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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Unusual Stories Of Former Days

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NORMAN MATHESON, Forest Hill told me some unusual yarns which I want to pass along to you.

Nelson Squires, Greenwich and his brother were coming from Farmington one night when they saw what they took to be a man on the road some distance ahead of them. He appeared to be asking for a ride as he had his hand out at shoulder level.

When the Squires got closer, though, they saw that the man was so huge his outstretched hand was higher than the top of the car. Nelson tried to tramp on the gas pedal and pull away from the spot, but his car began to slow down on him. The old story said that the car apparently was being slowed by the force that was emanating from the gigantic hitch hiker. But Squires managed to keep the car moving and got by.

The man "had a nose on him as big as a nail keg", and "his mouth was full of fire" the fanciful old story said. They got a real fright, Norman told me.

"Do you think they really saw something like that?" I asked and Norman replied "Oh, I guess they did. People used to see strange things, though you scarcely ever hear of stories like that now."

Norman was walking to St. Peter's one night when he was a young man. It was the year before the rural mail routes started, he told me. That would be somewhere around 1911, I believe, as the best information I can get indicates the rural routes started about 1912.

Mr. Matheson saw a woman on the road some distance ahead of him. "I could walk fast then", he told me, "but I couldn't walk fast enough to catch her."

Norman did catch up to her when the woman stopped suddenly on the road ahead of him. As he drew near he saw that her face was entirely unfamiliar. She was not anyone he had ever seen in his life. And he got a good look at her for she met him face to face. She was standing right in front of him.

"She Just Disappeared"

"BUT THE real fright came", he explained, "when she disappeared right in front of my eyes. She didn't go down, she didn't go up, she didn't go to either side. She just disappeared", Norman told me. "I really got a start then", he added.

"At the Bay (St. Peter's), he continued, "I met Harry Thompson with a horse and wagon, and I got a drive home with him as far as he went."

Norman had thought first of going to Thompson's place and staying the night with him, for he was still a bit shaken by what he had seen.

"Then I thought better of it and decided to walk home", he continued. But "I was stepping pretty high until I finally got in the house", he recalled with a smile, as he told me the story more than 50 years later.

Norman was going through Gay's swamp one night with his father, and a young man, Daniel MacPherson from Valleyfield who was teaching school at Forest Hill. The Mathesons had a good driving horse, a beautiful black animal.

Suddenly all three men noticed a well dressed man who appeared by the front, left wheel of the wagon. Apparently the wheel had struck him, but the man appeared to sit on the wheel until they got the horse stopped.

But there was no sign of the man then, though all three had seen him plainly. They searched for him, but they couldn't find a trace of him. Usually only one person used to see those unnatural, or ghostly figures.

"PETER MACPHERSON used to live over there", Norman told me as he pointed to a house on a hill some distance away – we were standing in the Matheson yard at that time.

One night Norman and his sisters were going a piece with two neighbor girls who had been visiting at the Matheson home.

We saw a light leaving that house, and going along the road toward Dundas until it disappeared from view", he told me. About one week later Mrs. MacPherson died, he recalled.

Most stories like I have been talking about are usually regarded as forerunners, or omens of things to come. But none of the other had been, so far a Mr. Matheson knew.

Man Seen With No Head

BEN SHEPHERD, a Forest Hill neighbor, and Alan MacKinnon were coming home from St. Peter's one night when Shepherd stopped and said "Look there, ahead – a man with no head." MacKinnon said "I can't see him." When Shepherd said "Look over my left shoulder in that direction", Alan MacKinnon replied "Indeed and I won't. He didn't want to see the apparition, Norman told me, and who could blame him? Perhaps he wouldn't have seen it anyway.

Another story Norman told me went like this.

"I remember one morning – I was only a youngster at the time – when two hard knocks came at our door.

"Mother got up – it was around five o'clock – but there was nobody there. A week later the same two hard knocks came again. When mother got up Dan Matheson was there. His mother had died during the night. Dan asked mother if she would go to help prepare the body – there were no undertakers to look after such things in those days as there are now"

The two knocks could be heard distinctly on both occasions. The first time, though, was a forerunner of the death of the neighbor woman.

Norman told me several others but I'll save them for another time. Incidentally Norman and I are not related. I met him first something more than 20 years ago at the Dundas Plowing Match as it was called then, and we have been friends ever since.

Compton Story Is Unusual

BOB COMPTON told me this unusual forerunner story when we met some weeks ago at the 50th Wedding anniversary of Mr. and Mrs. Alban MacAdam in Morell.

His father William Compton who was known as "Windmill Bill" because he built a windmill and devised a mechanism so it could be used to drill holes in logs which were used with the wooden pumps the Comptons built at one time. This story will be told in a future column.

William Compton had seen forerunners on several occasions which had indicated to him that somebody in the settlement was going to die in the near future. It was the unusual form the forerunner vision took that interested me in particular.

Mr. Compton used to see in a dream a ship going across the land. The ship would stop and take someone aboard. He would tell his wife next morning that a certain neighbor is not going to live long. And the forerunner would prove to be true. This went on for some time.

But one morning Mr. Compton came to the breakfast table wearing a worried expression that indicated something unusual was worrying him. Finally he told his wife that he had seen the forerunner of his own death, or words to that effect. When his wife naturally tried to cheer him up, with the observation that he had often seen the ship before in his dreams, he told her that it's entirely different. This time, he told her, "the ship stopped to take me aboard." Mr. Compton died within the week, I was told.\

Mother's Call Heard At Sea

WILLIAM COMPTON was not a superstitious man, I was told, far from it. But he had another unusual experience. He was at sea when his mother died and he had heard his mother call to him and use his name.

Later, after he had returned home, he learned that his mother had died on the day he had heard her call to him. And the time of her death corresponded with the time he had heard her voice. In case you are wondering – I know you must be – William's mother really had called to her son just before she died. For this latter story I have to thank Robert Compton's daughter, Mrs. Barry MacLaren, Parkdale who is a granddaughter of William.