



**Mayo Clinic Heritage Films
Discussion Guide**

**Born in a Storm:
The Tornado That Gave Rise to Mayo Clinic**



On the evening of August 21, 1883, a tornado ripped through the town of Rochester, Minnesota, leaving widespread destruction in its path. Makeshift facilities were set up to care for the hundreds of wounded, staffed by the town's few doctors. The Sisters of St. Francis, who ran several schools in town, quickly volunteered their help.

In the aftermath of this disaster, Mother Alfred Moes proposed a partnership to Dr. William Worrall Mayo. The sisters would build a hospital, manage it and train to be nurses if Dr. Mayo and his two sons would be the surgeons. Mother Alfred and Dr. Mayo never drew up a formal contract; they simply shook hands and proceeded on mutual trust and respect.

Saint Marys Hospital opened in 1889. Its reputation for excellence quickly spread and it grew into one of the world's largest and most respected medical centers. Today the people of Mayo Clinic are still guided by the principles and values of its founders.

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think disasters often lead to opportunities?
2. Have you been affected by a natural disaster? How did it change your life going forward? Did you take any precautions in case it happened again?
3. Dr. Mayo told Mother Alfred that Rochester (population 5,000 at that time) wasn't big enough to support a hospital. Do you think that was a valid reason not to proceed?
4. Dr. Mayo was 64 years old in 1883. Why do you think he agreed to take on a major new venture at the end of his career?
5. Mother Alfred had been very successful establishing and running schools in a number of communities. The members of her order were trained as teachers. Why do you think she became determined to build and staff a hospital?
6. Dr. Mayo was a solo medical practitioner and Mother Alfred was a religious leader primarily focused on education. What do you think would be the greatest challenges they faced in setting out to build a hospital? How could those be addressed?
7. Mother Alfred had a great deal of experience working with building contractors and managing finances. Dr. Mayo had been involved in a number of business ventures. Why do you think they were comfortable in this case proceeding on the strength of a handshake?
8. It's easy to see the need for teamwork during a crisis. How can organizations maintain that sense of cooperation going forward?