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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Child's Health Story Seen Most Unusual

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I HAVE a deep and abiding sympathy for anyone who is in poor health, and particularly for those who are suffering crippling physical handicaps, but the feeling of sympathy and regret is increased many times when the person so afflicted is a mere youngster. Children should have happy, carefree lives. Periods of worry and stress come soon enough when one has to face the years of adult life and the economic and other problems associated with it.

That's why my attention was drawn a few days ago to the story of Carl Bickers, a boy who had a delicate heart valve operation shortly after his birth, suffered a stroke at the age of nine months, had open-heart surgery performed in 1951 when he was one and one-half years of age; he had another in 1961, and late last month Carl underwent another that was possibly the most difficult of them all.

THE REASON for Carl's story appearing here is that his mother is the former Olga Stewart of Peter's Road, and it was told to me by his aunt, Agnes Stewart, who lives with her parents, Mr. and Mrs. John Stewart, 122 Fitzroy Street, who are formerly from Peter's Road. Carl's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Fred Bickers live at 31 Robert Street, Milton, Ontario which is near Toronto.

Carl was born a "blue baby" and his aunt recalls seeing him turning virtually blue when he would go into a sort of coma for an hour or more.

The "stroke" at nine months of age developed when a blood clot struck the brain and damaged permanently the right side of his brain, affecting his speech and partly paralyzing the right side of his body, including the arm and leg.

Fred and Olga Bickers were living in Truro when Carl was born and they moved to Milton where they would be close to the Children's Hospital in Toronto. Nova Scotia medical men who examined their boy said they could not help him further.

Open Heart Surgery At 18 Months

CARL WAS approximately 18 months old when the first open heart surgery was performed on him, replaced a valve on the left side of the heart. The operation which lasted through eight hours gave the tiny boy a new lease on life.

But 10 years later the lease was growing weak, apparently, and another major operation was scheduled. This time it was the right side of the heart that had weakened. Success appeared to have crowned the second eight-hour operation, but six months later "the new valve collapsed and a mysterious thing happened", Roy Downs says in a story he wrote in his hometown paper:

"For Carl's heart was so strong it forced new blood vessels and adhesions, and continued to function on its own."

The heart function appeared to have been performed with reasonable efficiency for a time, but in recent years Carl slowed down and often awoke in the middle of the night in great pain. Officials at the hospital gave him a year to live, Roy Downs reports, but that was a year ago Last October, and the boy is still alive.

But last December the parents took their son for one of the regular monthly hospital visits and they learned still another operation was scheduled.

'Deep Freeze' Ice Pack Is Used

THIS TIME "he was placed in a 'deep freeze' ice pack to lower his body temperature for a few days . . . and the operation was performed on January 27. The difficult surgery involved opening the entire front of the chest and he required seven and one-half bottles of fresh blood" during the long and difficult operation in which "a new tube was placed adjacent to the heart" which the surgeons hoped would give him some relief.

Carl came out of the delivery room five days later and two days later "he celebrated his 15th birthday by taking a few steps across the floor of the ward."

I'd like to tell you that this time the operation has really been successful and this young man who has endured so much ill health, remedial surgery and hospital confinement is really cured.

The real story, though as Roy Downs tells it, is "unfortunately the operation was unable to be successfully performed" though the new tube was placed adjacent to the heart as already described.

Carl's "will to keep going and modern surgery have extended his life span past the expected point of survival and each new day is a gift that must have come from some higher power greater than man or medicine can ever be", writes the understanding and sympathetic Downs.

Agnew Stewart brought me Carl's story in hopes it might be of some assistance, and possibly comfort to parents of other children who may have been born with faulty heart development.

For myself I hope the boy's story may also have another effect on some who have health troubles. It's so easy at times to get feeling sorry for one's self and forgetting that other people have the will and the courage to live through similar or worse ailments.

Personal Triumph Over Ill Health

CARL'S STORY recalls one an Island man told me several months ago. He had gone through bout after bout of physical and mental torture and at times he was just about ready to give up.

"You have heard or read, Mr. Matheson, about people thinking about taking their own life because they felt they couldn't take any more", this man told me, then added "I thought seriously of suicide many times". Then he went to a famous clinic in the United States "and there I saw so many others worse off than I was, that I was ashamed of myself for entertaining thoughts like that," the Island man told me.

He was fighting cancer and it must have seemed like a hopeless fight for there were three major operations in a short space of time. But he came through all of them and it does seem now as though the surgery was finally successful for it has been 10 years or

more since the last one, and the man who found new courage by seeing others worse off than he was, is conducting his business successfully despite the handicap which the surgery has meant.

Sale of 45 Years Ago Is Recalled

I REFERRED recently to a C. H. Robertson sale in Marshfield some 45 years ago and I found a few days later that the farm was the one now owned by Almon Wood. His father, Wallace Wood who lived previously in Alexandra purchased the farm for \$8,000 and the sale was one of the largest ever in the province up to that time.

Arrangements were made to meet the train at York for those who came by rail to purchase materials, and meals were served on the ground – hundreds were fed. The sale realized some \$6,000 and Robertson's herd of Ayrshire cows sold well. Several registered cows brought \$300 each, and the Woods bought three grade animals for \$800, which was good money at the time. Mr. Robertson later sold his household effects for approximately \$2,000. Mr. Wood told me.

The Woods hauled more than 100 sleigh loads across the ice as they moved their household furniture and farm equipment, feed for the livestock and numerous small articles. The haul was across the Hillsboro river and "many old neighbours and some of our new ones helped us with the hauling job", Almon recalls with appreciation.

Mr. Wood recalls that Baron Kelvin, one of the stallions I mentioned, was a Clydesdale imported by John Richards of Bideford. Few will remember the Kelvin horse but many standard bred horse fans will remember Captain Aubrey, and this sire of good racing stock was also brought to this country by Mr. Richards, Almon tells me.

"Captain Aubrey was the best Standard Bred horse that ever was brought to this province, without any doubt", Mr. Wood emphasized. He was a big horse, probably about 1300 pounds and some horsemen were reluctant to breed standard bred mares to him lest the colts would be big and awkward, Mr. Wood added. The Aubrey horse was sold to Nova Scotia after only a couple of years on the Island and, I gather, it was after he had left that his real worth as a sire was appreciated. There was a great deal of Aubrey racing stock in the Maritimes for many years, and it was no accident they were good horses as the Captain horse was sired by Peter the Great and that name is one of the greatest in Standard Bred history.