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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Phantom Boy Vision Recounted By Woman

By NEIL A. MATHESON

IT WAS ON Monday afternoon that Rev. Donald Nicholson and I were wondering why people don't see forerunners, or similar unexplainable things now.

Finally my friend suggested, with a smile, "people are too busy now to listen to any such thing". We had been talking about the time his father had heard his nephew call for help at Crippler Creek, Colorado, and have the real call actually come a year later, when the nephew was calling for help because his brother had been killed.

On Tuesday Barbara MacAndrew, Women's News Editor told me of an incident that was unusual, to say the least.

BARBARA HAD GOT out of bed and gone down stairs to get something for one of her children. Through the window she saw a boy of perhaps seven or eight years walking on the sidewalk, outside their home at 22 West Street. The boy went to the next intersection then turned at right angles on to the cross street.

Barbara was not aware of the time of night, and her first thought was that it was a Guardian newspaper boy who was up early to deliver his papers. She thought that it must have been six o'clock in the morning.

When she went back upstairs, though, her husband, Jack, had awakened enough to say it was three o'clock, not six. That put a completely different slant on the situation. What would a boy of that age be doing out on the streets at three in the morning.

No Tracks In The Snow

IT WORRIED HER so much, Mrs. MacAndrew went outside to see where the boy's tracks led to. But there were no tracks in the snow, though there was between one and two inches of fresh snow on the ground.

I asked Barbara if she had ever before seen anything of a similar nature. She told me that she had not.

Then she recalled that about nine years ago she had had a dream in which she had seen a large airliner crash in the New York area. She had clearly seen the stewardess on the plane, as she worked frantically to help passengers escape the wreckage – those who were still alive. And Barbara had heard, in her dream, the captain of the aircraft complain bitterly about the inadequacies of the radar and other technical aids that were available there.

Imagine her surprise when next morning she saw on the front page of her newspaper the stewardess she had seen in her dream. Two weeks later an aviation magazine carried a story on the same airplane captain's idea of the inadequacies which she had heard him describe in her dream.

I wrote this part of this column late Tuesday night and I was naturally wondering just what may develop, if anything, to indicate the vision of the small boy on the West Street sidewalk was a forerunner of events to follow.

Rose Valley Item Recalled

COLUMN ITEMS SEEM to drop into my lap this week. Less than an hour after I talked with Barbara in our office, I was having lunch with my sister, Marion MacLeod, in her apartment on Fitzroy Street. I had been recalling that I had never danced until my days as a student at Mount Allison when I was about 22 or 23 years of age. Dancing and playing cards were considered as extremely evil things in my Rose Valley home, and indeed in many other homes in the area.

And that brought from Marion recollection of the story of some men who were playing cards in the kitchen of a home not so far from where we grew up.

Somehow some other men got up over the kitchen where there were no boards over the joists, only the ones below that actually formed the ceiling of the kitchen. When the men tramped on that spot, of course, the ceiling boards from below were not strong enough to take their weight and they plunged through the ceiling down to the kitchen floor.

'Devil In The Cards'

THE BELIEF THAT the devil was in the cards, and playing them was the work of the evil one, had been heard many times by everyone in the community. The men who were playing cards that night in the kitchen had heard it too.

Imagine their feelings of fear when they heard the very ceiling over their heads splintering in the night, and saw the forms of men come tumbling down upon them.

'Ice Boat Disaster'

FRED BELL, BORDEN writes to remind me that next Monday, January 27, is the 84th anniversary of what was known in earlier years as "The Ice Boat Disaster".

The ice boats pulled by sturdy crews over the ice in the Strait, or rowed by them in spots where there was open water, formed our only steady winter communication with the mainland. (There were winter ice breakers which were stuck in the ice sometimes for a month at a time, and were often stuck for much shorter periods of time.)

On that occasion the ice boat crews and their passengers ran into a really bad winter storm out on the ice. Had to spend a night on the wind-swept ice and were out 40 hours in all, most of it without food and without any shelter, except for the upturned boats.

Mr. Bell properly notes "the heartiness and bravery of those men who almost daily risked life and limb so we could be kept in touch with the outside world during the winter months, when ice conditions prevented all other means of communication".

Up to that time no emergency food was carried in the ice boats, but after the incident each boat stocked some biscuits, commonly known as "hardtack". This most unglamorous food would sustain life, at least, should the need arise, as Mr. Bell observes:

Night Long, Bitter Cold

“DURING THE LONG bitter night and the cold biting wind of the following day physical pain and mental anguish was becoming almost unbearable; so great was the strain that one or two of the crew developed a temporary crack-up. It is doubtful if any could have survived another night.

“The real physical struggle after the sighting of land was to make shore and shelter but the strength of a few bolstered by hope and determination made their way to shore and a farm house nearby.

“These people soon spread the news and a search party began the rescue of the remaining number who were found staggering and struggling to make their way to shelter. Some had about given up and could make no further effort. One man was found standing almost stiff with his arms locked around a tree others standing waist deep in snow unable to go further.

“When finally all had been accounted for and sheltered in this friendly home an examination revealed that most all suffered from severe frost bite. In one case a man lost part of his foot through later amputation but while so handicapped he spent the rest of his eighty years as the village blacksmith (No disability pension in those days).”

My own estimate of the ice-boat task was similar to that of Mr. Bell. I couldn't think of a more exposed and completely unpleasant and uncomfortable place than out on the ice of the Strait.

Ed MacWilliams Comments

BUT AFTER I interviewed Ed MacWilliams of Cape Traverse, himself a crew member and later Captain for many years, I was confused. This sturdy man's description took all the hardship and exposure out of the ice boat story.

To hear him tell it, the ice-boat business was just another job. You were dressed warmly, you know what to do. It was simple as that.

But most of us will go along with Fred Bell's version. They were sturdy, hardy, fearless men that manned those boats. If they weren't heroes in their time, they most certainly emerge as heroes of their time to those of us who can look back on those difficult days over the distance of the years.