



Dr. Koop Tells of Twin's Tragic Death—Page 48

**Late
Sports, News
and Stocks**

The Evening Bulletin

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 2, 1976

D



FIFTEEN CENTS

Dr. Koop Explains How Alta Choked

By HENRY R. DARLING
Of The Bulletin Staff

Dr. C. Everett Koop pointed to the second button down from the top on his shirt and said:

"It was stuck just about here."

He was pointing to the relative location in his own body of the bean that caught in the throat of Altagracia Rodriguez and killed her.

"It was stuck so tightly and so far down that no slap on the back, no Heimlich maneuver, nothing could have saved her. Even if it had happened in the operating room we couldn't have saved her. Her mother estimates she was dead in 90 seconds."

Alta Rodriguez, the 3-year-old former Siamese twin sister of Clara, choked to death last Friday in the yard of her home in Las Auyamas, a country village high in the mountains of the Dominican Republic.

Clara and Alta were separated in an historic operation at Philadelphia's Children's Hospital on Sept. 18, 1974, by a team of surgeons working with Dr. Koop.



Dr. C. Everett Koop

Now they have been separated again, by a common green bean, an "habitual" bean, not much bigger than a kidney bean, Dr. Koop said, that Alta apparently put in her mouth and swallowed while sneezing or laughing.

In a press conference at the hospital yesterday, Dr. Koop said he left for the Dominican Republic last Sunday as soon as he learned of the tragedy.

He said he was shocked, not only by Alta's death, but also by the attitude of the newspapers in Santo Domingo, capital of the Dominican Republic.

"They are blaming the twins' mother, Mrs. Farida Rodriguez, for Alta's death," he said.

"They say she was at fault for taking the children to Las Auyamas where there is no medical care, that she wasn't watching them carefully enough and that because they have artificial organs, they needed special care.

"Well, it was my feeling that they would be better off in the country atmosphere of Las Auyamas instead of the city.

There has been some thought that Alta had choked on a coffee bean. The yard where she was playing next to the Rodriguez home and store is paved with concrete to form a drying area for coffee beans.

But Dr. Koop said the drying season

was over and the object that stuck in Alta's throat was definitely a green bean of the type the twins' father, Salvador, sells in the grocery. He described the tragedy as "the most freakish accident I have ever seen."

Dr. Koop, who was the twins' godfather, said the funeral was held over until his arrival Sunday. The funeral procession began from the Rodriguez' new home in San Jose de Ocoa, a larger town about 14 miles from Las Auyamas. The home was built for the family by the Dominican Republic government after the birth of the twins.

As the procession passed through the town, people kept joining it in accordance with Dominican tradition," the physician said. "By the time we got to the church, we had picked up 1,000 people."

The Rev. Louis Quinn, rector of the San Jose church, met the procession at the door and helped carry the casket to the front of the church. Dr. Koop, who has a degree from the Eastern Baptist College, delivered the sermon.