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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Patients Tell Story Dr. Shapira's Skill

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A LETTER to The Guardian this week recalls the feats of surgery performed here some years ago by Dr. Max Shapira who practiced at New Glasgow back in the 1940's. Marc Gallant, a 19-year-old former North Rustico boy who has made an outstanding success as a photographer and artist in the United States, tells an interesting story in his letter to Advertising Manager Stewart Vickerson. A call to my friend Joe Gaudin, a North Rustico man who is managing director of the P.E.I. Credit Union League, set me on the trail of still another Dr. Shapiro story. This one concerns Felix Pineau, who owes to the skilled surgeon the fact that he has two feet today, instead of being a partial cripple.

Mr. Gallant writes that he was in a fair way to lose his arm when he got it entangled with the business end of a washing machine ringer, when he was one and one-half years of age. This was 18 years ago, Mr. Gallant writes.

Marc's success story took him to New York where he finally located the man who saved his arm – the search spread over a three-year period.

Injured Arm Almost Like New

MR. GALLANT reports that "after a three year search he recently located the doctor who saved his arm in an operation performed in a Charlottetown hospital almost 18 years ago.

"At the mischievous age of one and one-half years Marc caught his right arm in the wringer of a washing machine. Several doctors told his parents the arm would have to be amputated. Then Dr. Max Shapira, a young doctor who had been in the province only a few years, attempted an operation, making extensive skin grafts. Four months later the injured arm was almost like new," Marc tells us. Several years later Dr. Shapira and his family moved to New York.

When he grew older Marc became determined, he writes, to find the man who had saved his arm.

The young Rustico man first visited New York during his Christmas vacation in 1963. Marc talked to the people in the American Medical Association office there, but the reply was discouraging.

MANHATTAN ISLAND alone had at least 100 doctors named Shapira. Undaunted, however, the youngster who wanted to meet and thank personally the man whose medical skill had meant so much to him, started making telephone calls on the long list of telephone directory entries under Shapira. Unfortunately he did not meet with success. Most of the men he called had never even heard of Prince Edward Island.

Marc next visited New York during the closing week of the World's Fair in 1965. No success was reported that time either.

Since January of this year, though, Marc Gallant has been travelling through the northeastern area of the United States on photographic assignments. His work brought him into New York on three occasions. Each time he made additional telephone calls, and each time he scratched a few more “Shapira” names off his list.

Luck Changes – Dr. Shapira Located

BUT LUCK changed late last month. It was Thursday, April 21, that Marc Gallant was invited to have dinner with a New York dentist. Driving to the man’s home, the conversation gradually shifted to Prince Edward Island.

Very casually the dentist noted that he knew a doctor who once practiced on P.E.I. Hardly daring to hope, Marc waited as the dentist said “His name is Doctor Shapira.”

The three-year search was over. Marc had found his favorite doctor at last.

Phoning at last “the right Dr. Shapira” – the words are Marc’s – the former Rustico man gave only the circumstances, not his name. After a slight pause Dr. Shapira recalled not only the patient’s name – Marc’s name – he also reminded Marc that his mother, Mrs. Edmund Gallant, RN (remembered as Zeta) had often assisted the doctor with house calls.

The following Sunday Marc met his long-lost doctor and his family at their home in Dobbs Ferry, N.Y., which is a suburb of New York City. The long search was really completed.

Felix Pineau Story More Unusual

THE PINEAU story is even more unusual, so far as the surgery is concerned.

After my friend Mr. Gaudin told me about it, I called Mrs. Pineau on the telephone and found it was back on August 27, 1947 that Felix Pineau had his foot virtually cut in two.

He was cutting grain with a horse-drawn binder, his good wife recalled for me. He stopped the operation, got down to pick something – I think it was a stone – from the table. That’s the part of the binder immediately behind the cutter bar and the knife.

The horses became startled – there were three horses pulling the binder – and they started running across the field. Mr. Pineau’s foot was cut across the middle, Mrs. Pineau told me. There was just the skin and a bit of flesh at the bottom of the foot holding the severed part of the rest of the foot.

Remember that this was 19 years ago next August, and modern feats of surgical skill had been unheard of. It looked like Mr. Pineau would lose the front part of his foot at least.

But the man was rushed to Charlottetown and was put on the operating table as soon as possible. It was six hours later when the operation was completed, Mrs. Pineau told me over the telephone. Next morning Dr. Shapira telephoned her to say her husband was out of danger.

Felix Pineau has had the use of his foot through the intervening years. He is able to do his own work as a normal man should.

Foot Not Completely Normal

THE FOOT is not completely normal. The circulation is a bit sluggish, apparently. The foot is inclined to be cold, compared to the other one. But that detracts but little from the skill of the man whom New Glasgow people recall as a good doctor and a skilled surgeon.

My thanks go to Mr. Gallant whose letter brought attention to the job Dr. Shapira did on his arm. It led in turn to the story of Felix Pineau and his foot operation. And here I express appreciation to Joe Gaudin, who has so often been helpful in providing information for good stories over the years we have known each other

Dr. 'Gus' MacDonald's Feats

FOR THOSE who are keeping scrapbooks, it was back on December 29, 1961 that I wrote the first column about Dr. A.A. (Gus) MacDonald of Souris who performed unusual feats of surgical skill more than a half-century ago.

It was just over 55 years ago, I believe, that Dr. MacDonald found A.J. MacCormack – a lad of 4 years – at St. Margarets with his feet cut off by a hay mower. Only a bit of skin was holding the feet – both were the same – when Dr. “Gus” arrived.

In the case of the St. Margaret's boy – I knew A.J. later when we were in Prince of Wales College together – Dr. MacDonald performed the operation in the farm home without any help. As I recall the story, Dr. MacDonlad broke the staves out of the barrel that was catching rain water from the roof and used them for splints

I'm not trying to take anything away from Dr Shapira and his feats of skill. I know many of you would want me to recall once more the feats performed by Dr. “Gus” who is known and loved by thousands in Eastern Kings where he was the family doctor for so many years.