

She Answers The Call Beyond Duty

By PAQUITA FINE

The wind whistled coldly through the cracks in the wall of the backwoods shanty and mingled with the crying of a small child and the soothing words of an older one. The pain-twisted face of the slowly dying mother on the rumpled bed turned hopelessly and helplessly towards the sounds. Tears ran down her face.

Coming into this house, another woman might have been tempted to turn and leave. Not Jeanette Falconer. Meeting the eyes of the suffering woman upon the bed, and reading the mute appeal, she turned first to the two children. A few words of comfort and the crying stopped. Within a few minutes one little girl was busy stuffing paper into the cracks of the wall, and the other was warming water on the small wood stove. A hypodermic injection eased the pain of the mother. A trip to her car and Jeanette was back with clean linen and soap. Within two hours the shabby little house had taken on a new look, the warm cozy look of a home. The patient, freshly bathed, lay relaxed on a clean bed. The children, scrubbed and neat, were intent upon their job of "helpin' Miz Falconer," and the aroma of the stew bubbling away on the stove filled the room with a mouth-watering odor.

These services are above and beyond the duties of the volunteer job Mrs. C. F. (Jeanette) Falconer holds as chairman of the Cancer Society's Service Committee. But love and compassion for all humanity is the key to the whole personality of Jeanette Falconer. A registered nurse who no longer works at her job for pay, but works even harder for free, warmth and understanding flows from her to reach through pain and fear to relieve a patient as much as the drug she may be administering. A soothing hand for the patient, a sympathetic ear for the others of the household, and Jeanette is a "member" of the family minutes after she enters a door. She cuts through the miles of red tape for necessary aid. Clothes, food, and medicine are quickly rounded up. If the need is urgent and immediate, she doesn't hesitate to dig into her own purse.

Last year Jeanette Falconer made more than 150 visits to

cancer patients in Orange County, and many more "just to visit." But it is not only the Cancer Society that reaps the rewards of a woman like Mrs. Falconer. Public Health Nurse Deeda Sessoms, caught between two emergencies, may call her with the certainty that she will respond to the call without hesitation. An indigent patient at the hospital, whose family is exhausted from night vigils, gets the same response, even though the following day Jeanette must be up early to care for her own family of four children and a husband who receive the same loving attention. Small wonder she was recently named Woman of the Year by the La Sertoma Club.

Born in Iowa City in 1918, Jeanette grew up in a family of eight children. "We lived next door to another family of eight children," said Mrs. Falconer, "and one of the older girls had gone into nursing. She was such a wonderful person, ready to listen to our small troubles or bandage a skinned knee, that we all adored her. Knowing her, I never wanted to be anything but a nurse."

A graduate of St. Patrick High School, Jeanette completed her nursing training at Mercy Hospital where she continued to work on general duty for the next two years. "I was very young then and there was the desire to see the rest of the world, so one day I resigned and set off with another nurse in a ramshackle old car for California. We stayed one month and headed back home."

A short time later, she joined the staff of the University of Iowa Hospital. One of her patients was Jim Falconer. In World War II, Jim joined the Marines. Returning to Quantico, Va. for Officers Training School, he immediately wrote Jeanette and proposed. They were married in Washington, D. C., in 1943.

"We found a little room over a garage and that was our first home," Mrs. Falconer recalled. "Jim only drew \$70 a month and I went to work at the civilian hospital there. For some crazy reason, I had neglected to bring any uniforms. I must have thought we were just going to live on love."

"With the completion of OCS, Jim received his overseas orders. I wanted to be with him



MRS. C. F. FALCONER

until the last minute but we didn't even have enough for me to follow him to the coast. But there was this little Greek restaurant where the proprietor had taken a fancy to us and served us wonderful dinners for only a quarter. He didn't even know if he'd ever see us again but he insisted on loaning us \$600 for a car so that I could make the trip. We sold the car when we reached the coast and sent back the money but I'll never forget his kindness. Six days later, Jim shipped out and was gone for almost a year. Julie, our oldest, was born while he was in the Pacific."

"After the war, we moved to Columbia, S. C. where Jim went to work with the VA as vocational adviser for the blind. I stayed home to keep house and care for Julie and our new baby, Joanne. Then, one day, returning from work, something flew in through a car window and into Jim's eye. He was in such pain, he was put into the hospital. Our neighbors were marvelous. They took care of the children so that I could nurse Jim, but despite everything, he lost the sight in the injured eye."

"For a year and a half, Jim

worked for the New York Life Insurance Company. Then he decided to open his own agency in Columbia, S. C. and we lived there for 10 years. The next four years were spent in Atlanta, Ga., with Jim acting as vice-president for Coastal States Life Insurance."

During this time, Mrs. Falconer did not work except on private duty for friends or relatives with "the compliments of the management." Her family had increased with the arrival of Cathy and Mike, and she was content with her role of housewife and mother.

"Then one day in 1957 Jim had to go to Raleigh on business. He passed through Chapel Hill and fell in love with it. When he came home, all he could talk about was the flower vendors, the benches on the sidewalk, the campus, and the bare feet of some of the students. He made it sound like heaven and it wasn't long before we decided we just had to live here."

"We rented a house in Colonial Heights while we built our home on Christopher Road. Jim designed our house and we all think it's a wonderful livable family home."

Shortly after the Falcons moved into their new home, Mrs. Falconer was asked to serve on the service program of the Orange County Cancer Society.

"I didn't know what it involved," she said, "but May Neville came in at the same time as executive secretary and we learned together. La Sertoma has helped us in so many ways—the Loan Closet and dressings for patients. The Home Demonstration Clubs help and this year the Grange Clubs are making hospital gowns for patients. Both the funeral homes, Walker's and Chapel Hill Funeral Home, loan us hospital beds free of charge and even deliver and pick up free of charge. We have to buy mattresses though, or re-do old ones, and right now is as good a time as any to appeal to anyone who has single mattresses they would like to donate. We always need old sheets for bandages too."

At present, Mrs. Falconer is working with 16 patients. She

goes every second Tuesday in the month to Hillsboro to pick up the surplus food for her patients which consists of flour, rice, cornmeal, wheat oats, peanut butter, lard, cheese, powdered milk and canned meat. To supplement this, she often bakes a cake or a pie on her own time as a reward to the children in the family who are "helping" her.

Asked why she did so much on a volunteer job that doesn't even require a knowledge of nursing, Mrs. Falconer said, "I've gotten so much out of it—so much more than I've put into it. This still lets me be a nurse without interfering with my family life. When I visit with a patient and just talk to them, they always seem so glad that it makes me feel good too. I suppose part of this feeling is what Lloyd Douglas meant when he wrote Magnificent Obsession and which I read when I was about 16. What little you give comes back to you a thousand-fold."

Mr. Falconer, owner of Falconer's Insurance Agency, is this year's president of the Cancer Society and a past president of the Cancer Society and a past president of its educational program. According to Mrs. Irving Dodge Jr. of the La Sertoma Club, Mr. Falconer is another person who donates his time far beyond the normal call of civic duty.

"If there are two patients at the hospital needing extra care at night, Jim may be with one and Jeanette with the other," she said. "There just isn't anyone else like this couple."