of a father's faith and courage. And then one day late in October a

newscast informed radio listeners that Arthur Morton had flown to the coast to be with his son again. After surviving four critical brain operations, Donny, with tragic irony, had contracted pneumonia. Donny's oxygen tent was removed as his father, haggard with anxiety, bent close to the little form and coaxed, "Donny, Daddy's here. Come on, tyke, you're going to pull out of this."

But on November 2 Donny Morton died in his sleep, defeated in the end by an inexorable combination of pneumonia and meningitis. Sceptics will say, "You see? Miracles don't happen in the 20th century." But they are wrong. The personal miracle Morton sought, that his child's life be saved, was denied. But out of his search for it came another miracle, because this Saskatchewan farmer's selfless and unquestioning pilgrimage across half a continent stirred the hearts of thousands. There are plans for a new wing to be built on St. Luke's Hospital, to further the advancement of children's brain surgery, and reports of a book and a movie that would spread the story of Donny Morton. Arthur and Ella have dedicated in advance every dollar of the royalties to helping children who need care beyond their parents' ability to pay.

The Pasadena surgeon who operated on the boy has made this statement:

"Donny Morton is dead, and it would

seem that the tenacious struggle of the child and his father had not been justly rewarded. But the case of this one boy has brought to light the fact that there are hundreds of Donny Mortons; and some of the cases

since discovered are already on the road to recovery. Arthur Morton's unselfish devotion has not given him back his little boy, but it has opened the way for many other patients to receive adequate treatment.

The Following quote is from a sermon preached by William Branham entitled Demonology in 1953.

And I... And It said to her... Then after He got through, I said, "The Lord bless you and heal you, my sister." She went off the platform. Why, that... I told her; I said, "The Lord bless you and heal you." But when God speaks, and you hear Him, you know it--Who is this speaking then. It's not the preacher; it's Him that--that speaks. Then that's different. But what I say, just like any other man. I wanted her to be healed and I prayed for her; but that's all I could do.

But she said, "The Lord said so." You watch what He's saying, watch what He tells them, then you'll know just what to depend on.

When the little boy... Now, here's the "Reader's Digest," the way they wrote it. The little fellow had been brought from... They had to put him in a sled or something and bring him over ground. He's twisted. His little hands was drawn down in this

condition, his little legs up under him, about eight years old; his little head setting sideways; his eyes pushed one, one way and one, the other is a... Oh, it was a pitiful looking sight. And the little fellow shook like this and just smelled terrible.

And the poor little father, the little sled would turn over, nearly, when the horses packing them through the way, bringing them out. And he'd keep patting him on the moonlight night and saying, "Don't fear, Donny, honey. We're not whipped yet." Said, he knowed two people that'd been healed in my meeting, and said, "If I could ever get where that man's at, God will do something for my baby."

So he--they finally got to the airport, him and his wife, and they couldn't--they couldn't--hadn't--didn't have enough money for even one of them to come on a plane. They didn't have enough money to come on a train. So they had to take just the man, and

he brought the baby. And they come all the way from Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, to Los Angeles, California, and went into Traveler's Aid for help.

And then, of course, watch the "Reader's Digest." It said he was searching for the... Said, "A divine what?" A question mark. I'd imagine what they said. And so he said, "Never mind. This man believes this, if the man prays for his baby, he'll get help; so let's see if we can get it." And they dispatched a the paper; put a car, and they took way down in Costa Mesa, forty something miles down to a Assembly of God campgrounds where they had a big school there. And I was speaking to the ministers.

And they brought him in that night. And at--he... They said there was twenty-seven hundred people standing in line to be prayed for when we got there. And of course, everybody had to require a prayer card. And I was praying for the people.

Now, here's where I begin and would know. I seen them. Here he said, when he stepped out of the car, that all those people standing in the prayer line, they just stepped back when they seen that poor little ragged father, that little Canadian cap on, walking with this poor little baby, and coming along." He didn't eat. He had to change it just like a baby: its diapers and everything. And he didn't eat, didn't have time to eat. He'd just run and get a drink of

water and get him something to eat and then go on. Oh, it was pathetic story. And so he kept saying, "All right, Donny, we're not whipped yet, honey. We're not whipped yet." Just keep on like that.

And when the folks at the place saw, standing in that prayer line, way down through that field, when they saw this poor man coming, they just stepped aside to give him his place. Well, when he come to the platform, Billy Paul asked him for his prayer card. 'Course he didn't have any. He said, "Sir, I didn't even know I had to have a prayer card." Well, Billy and the ushers had orders to--for the people to line up; that's legitimately, and that's right, just exactly what it should be. And I heard him say, "Well, that's all right." Said, "What must I do now to get a prayer card? Where must I go?"

They was holding up the prayer line. I said, "What's the matter?"

He said a--a, "Just a man without a prayer card."

I said, "Well, just have him to step off to one side."

And I looked back and I seen that baby, and something said to me, "Call him now." I never seen the baby. So the "Reader's Digest" gives the whole article of it.

And I brought the little baby up, said, never asked a question but looked right into the little baby's face and said, "You bring this baby from Canada. And you come here by a bus, a Greyhound Bus. Traveler's Aid has helped you." And he'd been

there about five minutes. Said, "Traveler's Aid has helped you to get here. And the baby has been to Mayo Brothers and Johns Hopkins. It's got a rare brain disease, and there's no way for them to operate. The baby must die."

And he started screaming real loud. And I prayed for the little baby. He started crying real loud and started off the platform. He turned around. He said, "What about my baby? Will it ever get well?"

I said, "That, I don't know, sir." And while I was speaking to him, a vision broke forth. And I said, "Yes, your baby... Three days from now you're going to meet a woman with a--a brown looking, I guess you call it, coat-suit: it's got a coat here and a skirt beneath. And she's black headed. And she's going to tell you of some country doctor that can operate on that baby; and you won't believe it. But that's the only hope that you have, through the mercy of God, and that operation. You let the doctor operate on the baby."

Well, he went off the platform crying, and he... Well, the next day the baby seemed to be a lot better after he was prayed for: could move its little arms. Well, he forgot all about the woman; and he was going to go on that way. So about few days after that, he was walking down the street, getting it out, so it'd get in the air (You know?), walking it down the street; and a--or walking down the street with it in his arms, rather. And a lady said, "Well, what's the matter

with your baby, sir?"

And he said, "Well, it's a--a brain disease," he said, "a rare brain disease."

And she said, "You know, I know a doctor that operated on a baby like that one time that was that way and the baby's normal now."

"Well," he said, "But, lady..." Said, "Mayo Brothers said that this..." Said, "Wait a minute: 'a brown coat-suit, black hair..." Said, "Say, lady, where's that doctor at?" And "Reader's Digest" gives the place, who he was. And he took that baby over there, and the doctor performed the operation absolutely successfully. And the baby come out of it.

And so they had the baby around there; it got so he could run, meet his daddy and everything.

The daddy went back to plant his spring wheat or something another. Now, here's what the "Digest" didn't get (See?), what didn't picture. But we had to know behind, because if you did, that a hospital would bring suit against this paper, and there's where it would be; a slip-up come. Somebody left a window up one night and throwed a draft across the baby. And the baby taken pneumonia and lived about two days with the pneumonia, not with the disease, with the pneumonia killed the baby. The "Reader's Digest" give it. Then it goes ahead and gives a nice good write up about--about the miracle was already performed anyhow. ■

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