

Zion Lodge Stories

Why One Toenail Grows Straight Up

Part of the toenail on one of my big toes grows straight up. It will start to tear a hole in the top of my sock if I don't keep it clipped off. It's not that I'm a genetic oddity. It all dates back to my days at Zion Lodge.

When I was a teenager, I was troubled with ingrown toenails on my big toes. I had already suffered through two operations (it can only happen four times, twice on each big toe) when I got the job at Zion Lodge, so I was pretty familiar with the symptoms and the cure. The cure is local surgery to cut out the toenail right to the root. When the local anesthetic wears off, it hurts like hell.

I read through the contract I got from Utah Parks and noticed that one of the benefits was medical care. I could tell that in about a month, I would have a problem with another ingrown toenail, so it seemed like it would be a nice thing to save my parents a little money and have Utah Parks pay for fixing it.

Sure enough, in about a month, my big toe started to turn red from infection and ooze pus. I waited long enough to make sure it was pretty obvious and then went to see my boss, "the man from Paragonah". I told him I knew exactly what it was because it had happened before. He didn't seem very enthusiastic about authorizing treatment, however. He looked my toe over pretty good. I pointed out that it wouldn't be too much longer before I wouldn't be able to walk on it. I remember Utah Parks as generally being cheap about everything, but finally, he told me I could hitch a ride on the commissary truck into Cedar City to see the doctor they had on contract but I had to do it on my own time.

That was one of the great things that happened to me because I now have this memory of Cedar City the way it used to be, with old fashioned storefronts up and down both sides of Main Street. Back then, Cedar City looked a lot like a movie set because the grocery store, bank, and city hall that are there now

weren't there then. I bought a shirt at a sidewalk sale in a store that isn't there anymore. It's a nice memory.

The doctor Utah Parks had on contract is not a nice memory. I knew what this operation should have been like and this guy butchered it. To make things worse, he prescribed an over-the-counter pain pill that was mainly just aspirin. (And I'll bet he charged Utah Parks for a full prescription on it anyway.) I was used to scoring some heavy duty drugs for this operation and I was really bummed out about just getting aspirin.

That night was my night off from my job at the Lodge, but at about the time the crew started to gather, the local anesthetic was wearing off. I was hurting. Even though I missed my normal sleep cycle to keep the appointment in Cedar City, there was no way I was going to get any sleep that night so I limped down to the Lodge to have something to do.

One of the crew had to move a desk with a thin piece of plywood on the front. He asked me if I could just hobble a few steps and help him lift it. Sure enough, it slipped out of my fingers and the plywood fell directly on the toe.

Blood, blinding pain, searing agony! The guy I was helping thought it was really funny though.

By the end of the night, my toe had stopped bleeding again and the pain was only horrible, not unbearable.

The crew was waxing the dining room floor that night. At that time, it was a tile floor that needed to be waxed every few weeks. We did it in thirds, moving all the tables and chairs from one third to do the work and then moving them back at the end of the night. The crew was just finishing up and starting to move the chairs back. A couple of them started competing to see who could carry the tallest stack of

chairs. Of course, I could carry more chairs at once than anybody else. At least, I could for a few steps.

Then the whole stack fell right on my toe.

Blood, blinding pain, searing agony! This time, the whole crew thought it was really funny.