



A DAY HOME FROM SCHOOL

I'm fighting a cold--not a bad one, nothing like that horrendous flu we all had last year. This is just a slight snuffle and an annoying tickle in the back of the throat. It was that bothersome tickle that awoke me one night recently, and I shuffled my way to the bathroom to see what we had to relieve it. On the Cold Medicine shelf we have quite an array of syrups and potions left over from that bout last year. There's "CM" for runny nose and non-productive cough, "DM" for stuffed up nose and loose cough, "RM" for sore throat and sinus headache, and just plain "M" for all of the above. I have trouble being decisive at 2 A.M. so I opted for "none of the above" "M's" and chose instead that little blue jar at the end of the row. Not to be taken internally, it says, so I rubbed a bit on chest and throat, with just a dab on the end of the nose, and shuffled back to bed. And do you know what happened? Well, lands sakes, I no sooner had pulled that flannel sheet and pile of blankets up under my chin, when I began to feel better. In fact, I felt like I was 10 years old! Perhaps that was just imagination, but it so happens that when I was 10 years old, if I coughed in the night more than once or twice, I could soon hear my mother's feet coming across the living room towards my door. There were six of us, but mother always knew which one was coughing. She carried a tray, and I knew what was on it. There was a teacup with a mixture of molasses and baking soda, a teaspoon, a cup of hot lemonade, and a small blue jar. She would sit on the bed beside me and say, "Now, I want you should take a teaspoon of this, and I'll rub some of this on your chest. Then we'll have a cup of hot lemonade and get right back to sleep." Dutifully I would take my medicine and sip that hot potion, sweetened with honey, just enough to make it palatable. Then, as she left--more often than not--she would say those magic words, "I think maybe a Day Home From School would do you good. We'll see." Snuggled down beneath the flannel sheets of yesterday with those kind words ringing in my ears, I was soon in dream land. With anticipation of the day to come and lulled by that nice warm drink, I was soon asleep. I awoke to find that it was not just a lovely dream. I could hear the ordinary sounds of a school morning well underway. Ben would be filling the jug for the kitchen range with kerosene. Olive would be watching baby Jayne while mother made sure that first-grader Lincoln was buttoned up properly for Mrs. McHenry's inspection. Dad would be feeding the chickens. Then all would gather briefly over breakfast, while Ben spelled out loud to mother. There would be a brief lull, as all lined up for the tablespoon of Cod Liver Oil, then the slam of the door and the pounding of feet as the troops ran to the grain house to wait for Mr. Brant Ellis in the school bus from the north side. You don't remember the grain house? It stood across the tracks from the present town hall parking lot. Mr. Leon W. Hall owned it, and he made sure the sliding door was opened on cold mornings, so that the Main Street kids who were picked up there for school could stay warm inside while they waited. "Where's Nancy today," someone would ask. "Oh, she coughed in the night, and mother said she needed a Day Home From School." "Lucky her," was the comment as Mr. Brant pulled to a stop and opened the door of the bus. They were off. And I was home. I would lie close under the covers drawing the last little bit of heat out of the soapstone at the bottom of the bed, until mother would come in and say, "Come on out where it's warm. I have the couch already for you." In my flannel nightie, with a sweater and knitted slipper socks, I would cart my pillows while mother brought the tray of medicines and I would be ensconced on the couch for the day. I remember how good that old-fashioned oatmeal tasted, steamed overnight on the back of the kitchen stove and sprinkled with brown sugar, dotted with butter, and covered with "top milk" poured from the bottle left at the doorstep that morning. Then the doctoring began--by "Dr. Mom", that is. Alternative doses of the molasses mix and the lemonade, served with words of fun and encouragement, and by mid-morning I had started to read a new Nancy Drew mystery book and was feeling right pert. Towards mid-day mother would say, "How would you like to listen to the radio?" Mother, I thought you would never ask! For it was time for the daily soaps. This was the highlight of a Day Home From School. As few times as I was there to hear them, I can tell you about characters, plots, theme songs, and even sponsors of these weekday sagas. There was Oxydols own Ma Perkins, Rinso White--Happy Little Washday Song, and Ajax, the foaming cleanser--wash the dirt right down the drain. They weren't called soaps for nothing! My favorite was Helen Trent "who found romance at 35--and even beyond!" (Impossible!) and Our Gal Sunday, the program that asks the question "Can a girl from a little mining town in the West find happiness as the wife of a handsome and titled Englishman?" (Of course she can!) There were countless others just as memorable. The list was ended only by mother saying, "Now you try and take a nap before the school bus gets here." Many years later, I understood that it was she who needed that nap. But I did doze off, dreaming about Mary Noble's triumph over that new and beautiful leading lady, and Helen Trent's rescue from the snare set for her by a fortune hunter, to be awakened by Mr. Brant's bus and the pounding of my siblings' feet as they raced to be the first to tell mother all about the day. Olive produced my homework, Ben teased me about faking to stay home from school and we all had a snack, including hot lemonade to be sure no one else would catch my cold. Now came the tricky part of the day. I needed to cough just enough to have mother suggest another day on the couch, but not too much to be put to bed without listening to Fibber MaGee and Molly after homework. Whether I managed it or not, there would be another rubdown, another dose of Molasses and another hot lemonade before bed. Now, I'm not sure if I felt better last week because of the little blue jar and its contents--Vicks vapor Rub, but I'm sure you all knew that-- or if the memory of a Day Home From School was so pleasant that it wafted me back into health. Anyway, the next morning I had this thought. Do you suppose the "M" on all those remedies stands for Molasses? Or maybe Mother? Hope your cold is better, too. Love, N.T.R.

CALENDAR

Feb. 13 7:00 P.M. Board meeting at Josh Crowell's
Feb. 14 Happy Valentine's Day to all!
Feb. 16 12 noon Mid-Winter Festivities at Christine's. West Dennis

MID-WINTER FESTIVITY

Tickets for the February luncheon are going fast. If you plan to attend, and have not yet made reservations, time is of the essence. Please refer to your January newsletter for a reservation form--or call 385-3689, 385-3528 or 394-0017 for instructions on how to obtain tickets. Nancy Thacher Reid is our guest speaker, and her topic is "Looking Back". Knowing Nancy's talent for turning up little known facts about Dennis and her people-- it will be an interesting afternoon.

HELP NEEDED...

Lynne Horton, curator of history at the Sandwich Glass Museum, is looking for native Cape Codders who were in the area during World War II to provide information for an upcoming exhibit entitled "On The Homefront". She is interested in oral history stories, pictures and any related items. Interested individuals should contact Lynne at the glass museum by calling 388-0251 or 394-0017. Any items donated for the exhibit would be returned to the owner, and would be fully insured and protected from possible damage.

THE SOCIAL HALLS OF YESTERYEARS--PART I

Since the rededication of Liberty Hall in South Dennis will not have taken place before deadline for D.H.S February edition I will save further reference to that venerable hall until a future date, and tell you instead a bit about Doric Hall in West Dennis. I know that in a series of some years ago I told you what I knew about our halls at that time, but, my goodness, have I ever learned a lot in the meantime! Part of that knowledge has come from research, part from the information received from "friends of truth in local history" who probably are the very best source of good documentation. Anyway, list to the story still told at the corner of Doric Avenue and Pond Street, West Dennis, about the social community hall known in its first days as Union Hall, and in its latter days as Doric Hall. It is a good beginning for a re-examination of the social changes that have marked our progress as a town, and as a social unit. Originally built to house the West Dennis Academy, the building stood first just east of the corner of Pond and Fisk. When it ceased to be used as a school, the proprietors converted it to a social center and named it Union Hall. I have few references to the hall under that name, but in 1875 the newspaper reports that Cyrus and Sears Crowell had the contract to move Union Hall to School Street. The reason for the move has not been found, but we can guess. The school lot was small and did not allow room for the carriages and horses which transported the good people of West Dennis to social occasions. Also the school did not have kitchen facilities, and as many, in fact most, of the events held there included a more or less elaborate collation, this was a major fault. Before the hall was moved, a basement story was built which housed a kitchen and supper room, and the old Union Hall was placed upon this new foundation. It was unique, in that, if a ball was being held, all dancing would cease at intermission time, the trap door would be raised and the company would go below to enjoy the refreshments of the evening. Once reestablished as Doric Hall, the records show it fulfilled its function as a village social center in all of the many meanings of that term. Private parties, such as the 50th wedding anniversary of Col. and Mrs. H.B. Winship, receptions for the graduating High school class, public dances featuring such groups as Prof. Carter's orchestra from Middleboro, and Martell's orchestra from Chatham intermingled with Lyceum meeting featuring political debates, and lectures by touring ministers. Occasionally roller skating was held, to the accompaniment of the West Dennis Band. Doric Hall may also have the distinction of having been the site of the first disc jockey dance. In 1896 those who attended the annual Stockholders Ball were treated to music played on Col. Winship's gramophone, described as a rare treat. I still have not heard from anyone about the wild and wooly parties put on by members of the Anti-fat and Anti-lean society. Well, times change and we must change with them. The day came when the stockholders of Doric Hall could no longer attract enough customers to use their building and the town was forced to take the land for non-payment of taxes. Already in a state of disrepair, the building was soon torn down, and the land is now used as a playground. But I know there are some of you out there in our vast audience who remember Doric Hall and I dearly wish you would send any memorabilia you may have to add to our archives.

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