

[Page 54 - Strays from a Conversation with Billy James MacNamara](#)

ISSUE : [Issue 69](#)

Published by Ronald Caplan on 1995/8/1

tor taking the shot out of his leg. He had turned from a fox into a man. Another story I used to hear my grandfa? ther telling here, about some old woman around here some years ago--they had her kind of suspected as a witch. So. Her next-door neighbour used to get milk from her--get a bottle of milk--they didn't have any cows. Get a bottle of milk from her. So this evening she went over to her house. And (the old woman) said, "The cows never got home tonight. They're in the woods, and I couldn't hunt them. But," she said, "you wait. I'll get you a bottle of milk." She said, "Give me your bottle." She ran to the rocking chair--a big chair she had. a big setting chair. And she had a gimlet, one of those awls, bored a hole in it, and held the thing under it--and the milk poured out and filled her quart of milk for her! (She made a hole under the rocking chair?) Made a hole under the rocking chair and held a bottle under it and filled it with milk. She was a real witch then.... Years ago when they'd bring home a horse-- buy a new horse and bring him home--before the horse would go in the barn, there was a superstition they had. Before the horse would go in the barn. The woman would take the white apron off--get a white apron--and spread it across the doorway, the floor, and the horse would step over it and go in. That horse would never leave. You know, he'd stay there. He wouldn't try to get back home to where he came from. That was another superstition. (Isn't that a good one?) Oh boy, it was an awful belief, eh? An awful belief. (But people would do that here. Is that right?) Oh, they tried it. Tested it, yes. Just like charms and all that. (Do you believe in those?) No. No, I don't. (But they make good stories, don't they?) Great stories, yeah. My father was telling the story one time-- he was dying with the toothache. Oh, his eyes were swelled up, and face. There was an old woman out back here, she was sup? posed to have a charm for a toothache. So anyhow, my grandfather walked out about three miles for to get this charm from her. Anyhow, he came with it. And when he came with it I guess my father was going crazy. And he gave him the charm. And my father waited for about an hour or some? thing to see if it'd do any good. It was getting worse. He took the charm and hove it in the stove! I guess the old man near? ly went crazy. The worst thing of all--to burn a charm. (Did you ever have a blood-stopper here in this neighbourhood?) No, but I can tell you a story. One time, my nose was bleeding--it was just, probably, not much of a nose? bleed. I was going out of Boston. And me, and the fellow who was wheel-mate with me, in the pilot house--a Newfoundlander he was, too--they're pretty superstitious. My nose started to bleed at the wheel. I said, "My nose is bleeding." "Here," he said, "stop. I'll take the wheel from you. Don't stay there." Anyhow, he said to me, he said, "Kneel down. Kneel down," he said. I knelt down. I was only--the first year I was up--I was only young, about 20. I knelt down. He said, "Cross yourself." And he told me this prayer to say, this blood prayer. I said it. My nose was still bleed? ing. I got up. About ten minutes after, we noticed it stopped bleeding. (Can you re? member the blood prayer?) I forget it. I had a charm here my aunt learned me--a fire charm, to take fire out. My grandfa? ther, he had that, he believed in that. This fire charm, if you burned your hand. To say this charm, prayer.



The prayer was --who was that saint they said used to be for fire--St. Anthony? One of the saints. Sat on a rock or something, watching a fire. He said, "Fire go off, and do not come in." And then they had to cross them? selves three times. This was the charm. I guess if your hand was burnt below the skin, it wouldn't do it much good! On the other hand, there was some of that old-fashioned medicine that they used to make, was really a good cure. I can remem? ber here, of seeing my mother in the fall of the year, used to go in the woods. Used to take the (var) balsam--you know the fir, balsam on the fir--take that. And they take those black blue spruce tops. And they take the other bark of the cur? rant trees--black currant trees--bark of that. And that yellow root that used to grow in the ground--they used to call it snake root--yellow root. I run across it yet from the woods, in places. It's only about the size of a needle--long, like that--strings. And I forget how many more kind of herbs. And they'd put them in bot? tles. And they'd bottle it up. And they'd leave it get just like beer in the bottle. Put it in a big jar, I think, first, she had on it. It would foam up just like beer. And they'd bottle that all up. And for a common cold, they'd drink that. And I'm going to tell you, it was cutting. Well, there was something to that, see. That's all that medicine's made out of, mostly, today, is out of the herbs of the ground. But (now) there's none of it. Now you look at cod liver oil--look at that, the cures that made for a long time. Billy James MacNamara continues on page 56