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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Strange Stories Told Have No Explanation

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I OFTEN meet people who say it is completely ridiculous to talk of such things as ghosts, or forerunners, or warnings that border on the occult. But people keep telling me stories for which there is no normal explanation.

Only this week, for example, Woodrow Wheatley dropped in to this office on a personal mission. While he was here he told me the following story:

"I was working in the smelter of the International Nickel Company at Copper Cliff, Ontario – that's close to Sudbury. I had just finished eating my lunch at the noon-hour break, had risen to my feet and started across the large floor, when I heard my mother's voice calling "Woodrow".

Naturally the man stopped short, for his mother was back here on Prince Edward Island at the time.

But here's the grippingly interesting part of the story. That brief pause, and turn to one side, saved Mr. Wheatley's life. A huge I-beam crashed through the ceiling from a floor above, and "burned" his shoulder and brushed the side of his face, as it hurtled to the floor level on which the Island man stood.

Had it not been for his mother's voice calling out to him, "the big I-beam would have split me in two", Woodrow told me.

Pat Callaghan's Story Recalled

I MET many friends from across the Island, as I moved around Saturday afternoon at the Liberals' provincial nominating convention. One of them was Pat Callaghan of Miminegash, which is in West Prince. He reminded me that I had never used the interesting ghost story he told me two years ago when I visited him at his home.

I informed Mr. Callaghan that I had told his story many times as I have spoken to groups in dozens of places across the Island. I had been keeping it for that purpose. But here it is for readers of this column.

Pat's grandfather, William Callaghan, had been a fish packer, among other things, at Miminegash in the days of perhaps 100 years ago, or close to that.

He scolded a young lad one day whom he had suspected of stealing some of the fish. The boy was working for him at the time.

The boy went home and told his mother, and she came to William Callaghan and proceeded to protest bitterly that her boy was honest and trustworthy. She scolded Mr. Callaghan for daring to suggest that her son could possibly be a thief. She used all of the language at her command to impress upon Mr. Callaghan that he had been terribly at fault in accusing her son.

A few days later William Callaghan had occasion to cross Miminegash Run – it's a fairly narrow strip of water that is shallow enough to wade with rubber boots, or it was then at least.

After crossing "the Run", Mr. Callaghan had walked along the shore for perhaps a bit more than a mile to visit a family he knew.

Brilliant Lights Blocked Path

WILLIAM CALLAGHAN completed his visit and it was about 11 o'clock at night, when he left for home. He should have been home long before midnight. But it was nearly morning when he arrived, and that's the interesting part of this story.

As he walked toward "the Run" he saw two lights some distance ahead. One was fairly high, the other would be perhaps six to 10 feet off the ground.

There was something strange about the lights, and Mr. Callaghan watched them in wonder, as he made his way towards the spot where he would step into water and cross "the Run" on his way home.

As he neared the spot, however, the lights moved directly in front of him. By the time he had reached the spot where he was to step into the water, one of the lights – both were unnaturally bright – came down to rest virtually on the ground in front of him; the other one was about shoulder height, and it was also directly in front of him. Both were directly and effectively blocking his path.

I've often been told that the Irish, like my own people, the Scots, and the English too, for that matter, had an unusual belief in, and often a fear of the supernatural in those far off days. This would be a fearsome occurrence to anyone. It would be a brave man, indeed, who would attempt to ignore such a phenomenon.

William Callaghan didn't ignore it. The movement of the lights were such as to block his further progress, regardless of the direction in which he attempted to move.

Crouched In Terror, Prayed

MR. CALLAGHAN didn't ignore the fearsome lights. Filled with fear at the unknown portent of the strangely unnatural brightness, he crouched low on the beach and prayed. What he thought about at the time has not been passed on to his grandsons, but one can well imagine the terror of the man as he remained on the ground, with his face close to the earth.

Doubtless he peered anxiously at the lights from time to time, to see if they were still there. Mr. Callaghan must have peered many times, for his time of imprisonment by the lights was long and painful. It must have even seemed more lengthy than it actually was.

Finally he looked up and saw that the lights were lifting. When they had lifted out of his path, he scrambled swiftly to his feet, waded the stream, and ran for his house which was nearby.

It was almost daylight when he rushed into the house, all but breathless.

"Where in the world have you been?" was the first greeting from his sister, Ellen, who lived with him – he was not married at the time. She had walked the floor through most of the late hours of the night.

She must have been as astonished as he was, when she heard the story he told about the indescribably terrifying experience.

To the people of that day, especially to the Irish and the Scots, I believe, the appearance of lights in such strange places, were an omen of things to come, often of death – the people knew them as “forerunners”.

Mother, Baby Died During Night

In this case the grim omen was of death. Later that day William Callaghan and his sister, Ellen, heard the news that the mother of the boy he had accused of stealing the fish, had given birth to a baby the previous night. And mother and baby had died.

The story that has come down through the years suggests that the woman had been suffering the pains of child birth during those long hours, when the lights of indescribable brilliance had held William Callaghan pinned to the earth. The suggestion is that lights had finally lifted, and disappeared, as the soul of the mother and child had taken their flight from their earthly bodies.