

The Story of Mary Knight
Rohnert Park Chamber of Commerce Article for September 7, 2021
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When Mary Knight walked into Dr. Monroe's office back in 1932, she was bright and excited; her red hair neatly pinned in a bun. She had finally gotten pregnant and was due any day now. As it was the middle of the Depression, money was tight, so she had limited her visits to midwives. But since she was about to deliver, she asked Dr. Monroe to give her an exam just to make sure everything was fine.

As Dr. Monroe examined her, he sensed that something was not quite right. Yes...her tummy was vastly enlarged and low, she had a swayback posture, she had that mysterious deposition of abdominal fat, and her breasts certainly had the appearance of a pregnant woman.

But her naval was still an innie, not an outie. And the stethoscope was not picking up any fetal heartbeat.

Mary Knight was not pregnant at all.

She had a condition called pseudocyesis (sue-doe-si-eee-sis), and it can happen to women who desperately want to be pregnant. They tell themselves they are pregnant, and their brains believe them! Their abdomens swell, they stop menstruating, they lactate, they have morning sickness, and they actually feel their babies kicking.

But there is no baby.

As we have learned together, your brain accepts what you tell it, and in the extreme case of Mary Knight, when she truly believed she was pregnant, her brain made sure that her body reflected that belief!

So what should Dr. Monroe do? Rather than simply tell her that she had been lying to herself for nine months, he gently said, "The baby is coming now. It will be born this afternoon. I'm going to give you some ether so that you won't be in pain. But labor has begun and we can proceed."

Dr. Monroe made sure that he was there when she awoke. "Mary. I'm so sorry!" he said, "The baby was stillborn. I did everything I could but it was no use. I'm so...so sorry!"

Mary broke down crying, but bravely accepted Dr. Monroe's news. The medical report then describes how her abdomen began to immediately subside. She soon left Dr. Monroe's office to go home and tell her husband.

A week later, she burst into Dr. Monroe's office with her belly as big as before. "Doctor!" she shouted. "I've come back! You forgot to deliver the twin!"

When you say to yourself, "I just can't do that because I'm too old, or too stuck in my ways, or too overweight, or too underweight, or this just isn't a good time" your brain not only agrees, but makes sure you can't. But when you say, "You know...I can really see myself doing that," your brain not only agrees just as quickly, it then looks for creative ways for you to do it, and also finds the energy.

Be careful what you are saying to yourself. Your brain takes you at your word...more than you could possibly know!

ⁱ V.S. Ramachandran, M.D., PhD, Phantoms in the Brain, Page 212