

The Snow Baby

by [Peter Glassman](#) (May 2020)



Ginny with the Baby, Alice Neel, 1975

It had started to snow on my way home to our Jamaica, Long Island apartment, two miles from St. Albans Naval Hospital. "Barb, I'm home. It's snowing really heavy out there. Thank God I have the weekend off."

It's supposed to snow all weekend." She took my wet Navy overcoat. "Put your dirty uniform in the clothes hamper. Set a good example for our son," Barbara shouted.

St. Albans was the only Navy hospital for New York State. I started to yawn after dinner. I had been up the night before, and worked all day. The workload was constant. President Johnson had decreed that all stable Vietnam casualties were to be sent to a military hospital closest to their home of record, and we were always full at 2100 patients.

"Before you pass out, spend some quality time with David," she barked.

After complying, I nodded off. The next thing I knew it was Saturday morning. I looked out the bedroom window, and the snow was still coming down hard with a strong blowing wind.

Sunday morning the storm had ebbed to steady, but light snowfall and a biting breeze. The sidewalk snow was up to where the parked car door handles would be, if you could see them. The TV news showed New York Mayor Lindsey ducking snowballs.

Mayor Lindsey had refused to grant a salary raise to the striking garbage truck drivers. The trash removal trucks doubled as the boroughs' snow plows, and the Mayor had essentially grounded the plows.

Our phone rang and Barb handed it to me. "It's the hospital." Barbara looked grave. "It's the Executive Officer."

"Good morning, Looootenant Glassman."

He called me by my rank. Usually he called me Dr. Glassman or Peter when we were alone. This was not a good sign.

"Y'all have to come in to the hospital today." Captain Montague had a Mississippi twang. "We're short-staffed, and everyone within a three-mile walking radius has to come in. This is a direct order from Captain Falworth."

Falworth was the CO. He had a standing dictum that non-compliance with his orders meant immediate transfer to Vietnam. "To a front line under fire field hospital," were his exact words.

It seemed like hours walking in the street snow to make the two mile trudge to the St. Albans main gate. The marine at the gate asked for my ID card.

He saluted and snapped to attention, "Sir, per orders of the command, you are hereby to remain on post until further notice. Please report to the MOOD."

Today's Medical Officer of the Day was a surgeon and a good friend.

"We've had several large air-evacs since Friday, Peter." The MOOD wrote something on his clipboard. "I'm going to be in the OR all day, with the JMOOD. He's my surgical resident, so I'm making you the JMOOD—effective right now."

The Junior Medical Officer of the Day was based in the emergency room, and had to field all urgent hospital problems before taking them to the MOOD. I checked in with the emergency room head nurse.

"We have no urgent problems, but we do have another forty-six-man air-evac coming in later this afternoon." She looked tired. She'd been on duty since Friday.

After tending to the ER, my pager light came on. My number was 580 and was flashing angrily. We didn't have a PA system for pages. It would make the place noisy 24/7. I picked up the nearest phone. It was the MOOD.

"Peter, we have an obstetrical emergency, and Captain Montague has ordered the hospital, which is you as JM00D, to comply."

"OB? OB has two doctors. What's the problem down there?" As a Navy intern I had delivered over 300 babies, and at least twelve a month since I became a General Medical Officer.

"The problem is at Kennedy International Airport. The roads and the airports've been shut down for a day-and-a-half, and a lady has gone into labor. We're the closest hospital to them with a functioning heliport."

I felt my bowels activate and gurgle. "What are you saying?"

"The CO wants you to pick up the Kennedy Airport woman in labor, and bring her here to have the baby."

"Can't we send someone else?" Ever since basic training I've been terrified of helicopters.

"No, you'll have everything you'll need including a portable baby isolette. This is her fourth pregnancy, and the last two labors were only two hours long."

"How long has she been in labor?" I gulped.

"A little over an hour . . . maybe. Get your butt out to the helo pad. They're waiting."

The helicopter prop-wash produced an additive snowstorm. I spoke to the pilot through the headset microphone.

"What's the latest on the lady's progress?" I asked. Almost before he could answer we were at Kennedy. It was only four miles from St. Albans.

"All I got is 'no change' from the last report 30-minutes ago', sir." The pilot switched to his radio and received landing instructions.

I got out with the one Navy Corpswave I brought with me. The blanketed patient was yelling, "Hurry. Hurry. For Christ's sakes the baby's coming! I know it is. I have to push."

We scrambled to the helicopter and got her in. The helo's interior was as warm as we could stand. I got my heavy coat off and put on a sterile gown, gloves, a surgical mask, and hat.

"I have to push. I can't help it." She added a few unladylike expletives.

My adrenalin level shot up higher when I examined her. "The baby's head is almost here. Get us the hell out of here. Now!"

It seemed we were halfway to St. Albans in seconds. "Don't push Miss "

"It's not Miss . . . Doctor . . . It's Mrs . . . Mrs. Osgood Bradley . . . Oh God . . . I can't stop the pushing."

The baby's scalp was now at my fingertips. Baby boy-or-girl Bradley had black hair.

I could see the flashing lights at our landing zone. The snow density picked up with the prop-wash again. I couldn't let the baby stretch her out any more without her getting severe lacerations. I turned to the pilot. "You're going to have to hover the aircraft while I deliver this kid."

My corpswive was professional. She gave me everything I needed including the local anesthetic for the episiotomy. The baby came right out after the small incision. Baby Boy Bradley was now a living, screaming tax deduction.

“Give me three-minutes to sew up the episiotomy and then land. We have a healthy baby boy.” I heard the pilot radio my words verbatim to the waiting hospital personnel.

I visited Mrs. Bradley in her post-partum room after I tended to the air-evac patients. “Congratulations, Mrs. Bradley.” I looked at her as they brought the baby into the room for her to feed. “This January 1969 snowstorm will be a memorable one for all of us.”

She clutched my hand. “Oh thank you— and the US Navy.”

The label on the nursery’s clear plastic bassinet still said Baby Boy Bradley. “Do you have a name for him yet?”

“No, we can’t seem to agree on any name. I just got off the phone with my husband, and he made a suggestion.” She looked at me, at the baby, and back at me again. “What’s your first name, Dr. Glassman?”

I didn’t get home for three days, and was up most of those nights with air-evac and ER work. I told Barbara of my frightening helicopter snow adventure, and she just smiled. It’s been many years since that snowstorm, and I occasionally wonder how Baby Peter Bradley turned out. I hope he’s a solid citizen, and a productive member of society.

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