

The Guardian, Charlottetown, Thurs., April 22, 1965

ACROSS THE ISLAND

Former Island Girl Mothers Waterfront

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I'M WRITING today about a former Island girl, now in New York, who grew up as Gladys MacDonald in Iris, the daughter of Captain Archibald MacDonald and Mrs. MacDonald.

Perhaps it was a love of the sea inherited from her sea going father, that caused Gladys to go to the Seamen's Church Institute back in 1930, but go there she did after her first husband died in Murray River after they had been married only four years.

She's Mrs. Kadish now as she married again in 1938, but this story concerns the interesting and useful life she has made for herself on the New York City waterfront where many hard-bitten sailormen have come to know and appreciate the former Iris girl as a real friend when they are ashore.

I have to thank Gene Lewis, 57 Churchill Avenue, Charlottetown for tipping me off to this interesting story. Mr. Lewis sent me a tear sheet from "Pictorial Living", apparently a magazine section of the New York Journal American, which carried a story "She mothers the waterfront", written by Wambly Bald. I wrote to Mr. Bald for Gladys Kadish's address, then wrote to her and find she still remembers her "beloved Prince Edward Island" with deep appreciation.

MRS. KADISH'S stationery carries the title "Seamen's Church Institute of New York" and it's located at 25 South Street. Her office on the second floor of the 13-story structure has "Personal Services" on the door, and that's what the attractive lady from Iris – see picture on page 3 – tries to give those lads who come to her for advice and assistance.

Many things can happen to a sailor far away from home, but Gladys Kadish usually finds a way to help.

Here are a few paragraphs from the story Wambly Bald wrote after visiting the Institute and talking to her personally:

Gladys Helps In Many Ways

"GLADYS KADISH, a tall hearty woman with a soothing smile, labors with almost maniacal diligence for her boy's when they have problems. She sees about 65 men a day. You get the impression that she'll do anything but break her neck to help them.

"Did a guy get drunk and lush-rolled, and need a little assistance? Is he having wife, or girl-friend trouble, with the law breathing down his neck? Maybe he's trying to locate missing relatives after being away at sea for a year. Or he needs someone to dig out his records for Social Security or Internal Revenue. He might require hospital care too, or retirement to some old men's rest home. Or maybe he's just befogged by loneliness and wants someone to sit down and talk with him.

That gives you an idea of the versatility of this warm, friendly lady with the charming smile and a warm heart. Here is some more of the same, again from Mr. Bald:

“A GUY in a jam needs a lawyer and a friend. She’ll get him a lawyer, and she’ll stay around to be his friend. The sick in hospitals get her special attention – frequent visits in the evening to check on their comfort. But Gladys Kadish doesn’t just visit; she brings books and candy, and the news a guy wants to hear about his shipmates.”

There are some people who occupy a desk or fill a chair at spots like the Seaman’s Institute – I’ve met a few of them in my time. But this lady puts all of her personality into her job to which she has given her life. If the Institute can help the visiting seaman Gladys Kadish sees that he gets that help, and she adds a warm personal touch that makes the service more deeply appreciated.

There are many sides to the assistance available at the Institute. One of them provides articles of clothing for those who need it. But if it’s only a shirt a chap wants in a hurry, or maybe a pair of shoes, he’ll find them right in Gladys Kadish’s office.

“It’s quicker and easier that way” the lady behind the Personal Services desk explains. “I’ve got shirts in all sizes here; why should they have to go rummaging around for that?” she asks with an understanding smile.

Love Letter Written For Sailor

THERE’S MUCH more to the Bald story but I want to add just this bit:

“Just last week”, she told the New York writer, “a big scowling bruiser from one of the oil tankers came in here and said Gladys, have you got a minute? and he showed me something he had started to write to his girl. It was only about four lines but he was stuck. So I asked a few questions about the girl and we got out a pretty fair letter. Then he went out and got a little package and I helped him wrap it up”, explained the smiling lady who brings cheer to so many down on the East River which has one of the toughest reputations along the eastern coastline.

Gladys was only 21 when her first husband died and left her with two small children. She left her children with relatives here on the Island, as she went to New York to find a job.

Remember it was in the depression and jobs were scarce. Indeed they were all but unobtainable. But Gladys found a job as a cashier for a soda fountain at the Seaman’s Institute, which paid \$16.50 a week. Some of the money went back to her children; with the rest she found herself a \$3-a-week room, and she managed to eat fairly regularly, though it was three years before she could buy her first new dress.

Understood Hard Time Problem

MANY SEAMEN who visited the institute were having a tough time too, and the warm-hearted girl from Iris got to know some of them, and naturally tried to help them as her own fortunes improved, with better jobs at the Institute. Then in 1943 the opening developed in Personal Services and Gladys Kadish took over as it gave her a chance to be of real assistance.

She gets cards and little souvenirs from all over the world, she told Wambly Bald. They come from men she has helped in countless ways. No wonder she told the New York interviewer:

“I’ve got more than two wonderful children. . . I’ve got a really big family now.”