

The Guardian, Charlottetown, Thurs., June 24, 1965

ACROSS THE ISLAND

Broken Crust Omen, Death 40 Yrs. Later

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ONE OF the most unusual forerunner stories I've heard comes from the East central area of Kings County. The lady who had the experience could be identified so she would be known to many Islanders, but her grandson, who told me the story, asked that I would use no names.

The lady was working late at night after the rest of the family had retired. That was necessary, as she had eight children and would have a great deal of sewing to do.

It was winter and there was a crust on the snow, as the lady listened to the unmistakable sound of a sleigh coming up a winter road from a nearby river, that was used as a winter highway when it was frozen over.

THE MOTHER of eight heard the sleigh approach the house and naturally wondered who could be coming at that late hour. AS the sleigh passed the house and turned to come towards the kitchen, where the light shone dimly through the window, the lady heard the crust break as the runners turned on it. But there was nobody there, there wasn't even a sleigh, as the anxious lady peered through the window.

Sensing there was something unnatural about the incident, the lady packed up her sewing and went hurriedly to bed. She kept her own counsel, and did not discuss the event with anybody as she waited to see what the omen had foretold.

When her son-in-law died some years later in California, she thought at first that was the event that the phantom sleigh had foretold. But, her grandson told me, his body arrived by motor hearse, so that did not bear a proper relationship to the sleigh sounds on the crusty snow.

Her Son Died 40 Years Later

BUT HER own son, then a mature man, died years later in the Charlottetown hospital in the winter season. The body was taken by motor hearse to a spot near the river from which the phantom sleigh came many years previously. From there it was taken on a neighbor's sleigh. As the sleigh neared the house, the mother listened with attention more keen than any of the others. Sure enough as it passed the kitchen and turned sharply to get close to the house, the crust broke under the sharply turning runners.

A half hour or so later, when the coffin had duly been placed in the front room, and the household had settled back quietly, the lady – she was then in her advanced years – turned to her daughter-in-law, the widow of the man in the coffin, and said quietly.

“I heard that same sound 40 years ago, as I sat alone sewing in the kitchen, as the midnight hour approached.” The omen foretold by the phantom sleigh of so long ago had finally been understood.

There were many of those forerunners in the long ago. I've often wondered, and so have people to whom I've talked across the Island, why they never happen now. But they do happen, apparently, though they do not come frequently. I was talking last Saturday afternoon to a longtime friend, Norman Matheson, in his home at Forest Hill.

This Forerunner Came In 1965

IT WAS about five years ago that Norman was watching Television late at night. Near midnight he heard the sound of a bird tapping on the window pane with its beak. When he looked at the window, he saw the bird as it pecked at the glass.

The most unusual feature of the event was that the bird was on the bare pane of glass, and was clinging to it as though its feet were glued to it.

It was a few days later that Norman heard that one of his best friends, Dan Burhoe of Strathcona, had died. The bird on the window pane was the forerunner of his friend's death.

Late last year his son Claude Matheson – he teaches in the Provincial Vocational Institute on the Malpeque Road – and his wife, the former Mona Taylor of Upton, heard the sound of a bird tapping on the kitchen window.

A neighbour had been seriously ill for some time, so they decided they should visit Douglas MacDonald, one of the best liked men in the community, who died a few days later.

I've heard of forerunners that took many forms, but never before had I heard of the sound being that of a bird pecking at a window pane.

Watched Fairies Dance At Southport

I'VE BEEN writing this column for almost five years now and not until a couple of weeks ago did I know that there's a "fairy hill" within a mile of my home. Mrs. Roddie MacDonald – many know "Dr. Roddie" who is her husband – told me about the hill – it's really a mound – and it's on the right hand side of the Southport road, just before you come to the Keppoch Road corner, if you're travelling from Charlottetown.

The Tom Martins lived in the nearby house when I went to Southport 20 years ago, and Mrs. Martin told Mrs. MacDonald about the fairy mound. Mrs. Martin often looked through her window on a bright moonlight night and "watched the fairies dance there by the light of the moon", she told Mrs. MacDonald.

And a chap named Joe Morgan used to suggest there's treasure beneath the mound, if someone would expend enough energy to dig for it.

No, I'm not going to dig for the treasure, even though the mound is close by – I pass it several times each day – but it's still a good story, and I'm passing it on to you just as it was told to me a few days ago.

Raps On Windshield, Car In Funeral

BYRON BURNS is a Charlottetown Jeweller now, but back in 1935 he was a youngster driving his dad's new Chrysler car in Murray Harbor. He had just turned the car into a private lane, and was backing out when he heard "several distinct raps on the

windshield". Cars had running boards then, and he thought that one of his chums had squatted on a running board and rapped on the windshield for fun.

But there was nobody there when he looked. An immediate search of the nearby area, and questions directed to people who were nearby at the time revealed that indeed nobody had been even close to the car.

"On the way up here," he told me – I was with him recently on the exact spot where this happened – "I had dropped Dad at William Cooper's house –He was section foreman at the time and was very ill.

"Dad, I learned later went to the back door, had knocked on the door and had to wait for a while as nobody had come immediately to see who was there.

"When Jeanette Cooper did come, she explained that she had previously heard several knocks, or raps, at the same door, but there had been nobody at the door when she went to open it."

Then, added Byron, "Dad told me about this experience he had, and I've always remembered the experience I had of hearing the raps on the glass, and there's nothing more distinctive than the sound of a rap on glassset in rubber."

So two days later the black Chrysler was used in the funeral for Mr. Cooper who had died the night the phantom raps were heard, my friend told me.

A FLASH back story in last week's column suggested that Ernie Collett, who lived in Westmoreland in the latter days of the last century, had sold beer. This is incorrect, I am assured by a granddaughter who was kind enough to call me. So, for those who keep scrap books of "Across The Island" items, please discard that reference.

And a young friend of mine in Forest Hill, Pearl MacBeth, tells me that I used the wrong surname when I wrote recently about Charlie Campbell, who is principal of Morell High School which Pearl attends. I'm sorry, Charlie.