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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Hospital Gives Column Material

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“ACROSS THE ISLAND” is originating this week from the Prince Edward Island Hospital where I am enjoying a really good rest, while my doctor and a group of nurses and technicians are taking tests and making observations in an effort to find certain information that seems necessary if the Matheson machine is to continue to function efficiently.

I landed here Saturday night and I felt pretty rotten. Two days later I felt fairly normal again, though there are problems that have to be ironed out for the future. If the result is as good for me as my medical advisor appears to hope, I shall describe the development, in the hope it may help some other people. If it doesn't, I'll keep it to myself, for I know most people have troubles enough of their own, without me adding to their load of care.

I planned on forgetting this week's column, but a combination of circumstances changed my mind. I wasn't in the hospital more than three or four hours, and hadn't moved from my bed, when I had enough material for my column. A few days later I found that several of my friends who are patients here, subtly hinted that they hoped I would have a column this week. So here it is.

There is so much I scarcely know where to start but to me at least, it is mostly good, some of it is extra special. Let me explain:

When I was ordered here on short notice – reason was a hospital bed suddenly turned up empty – Mrs. Matheson made several unsuccessful efforts to find me a transistor radio I could rent, but I had scarcely settled into bed when I had two really good ones.

Joe Rodd To The Rescue

Long-time friend Joe Rodd, proprietor of Toombs Music Store, didn't happen to have anything suitable in his store. But he had a personal radio at home, a really good one, so he promptly hiked home and got it. A few minutes later my friends Wally and Lee Ward who live almost opposite the hospital, sent their own transistor just in case I didn't get one.

No semi-private rooms were available so I was bedded down in Ward E. with two men I had never met previously. One is Captain Theodore Dicks, Georgetown; the other Raymond Garnhum, Charlottetown. A few minutes later Mrs. Garnhum came to visit her husband with a treat of ice cream. And what do you know? Mr. Garnhum wanted to share his treat with Capt. Dicks and myself.

“I'd just love some ice cream”, I told my new friend, “but I am here for a diet check, so I have to refuse with thanks.”

A short time later Mrs. Stan Hurray, North River came in to tell me that my long-time friend Mrs. Jack Spencer “is in the ward next to you,” and that meant a visit on Sunday. I knew her many years ago as Lizzie Horne when she and Jack were sweethearts. She worked then in the office for Nelson Rattenburry in this city.

Most of you know her perhaps, as the little lady who was so horribly beaten in her home a few weeks ago by completely irresponsible assailants. (The case is now before the courts, so I cannot comment further at this time.)

I was amazed to find that Mrs. Spencer had received 350 – that’s right, three hundred and fifty – letters and cards since she entered the hospital. I doubt very seriously that any patient that ever came to this hospital has ever before received such a flood of greetings, pouring out sympathy for the lady, contempt for her assailants and best wishes for an early recovery. I was glad that my own message was one of them.

Jack and Elizabeth Spencer worked mighty hard to pay for the farm they developed as a market garden – Jack died eight years ago. Here is one small example. In their early years on the farm, they often worked through the night until two o’clock in the morning, on the eve of market days, which were Tuesday and Friday. They shelled peas by hand, they prepared greens in bunches to sell, they got many other things ready. Then they slept for a couple of hours, before they started preparing their produce for market in the stall they had in the old Market Building, where the Confederation Memorial Buildings now sprawl across what was once a square reserved for farmers and those city folk who wanted to buy their vegetables and other available foods direct from the farmers.

Hardworking Combination

But the part that impressed me most, perhaps, was that those two industrious people, cut dandelion greens – before the dandelion flower appeared – and sold them for greens for table use, as spinach is used now. To me, at least, that is an example of the tremendous concentration these two people put into the effort to pay for the farm on which they had only enough to make a comparatively small down payment, when they purchased it. They used every possible means to pay for it.

I mentioned Capt. Dicks earlier, and I had hoped I might have energy and space to tell you something about this colorful member of a seafaring family that saw all six brothers qualify for their masters’ certificates, after their father and his 20-year old son had been drowned when their ship was sunk and they went down with it. But the story which I gleaned from many chats with the splendid gentleman of 90 years, must await another column.

Before I drop it, though, I want to say that we were really thrilled in Ward E when the hospital people produced an attractive birthday cake for the Captain on Monday. There were 9 candles – one for each 10 years of his eventful life.

My story, when I write it, will take you through the Captain’s boyhood from the time he went to sea with his father when he was a lad of 12, through service as a Skipper in the First Great War, and many additional experiences. They’ll include inaugurating the Wood Islands-Caribou service, a turn on the Borden-Tormentine run, a period on the old Mulgrave-Port Hawkesbury ferry and the run from North Sydney to Newfoundland.

Already I’m nearing the end of this column, and there’s so much to tell you about.

Here's one for those people who like to talk about the power of suggestion. A few hours before I typed this column, a nurse left on my bedside table a small glass of liquid for me to drink. I was out of the room at the time. The general appearance of the glass reminded me of a certain whitish colored, milky looking medicinal preparation that is sometimes useful when one suddenly ceases to be as active physically as I have been, and shifts to the lazy life I am living here this week.

With that thought in mind, I downed the small glass of white liquid, then grabbed quickly a glass of water and gargled the "unpleasant" taste from my mouth, with suitable grimaces. Several glasses of water were gargled before I was finally satisfied that the "unpleasant" taste had been removed.

Imagine My Surprise

Imagine my surprise several hours later to learn from my friend, the nurse, that she had left a glass of milk for me to drink. I really like milk. Normally I drink it one glass after another. So why did I find this glass of milk so distasteful, or why did I think I did?

Well, that's one I will leave for you to figure out for yourselves.

When I came in here Saturday evening, the only bed available was in Ward E. So I put in a request for the first available semi-private room. After just one day with my new friends I called a senior nurse Monday morning, and asked her to see that my request was cancelled. I could wish no better companions than these genial chaps with whom I share the three-bed ward.

The hospital here is filled to its present occupied bed capacity. There are many I met on my first stroll down the first floor corridor. They include Roy Huestis, Edward Quigley, St. Peters, Mrs. Horace Smith, Skippy Carver – hockey fans will know this young man – my cousin Mrs. Margaret MacDonald and Elby Ford, all of Charlottetown. And there's Mrs. Christine Burdett from Cavendish, another cousin I bumped into on that first corridor stroll. I've already mentioned Mrs. Spencer and Edward Quigley, St. Peters.

Come to think of it, Christine dropped in to see me Saturday night, a few hours after I arrived. There's Matheson blood in her, and the clan members are clannish as you might expect.

There are so many people I should thank for kindness, and dozens of little acts of courtesy. But I don't dare start mentioning names, for I'd be sure to leave some people out.

But I do want to thank administrator Neil MacLean, and his office staff, for making a typewriter and office space available, so I could type out this column.