

Health and Cures

When I was a little boy back in the late 30s the beginning of the 40s the life expectancy then would have been 55/60. People at 60 were regarded then as old and I remember my grandfather getting the pension which he got then when he was 70 and he was regarded as a very old man.

We were just coming at the end of the TB was still a big problem in our area lots of families were going away and going to the local dispensary in Dungannon and people were advised to always keep a goat because the goat ate the herbs and the herbs had a lot of anti dioxins we would call them now that kept people safe and actually the doctors in the dispensary had a large heard of goats and I remember my mother visiting the dispensary or the TB hospitals called the chest hospital in Dungannon then and she said it was lined with beds and lots of young people because the generation before mine two whole families had died out. TB was the disease we dreaded then we didn't hear any other diseases being talked about. TB was the big disease.

It was quite a short time frame they would go down very often the disease seemed to come in very often after spring time when they would be very bad flues about and I suppose people got broken down in health and then you would find that one of them had gone away to the dispensary and my father would be very worried of going to the crematorium and he would be worried incase other of the family followed suit.

I remember in those days these two houses in particular that the families had died out and we were doing work around the back of the house and we came upon these two collections of broken clay pipes and him telling me that these were clay pipes that were used at the wake of two of the people at that time had died in the house and people at that time had learnt that TB was spread by drinking out of cups or in particular smoking from a pipe and the custom had

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been to always to smoke when you had went into a wake and you were handed a plate of tobacco and a clay pipe and you smoked and handed the clay pipe round. So the TB was spread around by the mouth and by this time people learned it and they still wanted to smoke at the wake and they would buy 30 clay pipes and when the wake was over they'd break them this was a collection of clay pipes were found all broken in two.

Well people turned to their doctor almost at their last resort I remember as a very young man I remember an ambulance coming once to take away one of my neighbours who we learned latter had a bleeding ulcers and the old men around saying that it's a very bad sign because people never come back when they go away in the ambulance.

I would of not experienced the doctor ever coming to our house when all of the children were born the midwife was a local woman who acted in the house she wasn't a trained nurse at all. I only remember the doctor coming once and it was a new doctor had been appointed in Donaghmore in about 1944 I think it was or maybe 45 the year after the war and my grandfather had just got the pension and he charged him 10 shillings which was his total pension for that week so doctors were rarely used people turned to local cures and a big number of people had cures and each cure was used very often for animals as well as people. They turned to local cures for all kinds of things and the doctor would have been rarely called on.

Different people had different cures and my mother kept a list of all of the people in the locality who had different cures. The reason she did that was she had what was reckoned was a very powerful cure herself and it was the cure for the whooping cough which was a very important cure and I remember even up until the 70 into the 1970's I remember the doctors and the hospitals sending women with young children out to our house and she administered this cure and I remember very very many people sending her gifts during the year then and for

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cures that they had contributed to her she had the cure for the whooping cough. Another man who's still alive had a cure for bleeding and a very important cure not only for humans but for animals because of the event of barbed wire, barbed wire was a new thing in the farming the farmers didn't put up that very good fences and the cattle were jumping over the barbed wire and getting some very bad injuries and having very severe bleeding. So you would phone him or go and see him and I saw a number of incidents this myself with our animals the animal would be cured by the time you would come back there were big numbers of other cures most of which today have died out. A lot of people have cures for sprains but what I remember then the day before the National Health the people were using a lot of the local herbs and all that knowledge now has gone. My mother used chicken weed which was very common at this time of the year when the potatoes were dug she would go out she would gather large baskets of chicken weed and she would boil it at night when the potatoes came off and this was made into politicos which was a very effective thing for curing sprains. She also at that time the other big crop in this country was flax's and today people are turning to flax seeds for all the cures of the qualities of it. At that time flax seed was used my mother used it and she would mix it with the liquid off it and she would mix it with liquor's and this was very very effective cough cure, she used to bottle it neighbours would come during the winter time and keep it during the winter and then they would use this during the winter months.

Now when I was young the egg yolk was recognized then as a very effective cure were the skin had been damaged treatment of burns and now its qualities are very widely recognized and there were a number of other things like that natural things the farmers had in their fields. They had a very big knowledge of herbs the use of hers for different medicine purposes.

In our old cemetery here there is a bullion stone a stone with a large depression in it and it would fill with water during the winter time. Now if you had warts were a very common thing then warts on children at school warts on the fingers and

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hands were a very common thing and a very painful thing. Bleed a lot you would go up to that stone and get a snail and rub the snail on their hands and use the water from that stone and this was a certain cure at that time. Another one another of the big diseases at the time very serious disease was the whole whooping cough which used to break out every few years and one of the local cures was passing usually children were the most vulnerable to whooping cough was passing the child underneath the donkey which was quite dangerous thing and over the top of it 3 times and there are other ones. Wells lots of cures were contributed to wells, like you had in this area two very ancient holy wells and people used to go to these wells and walk around them 3 times for different cures a lot of that was dying out in my early days certainly it all had died out by 1950.

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