

[Recollections of Ridgewood]

Tales - Anecdotes (Misc.)

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK Forms to be Filled out for Each Interview

FORM A Circumstances of Interview [3?]

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER WILLIAM WOOD

ADDRESS 7012-67th. Place. Glendale, L.I.

DATE October 3, 1938

SUBJECT RECOLLECTIONS OF RIDGEWOOD — Annie Nilsson

1. Date and time of interview October 1, 1938
2. Place of interview My residence
3. Name and address of informant Mrs. Annie Nilsson 5943 Gates Ave., Brooklyn, N.Y.
4. Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant. Mrs. M. Eilbacher 7012 67th. Place. Glendale, L.I.
5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you
6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc.

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NEW YORK

FORM C Text of Interview (Unedited)

STATE NEW YORK

NAME OF WORKER WILLIAM WOOD

ADDRESS 7012-67th Pl. Glendale, L. I.

DATE October 3, 1938

SUBJECT RECOLLECTIONS OF RIDGEWOOD A DREAM THAT / CAME TRUE

Fifty-five years ago, Annie Soeldner, a child of ten, lived with her parents in a house on Gates Avenue, near Prospect. The front room was used as a grocery store. Among the customers was a Polish woman named Portavetch, whose husband worked as a waiter in a Brooklyn hotel. A disputed store bill gave rise to unpleasant relations which resulted in the withdrawal of the Polish family's patronage, and the woman discontinued coming into the store.

One morning, about a year later; Annie was awakened by her mother at the usual time, six o'clock. The moment she opened her eyes she said: "Oh, Mother, I had such a strange dream. I thought that Mrs. Portavetch came and bought 3 1/2 lbs of sugar from us." Ten minutes later the woman walked into the store and made just that purchase.

***** RECOLLECTIONS OF THE OLD FARM

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Father was the proprietor of a farm in Maspeth during the early eighties. He was fond of making what the people of today call "wise cracks." When planting peas, he used to say: "If they come, we won't see many: If they stay away, we shall see them all!"

He was referring to the possibility of crows coming and devouring his seed.

While I was yet a child, father became very ill, and the doctor said he had malaria. He was ordered to bed, and mother was directed to give him a teaspoonful of medicine three times a day. When the bottle was emptied, the same prescription was renewed.

Father was an impatient man, who thought he wasn't getting well fast enough. He thought, too, that because the medicine was colorless it must necessarily be weak; so to hasten his cure father took four teaspoonfuls at a time, instead of one. He did this when Mother's back was turned, and the first thing we knew he got so sick that we believed he would die before we could get the doctor. My! was Doctor Combs mad when he came? He had to stay about two hours before he could get father in shape to leave him. Before going away he said: "If you ever play a trick like that one me again, you can send for a horse doctor to come to your relief." Mother took no chances after that; she took the bottle away with her each time after giving father his regular dose.

***** A BIT OF WITCHCRAFT

When I was fifteen, I knew a very pretty girl who lived with her parents on Freshpond Road, Ridgewood. An old woman who used to sell pretzels in the vicinity was said to be possessed of an "evil eye." Every time she stopped to peddle her wares at my 3 friend's house it was her custom to praise the girl's beauty. One day the girl became very ill, and seemed to be going out of her mind. She grew worse as time went on, and frequently appeared to be demented. She would say: "Oh, Mother, it's got me again! Mother, Mother; take it away from me! Take it away!"

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The pretzel women had suddenly vanished from sight; she no longer came into the neighborhood, and everyone said she had bewitched the girl. Friends of the family were called upon, and some recommended one cure and some another. Acting upon the suggestion of a neighbor, the worried mother took her daughter to a certain woman whose prayers were said to be very effective in removing witches' spells; but all to no avail. At last, a gypsy gypsy was consulted; and she made the startling disclosure that a jealous woman had paid the old hag who sold pretzels to "hex" the girl. The gypsy assured the mother that if the girl would swallow raw eggs without salt, one after another until she vomited, the evil spirit would quickly take its departure. These directions were carried out, and very soon afterwards my friend ceased to complain.

***** SNAIL SOUP

About forty-five years ago, I went to work as cook for a family of three sisters; elderly ladies who lived in a neat brownstone house on Herkimer Street, near Eastern Parkway, Brooklyn. They seemed to like my cooking very much, and were particularly fond of my soups. The back door of the kitchen opened into a cool storage-room, the floor of which was reached by descending two steps.

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Here stood the ice-box, near a door through which we had to pass to reach the garden at the back of the house.

One evening, after the dinner things had been cleared away, I made a pot of chicken soup for the noon meal on the day following, and set it down near the outer door of the shed to get cold; leaving the door open so that the cool breeze could blow in. I stayed up rather late that night, reading in the kitchen; and, when I got tired, I went into the shed and put my pot of soup in the ice-box. After locking all the doors I retired to bed.

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Next day, when preparing lunch, I was horrified to discover two large garden snails in my nice pot of soup. Hurriedly removing them, I decided to keep my awful secret to myself, and at noon-time I served up the dish as though nothing had happened. While I was busying myself in the kitchen, one of the ladies called out, "Annie, shall we save a plate of soup for you?" I answered back that I did not care for any, and the same lady then said: "Oh, Annie, I'm so glad. We are going to finish it. We all thin think this is the most delicious soup you ever made!"

***** A MATTER OF PERSONAL OPINION

Shortly before my first marriage, I confided to the pastor of my church that my intended husband was a man of another faith. The clergyman seemed to be much distressed, and he said to me: "One cannot carry water on both shoulders; our religion is the best."

Had he suggested that ours was the true religion, I might not have retored retorted as I did; but when he said it was the best, I replied 5 "A person can buy seven different kinds of excellent face soap. The manufacturer of each kind may claim it to be the best. But each kind does not suit every complexion." My pastor offered no further criticism.

***** A STRANGE COINCIDENCE

Soon after my first marriage, I had an experience which, although it may seem trivial to relate now, made a deep impression at the time of its occurrence forty years ago. I was standing at the door of my house one afternoon when I noticed two women approaching from opposite directions. They passed each other almost in front of my door. These women were identical, as far as I could observe, in age, height, weight, complexion, color of hair, color of eyes, and attire. I had never seen either of them before. I have not seen either of them since. What they were entire strangers to each other was evident from the fact that neither gave any sign of recognition. Each was about thirty years of age and wore an orchid dress. Each had on the same kind of shoes as the other; the same kind of hat

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and the same colored stockings. Even the hair was of the same shade, and done up in the same manner. Both had blue eyes, and both walked with similar gait. Had another person told me of such an experience, I should have thought that person suffering from hallucinations.

***** 6 A PREMONITION: A FORTUNE-TELLER; A DEATH.

When I was a little past thirty years of age I developed a feeling of unaccountable melancholy; try as I might, I could not resist it. A strange presentiment of impending evil seemed to pervade my whole being. This unhappy state of mind manifested itself in an awful despondency and hopelessness by day, and my rest at night was disturbed by frightful dreams. One night I dreamt my father came to me and said, "They think I am dead; but don't worry, it is not I." The next night I dreamt of a wreath. Very strangely a neighbor of mine told me the next day that she, too, had dreamt of funeral flowers.

Bewildered almost to distraction, I decided to go to a fortune-teller. I carefully refrained from telling my husband of my intention, for he was unalterably opposed to anything that bordered upon superstition. Approaching the clairvoyant somewhat timidly, I could not at first muster up sufficient courage to mention the real object of my visit, but started the conversation on the pretext that I wished to hear about an absent relative-quite a distant one-in whom I was not especially interested.

The fortune-teller soon disposed of my first question, telling me not to worry about my relation, because, she said, he would soon be back. The woman then said to me: "You are married to a man who works with a hammer and chisel. He is not insured, but you had better see to it that he gets insured for you are soon to be a widow. You have already spent most of the life you were allotted to be together. Unless you follow my advice your two children will suffer."

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Now I had never seen this woman before; there was no possibility that she could have known, by natural means, anything of my personal affairs; yet everything she told me either was true at the time or came to pass later. My husband was a carpenter, a man of good physique and excellent constitution, who did not believe in life insurance. He was earning only fourteen dollars a week, and although this was fair wages at the time it was all consumed in our living expenses. We had two children, as the woman had said. Once or twice before this, I had suggested to my husband that he should take out an insurance policy, but I did not wish to be insistent over his objections. Nine months after my visit to the fortune-teller my husband died; and but for financial help from my father, my two children and I would have been practically destitute. We had been married only seven years. My husband was only thirty-three at the time of his death. ***** THE BENEFICENCE OF SAINT ANTHONY

The several years of my first widowhood, all attended by a constant struggle with adversity, were terminated by my marriage to a man with whom I afterwards spent many happy years. We enjoyed a measure of prosperity, and were well contented.

It has been my life-long custom to pray to Saint Anthony for guidance in worldly matters, and there are two outstanding instances among the many that I could mention of my prayers having been answered. One of these instances relates to a six-family house that my husband and I owned. Real estate was bringing good prices at the time, and we were undecided whether to sell our property to a man who had made a recent offer, or to hold it for a possibly higher bid. During our indecision I prayed constantly to [ST.?] Anthony. One night I dreamt that I stood amidst an almost endless array of flagpoles; from the top of each of them a long streamer was waving in the breeze, inscribed with the word: Sell! In every direction I looked I could see the words: Sell! Sell! Sell! Sell! We did sell the house, and at considerable advantage. Moreover, I am convinced that we could never again have received as good an offer as the one we accepted.

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Having moved into another dwelling, I was scrubbing the stairs one day when I lost my much-prized diamond ring, a present from my husband. Time after time we searched for it, high and low, but could not find it. I was almost heart-broken, not so much for its intrinsic value as for the sentiment connected with it as a gift. I made a novena and gave a candle to [ST.?] Anthony, and my faith was rewarded. My husband found the ring on a table in a closet. It seems as if no human hand could have placed it there.