Kate Newcomb
Doctor of the Northwoods

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GLOSSARY

donate (v): to give money, materials, or time to a person or cause

embarrassed (adj): self-conscious or uncomfortable

graduate (v): to finish school or training and get an academic degree, like a high school diploma

grateful (adj): thankful

medical (adj): having to do with medicine or a doctor’s treatment

outhouse (n): a small building without running water that people use as a toilet

physician (n): a person trained to help heal or cure people; another name for a doctor

well (n): a place to get water; usually a hole dug deep in the ground

wood stove (n): a stove that is heated by burning wood

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Do you have a dream job? What would you do if someone told you that you could not have it?

Kate Pelham Newcomb wanted to become a doctor. But her father said no. He thought it was not a job for a woman. However, Kate did not give up. She followed her dream.

Dr. Kate Pelham Newcomb worked at the hospital till the end of her life. She died on May 30, 1956 during surgery to fix her broken hip. Dr. Kate had become a hero to many people. A museum was opened in Woodruff in 1988 to honor her life.

Kate followed her dreams. She was told she could not become a doctor, but she did. Building a hospital takes a lot of money, but Kate made it happen. Dr. Kate’s dreams helped improve the lives of many people in northern Wisconsin.
LAKELAND MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

Still Dr. Kate wanted to do more. People had to travel long distances to see a doctor because there were not many hospitals in the area. Kate dreamed of building a hospital.

Kate cured a sick woman in 1949. The woman’s husband was so grateful that he gave Kate $1,000 to build a hospital. Others started donating money as well. A class of high school students started the Million Penny Parade to collect pennies.

Kate also went on a TV show called This is Your Life. People from all around the world began to send money for the hospital.

Thanks to Kate, the Lakeland Memorial Hospital was opened in 1954 in Woodruff, Wisconsin.

EARLY LIFE

Kate Pelham was born on July 26, 1885. She lived with her parents in Leoti, Kansas. Her mother died while having a baby. Kate was only four years old. That same year, Kate’s father married a woman named Nona. Kate and her stepmother did not always get along.

Her family moved to Buffalo, New York in 1893. When she was in high school, Kate’s boyfriend died. She wanted to become a doctor because so many people in her life had died. She asked her father if she could study medicine, but he said no. So she studied to be a teacher instead.

In 1952, the Million Penny Parade collected one million seven hundred thousand pennies.

When Kate was three years old, she taught herself how to read. She memorized Bible verses and songs, and found the words on the page.
**KATE’S FIRST CAREER**

Kate **graduated** from high school. She then began teaching in 1906. Kate liked working with kids, but she still hoped to be a doctor.

The Pelham family moved to Boston, Massachusetts in 1907. Kate stayed in New York. Then her father asked her to move to Boston when Nona died later that year.

Kate lived in Boston for six years. She did not like it. She had to dress in fancy clothes and give parties. Once, Kate felt **embarrassed** when she spilled her food at a dinner party. She told her father again that she wanted to become a doctor. He finally said yes.

Dr. Kate traveled by car, on snowshoes, and even in a canoe to help people all over northern Wisconsin. She cured many sick people and delivered over 3,000 babies. No mothers died in her care.

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**Female vs. Male Teachers in the United States**

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<th>Year</th>
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<th>1906</th>
<th>1926</th>
<th>1946</th>
<th>1966</th>
<th>1986</th>
<th>2005</th>
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<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>90%</td>
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**Why did you want to become a doctor?**
I have always been interested in healthcare. I like learning how individuals’ habits can affect their health. I also enjoy learning about medical advances in medications and treatments.

**How long did you have to go to school?**
After high school, I went to college for four years and then medical school for four years. A joke among medical school classmates was, “Can you believe we are almost in 21st grade?” After medical school is residency, and that usually takes four years to complete. This may seem like a really long time, but when you are doing something that truly interests you, it doesn’t matter.

**What is the hardest thing about being a doctor?**
The hardest thing about being a doctor is when things are out of my hands. One example is when there is nothing more that can be done for a patient; the miracle is not going to happen. I also work very long hours.

**What is the best thing about being a doctor?**
The moments where you really connect with a patient are rewarding. Medicine can also be very confusing, so I like explaining it to people. This is very important because sometimes the patient is confused or scared. Then suddenly they are on the path to understanding and getting control of what is happening.
Tommy smashed his finger in the car door when he was 3½ years old. Kate took Tommy to see the local doctor. He asked Kate why she was not a physician. Kate said she didn’t want to be a doctor anymore. Too many people had died in her life. Medicine could not save them.

During a snowstorm, the doctor called Kate. A sick woman needed her help. Kate went to the woman’s house and saved her life. She decided it was time to work as a doctor again.

Kate started medical school in September 1913. She studied to become a doctor for mothers and babies because she remembered how her mother had died.

Doctor (Dr.) Kate graduated in 1917. She then moved to Detroit, Michigan to work in a hospital. There Kate fell in love with a man named Bill Newcomb. They got married in 1921.

Bill soon got sick. His lungs were not working correctly. Nothing seemed to help. Bill was going to die.
Dr. Kate and Bill went for car rides in the country. Bill said he felt better when he got fresh air. So, Kate and Bill decided to move to Eagle River, Wisconsin in 1922. This meant that Kate had to stop working as a doctor.

Kate took care of Bill, and his health improved. Life in a cabin was different from city life. Kate had never learned to cook. She now had to cook on a **wood stove**. The cabin also did not have indoor plumbing like her house in Detroit. So she had to carry all her water into the house from a **well** and use an **outhouse**.

Kate had a baby boy in January 1922. But the boy sadly died two days later. Kate and Bill had another boy in 1928 and named him William Thomas Newcomb, or Tommy for short. They also adopted a little girl named Eldorah in 1936.