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Young man Drowns and Memories change!

The type of history which has always interested me is the histories that people remember. My sisters and brothers often tell me they don't know how I remember things that happened when I was so young. In fact, a number of years ago I wrote an article about how I nearly drowned during Hurricane Hazel and my sister Maurene told a friend it never happened! Later when she talked to other family members, she was assured I had in fact recounted the story correctly. This article is one of immediate recall – that of an unknown reporter; and recall by others which took place only in the past few weeks. The story is essentially the same, but some of the facts vary widely.

When I write my articles, often I remember only a slight bit of the information, or someone told me something about a subject that I found interesting. While looking for something else recently my research took me to an article from a number of years ago. I remembered the incident, however slightly differently. Oh nothing that would change the story, but enough that it reminded me my memory is not all I sometime give myself credit. The main difference was I seemed to recall getting up on a Sunday morning to get ready for Mass at the Sacred Heart Chapel at Beckley Beach when my father told me the events of the Saturday evening before. A crewman from the Coal ship drowned off the mouth of the Feeder Canal and how he and others dragged for and found the body of the deceased. As is normal for this and other articles, I needed to get some facts, or at least the account as correct as it was first told to me. The article below was taken from the Dunnville Chronicle printed July 14, 1955. It is copied here word for word. Clearly my day of the week was incorrect as was seemingly the location of the accident. I wonder why I was so convinced it happened on a Saturday evening!

Friday, July 8, 1955 Port Maitland, Death claimed a young sailor, a member of the crew "COLLIER" operated by Canada Steamship Lines Friday night July 8th in an accident in which three others might just as easily have followed him to their death. Drowned was Frank Moore of Tobermory, aged 28 years, who was married at Tobermory on June 4th of this year. With him at the time were Helga Schneider of Montreal, porter on the boat, Peter Thurston of Saskatoon and Doug Holler of Wiarton, deckhands. The accident occurred about 11:45 p.m.

The foursome had been on shore leave, and was on the way back to the COLLIER. Mr. Moore was standing in the dinghy, saying he did not wish to get his pants wet, when, about 40 feet from shore, the boat capsized, throwing the occupants into the water. Three managed to cling to the upturned craft, but Mr. Moore, who ironically enough was the best swimmer of the group, went under and was not recovered for nearly two hours.

Max Moss, sitting on his verandah only a matter of feet from the incident, saw the boat go over, and went quickly to the rescue, and was able to save the woman and the other two men. At the same time a call went in to the Port Maitland Fire Department, who immediately instituted dragging operation, and who in

turn called the Dunnville Fire Department and asked for the inhalator squad. When Mr. Moss first went to the aid of the victims Mr. Moore was heard shouting, but he sank from sight before he could be reached. Taking the three ashore, Mr. Moss quickly returned to the rescue operations, and grappling was begun. Earl Siddall had fashioned a bar with grappling hooks to be used between two boats, one of which was operated by Max Moss and Fred Clay, and the other by Jack Cotter and Carl Woods. It was this grappling bar which picked up the body at 1:30 a.m., and it was removed from the bar by Maurice Warnick of Beckley Beach and Murray Hurst. The body was located directly below the scene of the accident.

Dr. E. L. McInnis, County Coroner pronounced life extinct when the body was brought ashore and ordered it sent to Hamilton for a post mortem examination.

Tragedy often strikes in more than one spot in some Families, and this was an example of this. During a freak storm that struck Lake Erie last March, John Wilson was drowned from the tug "CISCOE" at Port Dover and his body was recovered only about three days before the present. End of Article.

So now what? I wanted to know what happened to these fellows and the young lady after that terrible night. I wondered if Franks' widow remarried and where she is today. Would any of the crew agree to talk to me all these years after the tragedy? Were any of them even still living? It took a few minutes on the internet to find the community newspapers from whence the crew called home in 1955. The papers; the Bruce Peninsula Press out of Tobermory and the Warton Echo, were good enough to put a request for information in their publications; and walla two hits!

The first was from Shirley Petroff who was vacationing in Florida when her brother read the request in the Bruce Peninsula Press. He was not inclined to talk so he asked Shirley to call me. I am not certain, but I believe she is younger than her brother Frank and told me that the paper got his age wrong. He was not 28 years old but only 19 years.

Then, Ruth Hatt, a sister of Doug Holler sent me an email after seeing my request in the Warton Echo. She gave me Doug's telephone number in Picton Ontario. Doug tells me he cannot remember just where the boat went over but felt it may have been about halfway from the dock (Moss's dock) to the COLLIER. Oddly enough that would put the accident just where I always thought my father told me, not where the Chronicle wrote! Doug sailed the COLLIER for four years mostly running coal to Cornwall. They only occasionally off-loaded at Port Maitland. Doug remembers the boat they were in and it sounded to me like it was one of Max Moss's boats. They were steal boats with each seat consisting of an air tank. On this particular boat the back seat where Doug was seated seemed to be the only one that did its job as the bow sank leaving the stern seat just about a foot above water. Doug's memory is that Frank Moore was later determined to have had a heart attack and he suspects Frank may have stood up as result of the attack thus tipping the boat. (Franks' sister Shirley never heard anything about Frank having a heart attack.) In this interview Doug never suggested anything about Frank not wanting to get his pants wet. Peter Thurston couldn't swim and was in a bit of a panic. Doug got a hold of him and instructed him to hang onto the stern until a boat from shore came to the rescue. The original article states that the three remaining crew clung to the boat, yet Doug tells me that Helga Schneider swam back to the COLLIER! Question to myself! Is this article I write today a revisionist history resulting from years of greyer and greyer memory, or in the rush to put together a story in 1955, did the reporter get the facts wrong? Did the Chronicle get all its facts correct or am I the one changing history?

Since Doug lives in Picton I want to write a tidbit on a totally unrelated matter. Picton is a beautiful town in Prince Edward County where if you follow the Lake Ontario shoreline as much as is possible while traveling to Kingston you will need to take the Glenora - Adolphustown Ferry to continue along Hwy 33.

This sometimes means it is a great opportunity to stop at Picton, a kilometer or two before the ferry and capture the essence of the town for a few minutes or in my wife and my case a few hours. On one of these trips we stopped into the Macaulay Heritage Park where there is a cemetery with a unique tombstone. It's in honour of Wm Pierce who died "February 31 1860" at the aged of 73 years." No one seems to know for sure just how Wm. managed to die on February 31st. I will be expecting my cheque in the mail soon from Prince Edward County for the plug.

Then there is the story about the CISCOE. It seems this fish tug is unlucky! Another look at the internet and I find this boat has spent more time at the bottom of the lake than floating. I am not going to do an article here today on it, but would appreciate hearing from someone; anyone who knows this boat and wants to update me on its whereabouts.

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