

An icy birth and an incorrect bill: The backseat delivery of a Yukon pioneer

Harvey Schroyen was born on an icy cold night in November 1950, near a small mining camp just south of the Arctic Circle. Finding the invoice for the delivery over 60 years later inspired him and his physician father-in-law to recount the tale.

Jim Corbett, MD
Harvey Schroyen

Harvey was born to Frank and Lil Schroyen in November 1950. Frank, a skilled carpenter, was lucky to find work with United Keno Hill Mines at Elsa, a remote frontier mining camp with few other families or women. Elsa is just south of the Arctic Circle, deep in Yukon Territory, and November is always dark, cold, and frozen solid with temperatures often reaching -45°F.

On the evening of 7 November, Lil began to feel labor pains and asked Frank to call on the doctor. He was very reluctant to disturb the camp doctor so late at night, but Lil insisted that it was time. So Frank walked up through the snow to the doctor's residence, woke him up, had a welcome drink or two (as you do), and then

This article has been peer reviewed.

Dr Corbett served as BCMA president in 1970-71. Harvey Schroyen is his son-in-law.

File _____		Mayo, U.S. December, _____ 1950	
M. L. F. Schroyen		Elsa, Y.T.	
TO Mayo General Hospital OR.			
From _____			
Hospitalization Mrs. Schroyen			
10 days @ 3.75		37.50	
Baby Schroyen 10 days @ .50		5.00	
delivery room		2.50	\$45.00-
<i>Laid Dec 22/50</i>			
<i>H.S.K. \$42.50</i>			

suggested they call back home to see Lil at 2 a.m. The doctor took one look at Lil and said they needed to leave for the hospital immediately.

The doctor was a young, newly qualified GP with limited experience, so he was keen to deliver the baby in the hospital rather than at home. He had the only working private vehicle in the camp, and the nearest small bush hospital was 30 miles away, down a long, snow-drifted road, in the village of Mayo.

Frank had to work in the morning, and couldn't go with them. It was impossible to get time off and would have been highly unusual anyway, in the 1950s, for him to accompany the two. Lil and the doctor set off into the dark, dangerously cold early morning to the hospital. No one else was on the road at that time of night. The doctor stopped the car on the side of the road near Half Way Lakes and examined Lil, and it became clear that the baby

had decided to come immediately. Lil gave birth in the backseat of the doctor's car with her boots on. Harvey, a Yukon pioneer, was born. Lil looked up to see the big wide eyes of the doctor and reassured him that she had done this before—not to worry. They carried on and eventually arrived at the Mayo hospital.

At the hospital, Lil was given the hard operating table to sleep on as all the other beds were full. According to hospital policy, she was not to get out of bed for at least 5 days and eventually stayed in the hospital for 10. When the invoice was presented to Frank, he pointed out that the delivery room had not been used and, therefore, he should not be charged \$2.50. The invoice (**Figure**) shows the delivery room amount crossed out. Money was scarce back then, you know, and you were lucky to have a job. **BCMJ**