

September 1978 95¢

# Good Housekeeping

121  
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# "MOMMY, IS THAT YOU?"



**Horribly disfigured after a car crash, Patsy Grant knew her life depended on whether her little girls would still love her**  
By Nilah Rodgers

**T**he moon was bright on the flat West Texas plain as Patsy Grant drove home to the little town of Levelland. She smiled at her husband Ronny, fast asleep next to her. He looked angelic, she thought, and, in fact, he was very special. He'd always been so considerate and so helpful with their eight-year-old twin daughters, Dina and Djna.

He'd been especially wonderful since the onset of Patsy's mysterious illness. The doctors had finally diagnosed her complaint as *mastocytosis*, a bone-marrow disorder so rare only some two dozen cases had ever been recorded. Her symptoms were like those of severe heart disease, arthritis and debilitating migraine headaches, all lumped together. Because of it, Patsy counted heavily on Ronny's love and he never disappointed her.

So, when he'd said earlier he was too sleepy to

drive, she couldn't complain, even though she was sleepy too. On top of that, she could feel a blinding headache building up.

As she drove, she must have blacked out momentarily, for the next thing Patsy knew a tree was looming in the car's headlights. The car struck the tree with a crash like an explosion. Patsy's head smashed violently into the windshield, yet she remained conscious.

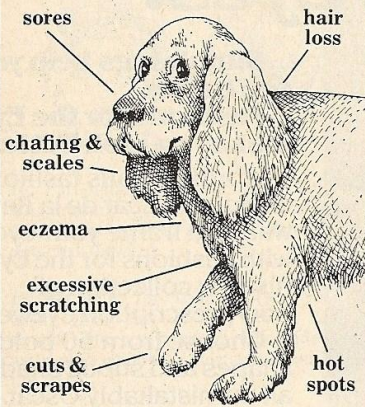
"Ronny!" she screamed. "Ronny!" The only answer was silence.

Patsy felt as though her face had been shaken loose from the back of her head. She tried to touch her nose, but couldn't seem to find it. She could taste blood on her lips. When she tried to reach out to Ronny, a sharp pain in her side stopped her. Her foot was pinned down and she couldn't move.

*continued on page 210*

Illustration by Alan Reingold

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## "MOMMY, IS THAT YOU?"

*continued from page 121*

After what seemed a long time, she heard voices. "Help Ronny! Please, help Ronny, he's hurt," she cried. Patsy didn't know it then, but a sliver of steel had punctured Ronny's temple at the moment of impact. He had died instantly.

"It would be a blessing if she would lose consciousness," Patsy heard someone whisper. And just before she finally drifted into unconsciousness, she heard a siren.

**H**er injuries were so massive that the two doctors on duty at Levelland Hospital could give her only emergency first aid and then send her to a hospital with more extensive facilities.

"Get her blood type and get fluid into her," a doctor told the nurses. "And someone call Methodist Hospital in Lubbock and tell them to have an orthopedist and a general surgeon standing by to operate in 30 minutes."

"Where's Ronny?" Patsy moaned as she came to.

"He's gone!" the doctor said without thinking.

Patsy wanted to scream but, mercifully, she fainted again. The doctors at Methodist thought Patsy would die. She was frail from mastocytosis and frequent bouts of pneumonia. As a result of the crash, half her face and almost all her nose had, in effect, disappeared. The cheek bones on the "good" half of her face were cruelly crushed. The doctors surmised that the broken facial bones had severed every muscle, tendon and nerve in her face, resulting in total blindness. Her rib cage was fractured, indicating heavy damage to vital internal organs. And her foot was broken.

For days she hovered between life and death. Her mother and sister Pam kept a sorrowful vigil in the waiting room. Though conscious for only brief intervals, Patsy knew when the day of Ronny's funeral arrived. Grief overwhelmed her, but she worried about Dina and Djna.

When her sister came to visit after the funeral, the first question Patsy asked was, "How are the girls?"

"They didn't cry," consoled Pam. "Every time they felt like crying, they remembered something good about him. They remembered so many good things."

If Dina and Djna could remember the good things, so could she, Patsy thought. And she would live—for her husband Ronny and their daughters.

A few days later, Patsy made a momentous discovery: she could see a little through the slit in her bandages! She had sight in her right eye! And then her doctor told her, "You're ready to be moved to a private room."

The life-or-death battle had been won, but it would still take a long time before Patsy could get out of bed to hobble about her room on crutches. When she first looked into a mirror, she stared in horror at the toothless, swollen mass that had once been a pretty face. Dina and Djna would surely scream and run away when they saw her. Thank

heavens she hadn't let anyone bring them to the hospital.

The day finally came when the doctors told Patsy she had to go home. She again examined herself in the mirror. The word "monster" describes me perfectly, she thought.

The doctors had given her dentures, but her jaws had to be wired up and "buttoned" to her forehead. A black patch concealed her blind eye and a bandage covered the hollow that had been her nose. She had no feeling in her face. She was unaware of her tears until they fell onto her hand. In addition, she still could not walk without crutches. She was certain she would frighten the twins.

Maybe the girls would have been better off if she had died with Ronny, she thought.

Dina and Djna had been staying with Patsy's sister Pam and her husband Jimmie. They were to remain there for a while and Patsy would stay with Ronny's parents, Mama Pearl and Papa.

When Mama Pearl and Papa ran down the front steps to embrace her, Patsy couldn't help noticing how they carefully averted their eyes from her face. If it was this hard for them to look at her, how could she expect her girls to do it?

Patsy wondered how her sister had prepared the twins for their first visit. "Your mother won't look or sound like she used to," she'd probably say, "but, remember, she's still your mother. Be sure you give her a hug and a kiss. Be happy that she's alive."

**P**atsy waited for Dina and Djna in Mama Pearl's living room. Nervously, she clasped and unclasped her hands in her lap. Then, as the door burst open, Patsy instinctively flung her arms out wide to hug her daughters.

Instead of running to her, they both suddenly stopped, then stepped backward. They didn't say a word. They just stared, wide-eyed and silent.

"Dina? Djna?" Patsy called.

"Mommy, is that you?" Djna asked.

"It is! It is!" said Dina excitedly. "It's Mommy's voice!"

"Mommy!" the twins shouted and ran to her arms.

"Oh, Mommy, we know it's you now," said Djna.

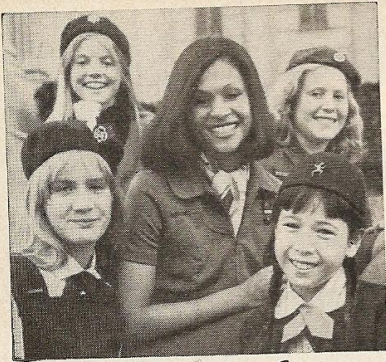
Tentatively, they touched their mother's swollen, bruised arms and gently patted her bandaged cheek. Then, at last, they kissed her.

"We love you for what you are, not what you look like," Dina said. Patsy knew the sentence had been memorized. But the kiss that accompanied it was natural.

"When you're pretty inside, it doesn't matter about the outside," Djna added, kissing her again.

The girls knelt in front of her, studying her intently. She did not flinch before their close inspection. Finally, she hugged them to her with all her strength.

Patsy decided to undergo plastic surgery to restore her face. The first surgeon she visited couldn't help her. Then a reconstructive surgeon in Houston took one look and said, "I could



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operate, but you might not look any better afterward."

Back home in Levelland, she was more self-conscious than ever. She only left the house because the twins forced her to.

Patsy would drive them to the supermarket, but make them go in for the groceries. She stayed behind the wheel of her car, her head half buried in a magazine. But Dina and Djna refused to let her hibernate.

"We think you're the best mother ever," they said and they pushed her to new activities. Fourteen months after the accident, Patsy's case history and photos were sent to a renowned plastic surgeon in Florida. He wrote to say he could help her, if she was willing to undergo five or six operations. Patsy agreed.

The doctor welcomed Patsy into his private office, but he seemed upset. He had a medical report on his desk from her doctors back in Texas. "Mrs. Grant," he said, "you're due for your first operation tomorrow and I just learned that you have mastocytosis. If you are given a general anesthetic with mastocytosis, you could go into shock."

Then, he said, "If you still want me to operate, I'll have to do it with just a local anesthetic. Be here at 7 A.M. tomorrow."

Patsy stumbled out of the office, so scared that she became violently sick. She wanted to run away from the hospital forever, but she knew that she would be back for the operation in the morning. She'd be back for Dina and Djna.

The local anesthetic deadened some of the pain, but she was aware of every move the surgeon made. When he scraped her cheekbones, it terrified her. When he took a piece of a rib (to graft as the center of her new nose) and cartilage from her ear (to construct the nostrils), she shook in terror. Finally, he covered her cheeks with skin grafted from her upper arms.

At last, the first operation was over. Afterwards, as Patsy sat in her room, fighting the pain, she kept thinking, "Before long, I'll be back home with my girls."

But things did not go well. When the doctor took off the bandages, he exploded in anger. The sponge-like synthetic he'd inserted to build up her cheeks had been rejected by her body and the skin he'd grafted from her arms over the synthetic had not healed. But, at least, there was no longer just a hole in the place where her nose should be.

"Next time," the doctor said, "I'll lift up fat tissue in the cheeks and sew it in place to keep the synthetic there. Now go home to your girls."

When Patsy arrived home, she knew Dina and Djna were disappointed not to see a dramatic improvement. "Mother, you look . . ." Dina hesitated slightly before saying, "better."

The first reconstructive operation took place four years ago. Since then, Patsy has had 12 operations on her face, 11 of them with only a local anesthetic. Every time Patsy returned home to Levelland after an operation, Dina and Djna greeted her with, "Mother, you look really good!" "You're one of the prettiest mothers we know."

Improvement has been slow. Had Patsy known at the start what lay ahead—and what still lies ahead—she probably wouldn't have begun. After the twelfth operation, her doctor said, "When the insurance company quits paying for this, tell me and I'll quit charging."

Patsy still has not forgotten the horror of the accident, and she still misses Ronny—but she no longer wishes she had died with him. These days, she looks to the future more than to the past. The special love of Dina and Djna, her doctor's stubborn skill and her own courage have made her whole again. Once more, she's able to know life's sweetness and joy. ♦

## GOOD HOUSEKEEPING FASHIONS

Coats featured in A WINDFALL OF GREAT NEW COATS (pages 148-155) are available at the stores listed below. All prices are approximate; prices slightly higher west of the Mississippi.

MISS GALLERY (page 148, left)  
Herringbone reefer is a wool blend. Sizes 6 to 16. \$130.

New York and selected stores . . . Saks Fifth Avenue  
New York, N.Y. . . . Macy's  
Portland, Ore. . . . Lipman's  
Washington, D.C. . . . Woodward & Lothrop  
Accessories: Derby, Frank Olive. Scarf, Oscar de la Renta for Accessory Street. Gloves, Ben Berger. Bag, Oleg Cassini for Dame. Panty hose, Hanes. Shoes, Sears.

MISS GALLERY (page 148, center)  
Steamer has sweater-knit collar and cuffs, is a wool blend. Sizes 6 to 16. \$135.

Baltimore, Md. . . . Hecht's  
Columbus, Ohio . . . Lazarus  
New York and selected stores . . . Saks Fifth Avenue  
New York, N.Y. . . . Macy's  
Pittsburgh, Pa. . . . Kaufmann's  
Portland, Ore. . . . Lipman's  
Washington, D.C. . . . Woodward & Lothrop  
Accessories: Bandolier belt and matching bag, David Mehler for Dame. Hat and string gloves, Sears. Sweater, Collage. Boots, Larry Silverstein for Seven Star.

ANDY JOHNS (page 148, right)  
Brown diagonal-tweed coat is button-front with a wrap belt, in a wool-blend fabric. Sizes 5/6 to 13/14. \$90.  
Bloomington, Ill. . . . Roland's

Buffalo, N.Y. . . . Adam, Meldrum & Anderson  
Indiana, Pa. . . . Brody's  
Louisville, Ky. . . . Stewart's  
Modesto, Calif. . . . C.H. Dunlap  
Rochester, N.Y. . . . B. Forman  
Wilmington, Del. . . . Lucille's

Accessories: Scarf worn across coat, Oscar de la Renta for Accessory Street. Gloves, Grandoe. Hat, Ernie. Boots, Sears.

TOP FLIGHT (page 149, left)  
Button-front cape is a wool-blend lined in acetate. Sizes small, medium and large. \$100.

Akron, Ohio . . . O'Neil's  
All stores, Va. . . . Rices Nachmans  
Baltimore, Md. . . . Hutzler's  
Chicago, Ill. . . . Chas. A. Stevens  
Cincinnati, Ohio . . . Shillito's  
Houston, Texas . . . Palais Royal  
Los Angeles, Calif. . . . The May Co.  
New York, N.Y. . . . Gimbel's  
Oakland, Calif. . . . Liberty House  
Omaha, Neb. . . . J.L. Brandeis  
Richmond, Va. . . . Thalimer's

Accessories: Cowboy hat, Madcaps. Gloves, Grandoe. Sweater, Collage. Belt, Mulberry. Boots and jeans, Wrangler.

DOMINO (page 149, center)  
Camel cape is a wool blend. Sizes small, medium and large. \$140.

Cincinnati, Ohio . . . Shillito's  
Minneapolis, Minn. . . . Jackson Graves  
Portland, Ore. . . . Lipman's  
Accessories: Fur boa, Don Kline. Hat, Ernie. Panty hose, Givenchy for Round-the-Clock. Boots, Golo.

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