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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Death Is Reported Foreseen In Dream

By NEIL A. MATHESON

I'VE TOLD the story of many forerunners in this column. Here's one that concerns the death, and later the funeral of my father, John A. Matheson of Rose Valley more than 50 years ago. I had never heard the story before and was greatly surprised when my sister, Marion MacLeod, told it to me the week my Margaret died.

I recall hearing as a youth the story of Rev. John Gillis – he was in the old Strathalbyn charge – having had a dream of a man coming to rob him. He prepared for the attempt and successfully prevented it.

This story, though, is that Rev. Mr. Gillis had foreseen in a dream, the death, and the funeral of my father. Apparently the two were unusually warm friends and Mr. Gillis simply refused to believe that this dream was to come true.

In his dream Mr. Gillis had seen every member of the family save my mother and myself. He didn't see us the day of the funeral either. Both of us were in the bedroom, off the parlor where the coffin was arranged. The picture on the day of the funeral was exactly as he had seen it in his dream.

Air Of Terrible Tragedy

MY ONLY memory of that day is that I refused to look into the coffin. I do not know why. My uncle, Duncan MacDonald, lifted me up to the coffin once, but I refused to look so he had to let me go. I was only five years old but I can still recall something of the air of terrible tragedy that pervaded our home at the time.

John A. Matheson dropped on the road on his way to Emerald, close to the home of John (County) Matheson. He had suffered a cerebral hemorrhage, commonly called a stroke. He never regained consciousness.

Those Mathesons' forefather settled on the County Line road – it runs between Prince and Queens Counties – the name "County" Mathesons stuck to them for a long time.

A Rose Valley neighbor got my father into a wagon and took him to the Matheson home where he remained until the end.

I remember my cousin, Dan Matheson, telling me how a bright light was seen in the sky over my home, the day my father died. But this "dream" story is completely new.

Saw My Father In Dream

DREAMS HAVE seemed real at times. I recall dreaming that I saw my father in the back field of our farm in Rose Valley. It would perhaps be several months after he died. Next day I went back to the field and searched in the area where I had seen him in the dream. There was a clump of trees, and some stones piled up around them. The dream was so real that I felt my father should actually be there.

Incidentally early this year a man told me a ghost story that concerned my maternal grandfather, Alexander McLure, whose home was on what is commonly called the Dixon Road. His grandson, Donnie McLure, lives there now. Unfortunately in the stress and worries of this summer I forgot the story. I've even forgotten the name of the man who told it to me. I would appreciate hearing from this man, and have him retell me the story. I'll visit you, sir, to get the story, if you wish it that way.

Strange Light Seen

I MET many people at the exhibition Saturday at Abram's Village. Included were George Key, his charming wife and their son and daughter. George is a key candidate in the Conservative convention coming up. Many people to whom I talked pick him as a winner. He seemed at home moving through the crowd talking to many people at the fair. If he is anything like his late father, he should indeed be a winner. What a grand man he was.

When I talked with them a few minutes Mr. Key – he's Mayor of Summerside as most people know – told me of a ghost story session in Florida last winter. George said he told a few of the unusual yarns, some of which he had gotten from this column. I gather that others were also telling them.

Later that night, Mr. Key told me, there was a most eerie light shining into the room. Coming after the story-telling episode, it had a marked effect.

That prompted Mrs. Key to admit she had been the source of the light, she had done it for fun, sensing the eerie atmosphere that had been created by the stories.

The laugh was spontaneous. It was also general, even I joined in it, and I haven't been doing much laughing these past few weeks.

Two years ago last spring Mrs. Matheson and I were looking for Cook's mill in Wood Islands West. We dropped in at R.S. MacBeth's store to ask directions, and ran into this story which concerns one of our Mathesons

It seems that Rev. Donald Morrison Matheson was preaching at the time in the Pictou County area, where many Scots lived. Some of them were short on English but long on Gaelic.

A young chap taking the census arrived at the manse. He told my uncle of his difficulty and Rev. D.M. offered to go with him to the nearby homes where the Gaelic was strong. Rev. D.M. was married, incidentally, to Barbara MacBeth from Forest Hill.

The young chap would read the question in English and my uncle would translate into Gaelic. They hadn't got far, though, when the Gaelic-speaking lady burst into laughter. The question had been simply "where were you born?" My uncle's translation had put it "Where were you calved?"

When the story got back to the MacBeth family in Forest Hill one of them observed "Imagine Donald Morrison Matheson not being able to ask the lady where she was born in the Gaelic. When he was a young boy in Rose Valley he couldn't even put out the cat in English."

I told the story to Charles Cook when we arrived at this mill, and he told this one to Mrs. Matheson and myself.

A lady and her daughter in the Montague vicinity in the long ago had asked a man to come and dig a well for them. He arrived in the evening, just in time for supper. He would start work there the following day.

Hay and Oats Suggested

HE WAS DIRTY from the previous job, and asked for a basin of water to wash himself. Apparently he had opened the neck of his shirt and the lady of the house noted there was an abundance of hair on his chest.

Turning to her daughter she observed in Gaelic:

“It should be hay and oats for that fellow” suggesting the animal-like hair on his body.

A half hour or so later they were finishing their meal and the lady offered him some more tea, asked whether there was anything else he desired.

He replied that he had eaten excellently and was full. Then he turned to the lady with an impish grin and said: “I’ll have some of that hay and oats though.”

Referring to the Gaelic, not being able to speak the language of the Highlands when I was a boy was considered a serious offense by many of the old time Scots I met.

My only memory of Grandmother McLure, for example, is of my mother taking me to see her and warning me “When you go into the room to see Grandma, and she asks you ‘Have you got The Gaelic?’ don’t tell her ‘no’, I’ll get you out before you get into trouble.”

I have no recollection of what happened between Grandma and myself, but I’ve thought about the incident many hundreds of times since.

My mother always taught us that even “telling a lie in fun” was an unforgivable sin. How she brought herself to tell me I should lie, or at least not tell the whole truth to Grandma, I’ll never know. I could talk some Gaelic then and understand more, but could not carry on an involved conversation.

This incident emphasized just how serious a failing it was thought to be at the time not to teach their children Gaelic.