



The *Great* Canadian  
Catholic Hospital History Project

Documenting the legacy and contribution of the  
Congregations of Religious Women in Canada,  
their mission in health care, and the founding and operation of Catholic hospitals.

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Projet de la *Grande* Histoire  
des hôpitaux catholiques au Canada

Retracer l'héritage et la contribution des  
congrégations de religieuses au Canada,  
leur mission en matière de soins de santé ainsi que la fondation et l'exploitation des hôpitaux catholiques.

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**Our Lady's Hospital  
Vilna, Alberta**  
A collection of articles from the  
Sisters of Service congregational publication  
"Field at Home"

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## **Sisters of Service**

### ***Field at Home S.O.S. Magazine***

The Field at Home was the brainchild of Rev. George Daly, C.Ss.R., director of the Sisters of Service for 34 years. Two years after the founding of the community, the first issue was published in October 1924 to inform the benefactors about the work and progress of the Sisters and to solicit funds.

For the initial eight years, Father Daly wrote and oversaw the production of the quarterly magazine. As an author of three books and numerous articles, Fr. Daly's publishing knowledge of the power of words and illustrations shone throughout the issues. The first issues of cream-coloured seven pages reflected the community's classic simplicity with a cover of a black ink adaptation of its coat of arms.

Replacing Fr. Daly as editor, Sister Carolyn Albury assumed the responsibility for the next 20 years, continuing his five main sections: The Editorial, written by Father Daly until his death in 1956; At Headquarters; In the Mission Field; Our Benefactors and Vocations. The four successive Sister editors brought their experience and journalistic training to the magazine, which returned to the original size in 1955. The later issues reflected the contemporary and changing religious trends and celebrating the historic moments within the SOS and Canada.

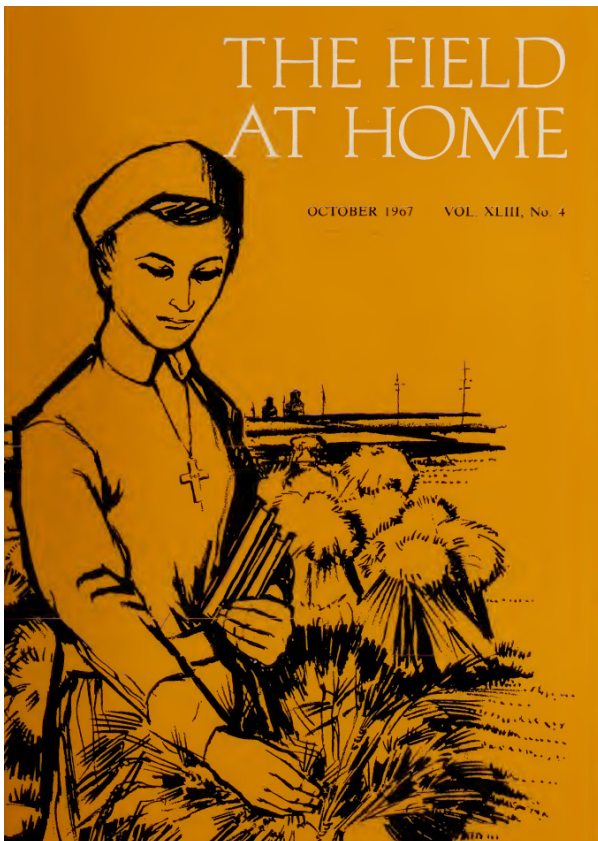
To attract interest and support, The Field at Home originally was complimentary. Copies were distributed to churches and placed in pews. Several Sisters were attracted to the community after reading the magazine. Later a yearly subscription cost \$1 a year and only increased to \$2. At its peak in the mid-1960s, the subscription list rose to 4,300.

The publication of the magazine ended in 1984.

The following are articles extracted from the magazine that made reference to Our Lady's Hospital in Vilna, Alberta.



Examples of magazine covers through the years.





Field at Home Vol. V, No. 2, April 1929, p 9

**NEW HOSPITAL OPENED BY SISTERS OF SERVICE AT VILNA, ALBERTA**

**Fully Equipped and with Accommodation for Thirty Patients**



On the feast of the Epiphany, the informal opening of Our Lady's Hospital took place at Vilna, Alberta. It will be recalled that the Sisters of Service opened a small ten-bed hospital in this town about three years ago. The efficiency and devotion of the good sisters were so appreciated by the community that an urgent request was made to the Rev. Father George Daly, C.Ss.R. (who generally supervises endeavours in every part of Canada) for a fully equipped hospital which would be in keeping with the needs of this vast district. The new hospital building is in bungalow style with accommodation for thirty patients, all patients being on one floor. It is built of Bruno tile, with stucco facing and trimmed with tapestry brick. It is 76 feet by 44 feet.

On the west side of the building is a very spacious sun porch. Under separate roof, but attached to the main structure, is the Sister's convent in which are chapel, dormitories and community room. The building is equipped with most up-to-date steam heating and plumbing. A Victor X-ray, operated by a 6 kilowatt Caron engine which also supplies electricity for the building, makes Our Lady's Hospital one of the most complete of the smaller hospitals of Alberta. The general contractor was Mr. Charles Gordon of Vegreville.

Great credit is due Rev. Father Daly and the Sisters of Service for providing hospitalization for the new and growing district. The acting superior is Sister Campbell to whom is due in large measure the excellent arrangement of the building. The hospital was blessed by Rev. Father Hughes on the feast of the Epiphany. The solemn blessing and laying of

the corner-stone will take place at a later date, most likely during the month of May.

from the *Western Catholic*

Field at Home Vol. VI, No. 2, April 1930, p 7

**VILNA—OUR LADY'S HOSPITAL**

Sister Furman (a Sister who speaks Polish) and I who speaks Ukrainian, has now joined the staff of the Vilna Hospital, and recent news tells us that Sister has started two Sunday schools in the district for Polish and Ukrainian children, also a social Club for women and girls, which meets every Friday evening. Sister's knowledge of languages is very useful in the Hospital too, as many of the patients are unable to speak English, and Sister Furman acts as interpreter.

Field at Home Vol. VII, No. 3, July 1931, p 6

**VILNA, ALBERTA — OUR LADY'S HOSPITAL**

From Vilna there comes the news of a fire. We quote part of a letter written by one of the Sisters in Vilna to the Motherhouse in Toronto: "I hardly know where to begin my tale of tragedy—for tragedy it is, at least to us. Last week the barn and ice house were burned to the ground, and were therefore a total loss. I can't say how the barn caught fire, but it burned at a great speed when once started. I suppose things are never so bad that they couldn't be worse, for if the wind had changed ever so little, I hate to think what would have happened to the Hospital.

Everyone was very kind with offers of assistance. Undoubtedly they realize that we have troubles as well as they do. The ice was saved, thank God, but we had to build a new ice house with all possible speed. Men worked all that night, and part of next day, in order to erect it. The fire was a cross, and a hard one to bear, especially now when times are so difficult. But God is good, and perhaps even a fire will help in His work. Who knows?

We now have a statue of the Sacred Heart in the hall, where it can be seen by all who come to the hospital. A light constantly burns in front of this statue as a petition to the Sacred Heart for a blessing on our work. During the month of May, each evening after recreation, we said the *Memorare* and sang a hymn in honour of Our Blessed Lady asking her for a special blessing on our work. May our dear Lord and His Mother ever watch over us and help us.

## HOSPITAL NOTES

The doctor's departure on his summer vacation from our Vilna hospital seemed to be the signal for things to start happening.

One evening a man came to the hospital in great distress about his wife who was seriously ill some miles distant. The Sisters started out at once in the man's car and on reaching the home found the patient so ill that they would not risk leaving her, but brought her back to the hospital, where she could be watched closely.

The husband's reliance on the Sisters was absolute. He left the full responsibility with them. During the night the woman's condition grew so much worse that the Sisters became worried and phoned to Doctor X of a neighbouring town for advice as to the treatment necessary.

To the relief of everyone concerned, the patient responded favourably, and in a few days she was able to return to her home and await our own doctor's arrival for further care.

During her stay in hospital this woman availed herself of the privilege of going to Confession in her own tongue (Ukrainian) and receiving Holy Communion in her own rite, as a Ukrainian priest happened to visit the hospital at that time.

### St. Joseph Wins the Day

The old man kept a store in the village, and although the Sisters did not deal with him (they found his prices too high), they called in occasionally to speak to him in German, as this seemed to please him. He was a Jew and spoke several languages.

One evening while the Sisters were at supper two men arrived in a little truck, bringing the news that the old man was very sick and absolutely without attention. The Sisters went at once and found the man sitting in his store, looking very ill; in fact, near to death. It seems he had failed rapidly and finally had fallen and injured himself extensively.

"Come with us to the hospital," the Sisters said to him.

"No, I can't go!" was the old man's decided answer.

"But you have no one here to do anything for you, and you need assistance," urged the Sisters.

"No, I won't go to the hospital, and I mean what I say. It's hard on the pocket book, and besides I'm having a sale right now—not an eight or ten day sale, but a complete sale."

By that time there was a gathering of curious minded people in the store, for it was a novelty to see Sisters in a down-town store. So, realizing they could make no impression on the old man, the Sisters went home leaving instructions with the clerk (who was a Syrian and should be a Catholic) to come for them if there should be urgent need, or if the old man changed his mind about coming to the hospital.

The Sisters recommended the case to St. Joseph and the next morning an agent brought the poor, suffering soul to the hospital. It seems he had managed to persuade him somehow.

Everything possible was done for him and he was so appreciative and respectful. However, he grew rapidly weaker, and passed away quietly the next day, but not before Sister had baptized him and named him Joseph, in order that the dear Saint might help him to die a happy death. He wore such a peaceful smile in death, that we feel St. Joseph did not fail him and us.

### 45 Miles for Treatment

A child who had cut itself with an axe was brought to the hospital from a distance of 45 miles. The whole family came along, as there was no one with whom they could leave the other children. They came in a wagon, driven by a team, and it took almost two days to complete the journey as the roads were bad, owing to frequent rains.

The wound was bathed and dressed, and as there was a possibility of a broken bone, the leg was placed on a splint. Instructions were given to the mother as to the care needed, and she was warned to watch for symptoms that would make it necessary to bring the child back when the doctor returned. They did not come back, so we presume the wound healed without further trouble.

### Help in Time of Need

Under the supervision of Mrs. Eadie, wife of Dr. Eadie, a bazaar was held in aid of the hospital. Although the time of year was unfavourable, this effort brought in \$172.00—a very welcome addition to our budget. We are surely grateful to all

who helped bring this venture to such a successful conclusion.

*Seldom can the heart be lonely  
If it seeks a lonelier still,  
Self-forgetting, seeking only  
Empty cups of love to fill.*

## The Vilna Ambulance



This is an interesting snapshot of the Vilna ambulance in action. The patient, who is sitting in the chair, was in the hospital for six months. The woman standing beside the vehicle is his old mother, who walked fifteen miles to bring him clothes to go home in. They are very poor.

**Field at Home Vol. XI, No. 4, October 1935, p 10**

### HOSPITAL DAY IN VILNA

One of our Sisters at Vilna has sent us the following account of this interesting event: "At last came the Great Day. How we had prayed for a fine day as being almost the only thing to worry about. It turned out to be a day of variations, sun and cloud, with a little rain and wind.

"We hurried around to have everything in order by one o'clock, but we know now that in Vilna one does not hurry to be on time; in fact, in most homes there is no such thing as a clock. So, although the opening was set for one o'clock, it was almost two before anybody began to arrive.

"Then we spent a few anxious hours on account of the non-arrival of the appointed judges. The mothers who had brought babies with the hope of winning a prize, were getting uneasy, and so were we. A phone message told us there was car difficulty along the way. The roads were in very bad condition, owing to a heavy rainfall. "However, about 4:30 everyone

seemed to arrive at once. Then Father Schmeltzer, Chairman, announced the opening and things proceeded according to schedule.

"First came the raising of the flag on the new flag pole, under the direction of Mr. Race, United Church minister of Vilna. This little ceremony was very impressive. Mr. Race gathered his boys around the flag pole, called them to attention and commanded them to salute. The salute was held while the flag was hoisted. Then the fire-crackers were lighted and the crowd sang "O Canada," led by Mr. Race. Just at that moment the sun came out and shone down on us so beautifully that it made everyone happy.

"This ceremony was followed by the examination and judging of the babies, the prizes being distributed by Father Schmeltzer.

"Speeches were given by Mr. Day, United Church minister of Good Fish Lake, on Citizenship; by Mr. Dufty, Secretary of the town, on Patriotism; by Mr. Haverlack, new school principal, on Home and School; by Dr. Anderson, on the relationship between the hospital and the community.

"Next came the soft ball game, played by the Vilna team against a neighbouring team. Vilna, of course, won. Dr. Eadie presented the champion team with a beautiful silver cup.

"At 10:30 p.m. there was a fine crowd around the platform, which had been ingeniously lighted, and tastefully decorated, when, suddenly, there was a downpour of rain!

"Dr. Eadie, with his usual presence of mind in emergencies, hurried the people off to the town hall, where they continued to celebrate until four o'clock in the morning.

"Under the rainy circumstances, we made very little financially, as there was no sale for ice cream and cool drinks, but we believe much good will come from the affair in the way of an increase of friendly feeling among the people. Everyone seemed so pleased with the little programme."

Field at Home Vol. XII, No. 2, April 1936, p 6-7

## INTERESTING HOSPITAL INCIDENTS

### A Baby's Faith

Although we are told that a child does not reach the age of reason before seven, evidently the age of love and confidence is reached much earlier. At least this was true in the case of Ruby, a three-year old, who entered our Edson Hospital recently.

Ruby was suffering from an infection similar to lump-jaw in animals. One of the Sisters taught the child her prayers and explained that Jesus loved her and would make her face better if she asked Him. She was told also that Jesus lived in the little house on the altar in the chapel.

Some time after, the child was seen making her way to the chapel. Listening in the hall, the Sisters heard the sweet baby accents: "Little Jesus, make my sore face better. You hear me, Jesus? It's OK if you don't. I want to go home, Jesus." Silence for a few moments. Then the baby voice was heard again—"All right, Jesus."

What did the Sacred Heart whisper to this dear little infant? "We do not know, but the sore face did get better and Ruby is home again, a proof that our loving Saviour can no more turn a deaf ear to children now than He could when He was on earth and said: "Suffer the little ones to come unto Me, for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven."

### Saved for Heaven

A six-day-old baby was brought to the hospital in a very critical condition. The Sisters discovered the infant had never been baptized as the Father, who should be a Catholic, was married outside the Church and had grown hardened in indifference. As there was no hope of recovery the baby was baptized and died soon after. It seemed as though our Lord merely brought the little one to the hospital to save it for heaven.

### First Aid?

A man was brought in with a sprained ankle. It seems he had been out shooting and had shot a squirrel in a tree. The little animal was not obliging enough to fall down after being shot, so the man had climbed the tree after it. Unfortunately he lost his balance and fell to the ground, hurting his ankle. Before bringing him to the hospital his friends painted the injury with

iodine, as a first aid measure. They used veterinary iodine! The result was a very bad burn, so the poor man suffered as much from the remedy as from the injury. Moral—be careful of strong iodine!

### Nuptial Mass

Tragic and pathetic incidents have no monopoly in our hospitals. Ofttimes we have episodes that are frankly humorous, and these keep our funny bones supple. Again, some events are simply joyous and happy, as was the Nuptial Mass celebrated recently in the chapel of Vilna Hospital. For some months the young man had been riding a distance of sixteen miles to receive instructions, as he was not a Catholic. At last he knew what was required for reception into the Church and this touching ceremony took place in the hospital chapel. The father-in-law, who is also a convert, was one of the sponsors, and this good man travelled the long distance, fasting, because he desired to receive Holy Communion.

The following Saturday was the wedding day. The party consisted of the bride and groom, her father, his mother, the best man and one of the neighbors. They were all so sincere and the atmosphere so devotional that everyone that was present was truly edified.

After the ceremony, a wedding breakfast, provided by the Sisters, was served. The Sisters saw that each member of the party was given rosary beads and holy pictures before leaving for the new homestead, which is situated about 20 miles from the hospital.

### 24 Miles With Hemorrhage

One poor woman drove 24 miles to the hospital with a hemorrhage from the nose, which had started a week before and could not be checked. The Sisters tried one remedy after another with very little success, for the woman was suffering from a disease which caused the bleeding. At least, after two large doses of hemastatic serum and a new packing, the bleeding was controlled and the woman was able to rest and take nourishment both of which she badly needed.

### How Faith is Lost

A young lad admitted to the hospital said he was attending the United Church, although he should be a Catholic. On further enquiry, the Sisters learned



he went to this Church because of the Young People's Club in connection with it. He wanted to be able to go around with the other boys. His name has been sent to one of our catechetical houses, and he will now be receiving instruction in his religion. We hope he will grow to value and appreciate the Gift of Faith which heretofore has meant very little in his life.

### Deadly Environment

A young girl of eighteen entered the hospital suffering from T.B. It seems the family was very poor and all crowded together in a tiny one-room house. This girl slept in the granary rather than sleep in the house under existing conditions and caught a severe cold there; at any rate she is now in an advanced stage of tuberculosis. She had not been to the Sacraments for over a year, not from bad will, but because there seemed to be no way. The poor child was actually beginning to wonder if one religion is not as good as another. It is very sad, but many of these people come to the same conclusion, all because they are not instructed and have so little Catholic contact and influence.

### An Unwilling Guest

A woman who had to have her appendix removed brought her baby along as she had nowhere to leave him, so he was the guest of the hospital until the mother was ready to leave. Isadore—that was his name—felt very much abused at the strange turn of events in his young life and sounded his disapproval in no uncertain voice at all times and in all places. One night when he was thus giving vent to his outraged feelings, Sister tried to soothe him with a bottle of milk. But although he was nearly starved he would not take a drop. In desperation Sister had recourse to the medicine dropper, and after taking four ounces of milk in this manner he at last went to sleep, much to the satisfaction of Sister and the patients who had been so long disturbed by his howling.

### Small Beginnings

Some weeks ago two of our Sisters at Vilna Hospital, set out to visit the families of the district, in the hope of gathering the children on Saturdays to be instructed in religion.

The next Saturday at ten a.m. (the time appointed for class) one boy turned up. After waiting a half hour, his sister with three other girls appeared in sight. The Sisters knew the boy and three of the

girls, but as the fourth child was a stranger, Sister asked who she was and if her parents knew she had come. The information was eagerly volunteered by all the others at once: "Yes, Sister. You see, her mother she Greek Orthodox, her grandmother she Greek Orthodox; but her father he Orthodox, and her grandfather he Orthodox, and she wants to come to our Church with us."

On being asked why they came to catechism class, they said it was because they wanted to know more about God. Surely that reason could not be improved upon.

The next Saturday two more boys of 12 and 18 joined the class, also two little ones of six and eight. These last brought along with them a boy of seven and explained in all seriousness that they thought he had better be learning catechism than playing on the streets.

Sister explained a short form of the *Morning Offering* to the juniors, and asked them to learn it. Shortly after, they were reading from a picture book: "So before everything I do I will say with all my heart 'All for Thee'." One little fellow, with an eye for brevity interrupted the reading at this point: "You see, Sister," he pointed out, "that means works, sufferings, and all, so I'll say that instead of the long one."

### Requiescat

In our last issue we printed the story of a Cree boy who was brought to the hospital for treatment after going around with a dislocated hip for three months. At that time there was some hope of his recovery. A ten pound weight was attached to his leg, and he was on his back for six weeks, but as the days dragged by, there was no improvement in the condition of the wasted body of Joe (that was his name) was prepared for death.

A few days before Sister asked the lad a question and received no answer. She, thinking he had not understood, repeated the question. Then Joe uncovered his wee brown hands in a most dignified manner, showing her his red rosary, and giving her to understand quite plainly that he could not answer when saying his beads! How edifying to see the Faith, brought to his tribe by those zealous missionaries the Oblates of Mary Immaculate—treasured so highly by this wee lad!



One day a Cree friend came to visit Joe and asked if there was anything he wanted. "I want Holy Communion," he replied. That was his one desire, but owing to continual nausea he was not able to receive. However, during the early days in the hospital he had the happiness of receiving Communion frequently, so he was well prepared. Unconsciousness preceded his last few days in hospital, and his sorrowing parents took him home to die, which event took place two days later. May he rest in peace!

### A Valued Souvenir

For some time the Sisters had charge of an old half-breed Indian, who was very repulsive and quite helpless. However, with patient kindness, the Sisters nursed him and prayed for him and before he died they were rewarded by having him say, with evident sincerity, *Acts of Contrition, Faith and Love*.

On hearing of his death, his sister came in to see him, and the first thing she did was to ask for his pipe. On receiving this coveted souvenir, she sat down in the office and had a good smoke.

Field at Home Vol. XIII, No.1, January 1937, p 6

### BENNY STEALS HEAVEN

Benny was given into the Sisters' care at Vilna Hospital when he was very near death from a complication of diseases. Seeing his critical condition, the Sisters asked his mother if he had ever been baptized. The answer was "Yes." For some reason, the Sisters were still doubtful, and one day when Benny was actually dying, they questioned the mother again, asking who had baptized the child. The name given made Sister hurry for water to give Benny the benefit of real baptism. The poor infant seemed to have been waiting for this, for his soul sped away immediately, as though released and free to enter heaven. The Sisters feel that Benny is now an advocate in heaven, and that he will obtain many blessings on their work among the suffering poor of Alberta.

Field at Home Vol. XIII, No.1, January 1937, p 10

### NURSING THE SICK POOR IN ISOLATED DISTRICTS

The hard-worked kindly doctor who looks after the physical well-being of the inhabitants of Vilna, Alberta, and environs, recently received information that several children and grown-ups living at some distance from the hospital were badly in need of medical attention, including minor operations.

As he would need the assistance of nurses on this charitable expedition, the doctor turned to the Sisters of Service for aid, and three Sisters were scheduled to accompany him. A few hours were spent in preparing the necessary equipment, sterile towels, gowns, dressings, instruments, stimulants, serum, etc.

Leaving Vilna at an early hour, the doctor and nurses arrived at their destination at 9:45. The Anglican Hall had been borrowed for the occasion and converted into a temporary hospital. A number of cots were occupied with patients awaiting attention. The dressing-room of the Hall was used as an operating room and three card tables placed closely together served as the operating table. Two smaller card tables held the anaesthetics and instruments.

Doctor and nurses were soon at work and there was much to do, for a large number of people took advantage of having the doctor so near. Needless to say, this was all charitable work, as these people are very, very poor. Three sets of tonsils were removed before noon. Then there was a pause for lunch, which was served at the home of one of the patients. After lunch, five more operations were performed on the card tables, much advice given and medicines distributed. Some of these patients, the Sisters were told, would not even have a bed



The winter ambulance in Vilna



**A Western farmer on his way to visit his son in Vilna Hospital.**

to rest on when they returned home—they would sleep on the floor.

When everything possible had been done for the sufferers, the Sisters set out on the homeward journey, tired but happy, and grateful for the opportunity of helping these poor people. They stopped off to visit a child who had been admitted to the hospital some months before, when he was only a few days old, with a temperature of 106. He had lingered between life and death for some weeks, but finally improved and was taken home. They found him pale, undersized and unable to sit up. But he smiled at them from his poor soiled looking cradle. The Sisters fear a permanent disability of the spine for this little one.

**Field at Home Vol. XIII, No. 2, April 1937, p 12**

### **FROM VILNA TO HEAVEN**

In a recent communication from Vilna, we learned of the admission to Our Lady's Hospital of an eight-year-old boy. The lad was unconscious and was brought to the hospital by his father, who informed the Sisters they were not Catholics. Sister asked if the child had been baptized and the answer was "Yes".

However, the next day the Mother came to watch beside her son, for there seemed little hope of his recovery, as he showed no signs of returning consciousness. Her continual lament, in broken English, was: "If only he could be confessed!" Sister tried to advise her to get their minister to see if he could do something for the child; during the conversation the woman explained that she was Catholic and the child was not baptized, which was the cause of her great grief.

Sister consoled her by saying that if the father would give his consent the priest would baptize her boy, and if not, the Sisters would do it quietly, when death was near. To everyone's joyful surprise, the father did give consent, and the priest was not long in baptizing and anointing the dear little sufferer. That very night the child went in the white robes of baptism to enjoy eternal happiness in the nurseries of heaven.

As we have so often stressed, the Sisters in our western hospitals are ever on the watch to help the souls of sufferers under their care. The above incident is only one of many instances where the hospital has been indeed the very gate to heaven.

### **Warming The Ice Cream**

Andrew had been in Vilna hospital several weeks and on returning home was describing his experiences.

"My, but the Sisters were good to me!" he said to his father. "One day they gave me a special treat. It must have been made a long, long time and saved for me because it was so cold, and when I poured some tea on it to warm it, it could not get hot."

### **Pear Soup**

Recently there was a little boy of five being taken care of in one of our hospitals. One day someone gave him an apple. He called a Sister and said: "Say, will you please take the hide off it. Maw won't let us eat apples with the hide on." The following day a pear was sent up to him on the tray and no one thought of peeling it. After a while the Sister who had removed the skin from the apple came along and he told her he had eaten a pear for supper. "Did you eat it, hide and all?" queried Sister. "No, maw won't let us, so I bit a hole in the hide and sucked the soup out of it."

**Field at Home Vol. XVIII, No. 3, July 1942, p 14**

### **VILNA NEWSLETS**

A Sister at our Vilna Hospital has sent us an interesting sketch of the various activities on that mission: "Our little hospital is not busy these days, but God does not withhold opportunities for doing His work in some form or other. Groups of eager-eyed youngsters are finding their way up here with heartening regularity, and working with



these children is a privilege for which we cannot be thankful enough.

“Early in December we reorganized the choir, and started off with ten members. We practised, practised, practiced (after school and in the evening) so that the singing might be perfect for Christmas. Midnight Mass was really lovely. Red and white vigil lights glowed softly against the white and gold of the altar. Father built a beautiful Crib, over which floated a firmament of silver stars and a silver moon, with a blue background. The effect in the lamp-lit church was realistic and caused not a little stir among the congregation. At 11:45 the music started, and I think the children's voices must have been a true ‘Sursum corda’ to all present, as they sang the beautiful Gregorian Mass ‘Cum Jubilo’ and carolled forth the loved old Christmas hymns.

“Our own Christmas here was as near perfect as it could be. Of course on Christmas Eve about 9:30 p.m., in deference to feast-day tradition, two accident cases came in. However, the patching up process did not take too much time, and the excitement caused was quite in keeping with the season. Santa Claus was in a very benevolent mood and everyone seemed to be living up to the song: ‘Tis the season to be jolly.’

“In January we had a party for the choristers. They had a gala time, with some rollicking singing, plenty of goodies and a little present for each one. The choir has grown by leaps and bounds and now numbers twenty-five members. Practice is scheduled for 7:00 p.m. on Wednesday evenings, but they begin to arrive about 6.15, some walking five or six miles.

“At present there is a play for St. Patrick's Day in the making. Father is directing it, and it is going to be a grand success. The cast are very enthusiastic, but the brogue does stump them a bit. Why, they want to know, is the play written in bad English. Shades of St. Patrick! Too bad you can't drop in some evening when we are in the drama business. Father takes the play in the laundry. Sister H. and I take the dancers in the dining room. Sister Superior and Sister W. hold the fort upstairs, and entertain the companions each member of the cast brings along.

“All this may give the impression that though in a hospital we do everything but nurse. Really, that is not so. Occasionally we have spells of feverish

activity in the nursing line. Ordinarily, our patients keep us comfortably busy, with some spare time to devote to other phases of missionary endeavour.

“And thus we go on, trying to utilize life's little opportunities for the glory of God and the good of souls. Sometimes our task is only to still the autocratic ‘Wah!’ of an infant, at others to whisper into dying ears the age-old prayers that have brought peace and comfort to countless hearts; again, we may be called upon to face a serious emergency when no medical help is available. Whatever the task, we try to keep our hearts lifted upwards—working earnestly (but praying, too) always mindful that no matter how well we may sow—‘God giveth the increase.’”

**Field at Home Vol. XVIII, No. 4, October 1942, p 10**

### **OUR VILNA HOSPITAL**

Some ninety miles northwest of Edmonton is the little town of Vilna. Its very name suggests a population of Poles, Russians, and Ukrainians. The Canadian National Railway line of Edmonton to St. Paul, in which Vilna lies, has, we would say, the thickest foreign born population of any part of “Western Canada. On visiting this country for the first time, the traveller would think himself to be in Russia or the wheat-fields of the Ukraine.

Some seventeen years ago the Sisters of Service built a cottage hospital to serve the surrounding communities. It has served there as an outpost of mercy, particularly to mothers who often faced death in giving life. Built on the very fringe of our great hinterland, this hospital of Vilna stands out as the very embodiment of Christian charity.

“Sickness,” says St. Gregory, “is the knock at the door which often awakens the Christian from a deep and prolonged slumber.” The care of the body, bruised by sickness, is but a means to the care of the soul. The Catholic hospital is essentially a missionary endeavour. Yet this does not prevent it from being an efficient and up-to-date health institution. After a recent official inspection the Government of Alberta paid tribute to our Vilna Hospital in the letter published below.

The reading of this letter, we are sure, must have been very gratifying to the Sisters who spend their lives in the service of the sick and the poor

in Our Lady's Hospital in Vilna. God only knows what sacrifices and privations the erection and maintenance of this hospital have meant to them. May the zeal and generosity that found them equal to the task of yesterday be with them to face the ever-growing responsibilities of tomorrow.

G. Daly. C.Ss.R.

Government Of The Province Of Alberta  
Department Of Public Health  
Edmonton, Alberta

August 21, 1942.

Sister Superior,  
Our Lady's Hospital, Vilna, Alberta

Dear Madam

You are to be congratulated on the type of hospital and the quality of service provided in this small community.

You are particularly to be congratulated on the high quality of the records which are kept in your hospital.

Yours very truly.

(Signed) A. Somerville. M.D..  
Medical Inspector of Hospitals

**Field at Home Vol. XIX, No. 2, April 1943, p 5-7**

### **A DAY AT VILNA HOSPITAL**

Would you like to know how a nurse spends her day? If you will come with me I shall be glad to introduce you to our little hospital and its way of helping souls and bodies. The sky is still star-studded, and it is the moon, not the sun, that peeps demurely round the corner of that window. But it really is 8:00 a.m. We are fairly far north in Alberta. Misty? No, that is not mist. It's the cold, so intense as to be visible, enveloping the village like a flimsy veil. This winter has been the most severe in many years. Yesterday the thermometer registered 66 below zero. Nor does the cold seem to have abated at all. This should be a quiet day. People will not venture out if they can help it. But you never can tell in Vilna.

### **A Potential Apostle**

Now to the work! I think we shall start with Fred. You will like him. He is eleven years old and more

than ordinarily intelligent. Wait until you hear him recite his catechism! *No-o-o!* religious instruction is not a routine order for all our patients, but—well, I'll tell you about Fred. He came to the hospital a week ago with all the symptoms of acute appendicitis. His father registered him as a Catholic, but said he had never been baptized. Fred's appendix proved to be, not merely acute, but ruptured, and he seemed to be in for a long siege of general peritonitis.

Thanks to the wonder-working Sulfa drug he has had an uneventful recovery and will be going home on his tenth day. Spiritually he is doing equally well. He has gone through the First Communicant's Catechism, and he really started from scratch. Unbelievable though it may seem, he did not even know that God made him. Now he tells me that we should love God very much, because He loved us enough to be "hammered" to the Cross for us. Fred will be a little apostle with the rest of the family. His father has promised to have the children baptized and to come back himself to the practice of his religion.

### **The Language Universal**

This old lady has a heart condition. She was very ill when she came in, but is much improved now and will soon be discharged. I rather hate to see her go. She lives alone and supports herself by keeping hens and, of all things, a livery stable, which she manages herself. Very likely she will be found dead someday. No, she is not a Catholic, but Orthodox, and she seems a pious soul. She knows no English. I know no Ukrainian, but we get along famously and have good fun together. Laughter is a universal language, isn't it? Poor old soul! She is touchingly grateful for the slightest service. I enjoy doing things for her. Can anyone resist the lonely mothers of the world?

### **Another Victory for Sulfa**

Anne comes next. Why the gown? Well, Anne is a very septic patient. She has a streptococcal throat infection, so for the protection of ourselves and the other patients we wear a gown when working with her and keep everything she uses separate. Oh, no, she won't die, although she probably would have a few years ago. Once again the Sulfa drugs come to the fore. Anne is only sixteen. She is very ill and very miserable, talking and swallowing with great difficulty, but her disposition seems not the least bit affected, nor does her smile ever dim. She



requires a great deal of nursing care, to which she is responding nicely.

### Our Incubator Baby

The last and literally the least of our patients is by far the most important. Haven't you heard of "Inky?" Well, her name is not really Inky—it's Esther Marie, but come and see her. There, isn't she a darling? Small? Why, she is positively obese now, weighs four and a half pounds. Just look at those double chins. You should have seen her when she weighed two pounds. Ah, I knew that would arouse your interest! You see, Inky was premature—three months premature.

No doubt you remember the record-breaking storm last November which snowed in most of the Province for the winter. Inky chose the wee small hours of that morning for her debut into the world. To add spice to the situation our doctor was snow-bound in Edmonton. Out here when the doctor is away you just do the best you can without him and pray earnestly that nothing serious happens until he gets back. Our Lady and St. Gerard Majella are powerful auxiliaries and can always be depended upon to help when needed. In Inky's case we cannot overlook Dr. De Lee and his book, *Obstetrics for Nurses*. It was certainly the "vade meum" of our lives for many days. In fact, almost every conversation was prefaced with: "Now, Dr. Lee says ..." The idea of having a statue of St. Gerard resting on De Lee's Book had many supporters.

To return to Inky. At first the height of our ambition was to keep her alive until the doctor came home, but Inky had no intention of dying, so she was wrapped up in absorbent and tucked into the incubator (hence her nickname) which was to be her home for many weeks. The first month was the hardest for us. She did not seem much concerned. Gradually she began taking food and gaining weight like other babies. She is to go home when she weighs five pounds, so we shall soon lose our Inky.

### Life—At Its Beginning and End!

Quarter to eleven. There is still a half hour before noon prayers, so I think I shall finish arranging the linen cupboard I started—Oh, look! Is that a runaway team coming up the road? No, there's a man driving it—must be bringing a patient. See, there is something moving under that red quilt.

That must be the patient. Poor people! They must be frozen. We had better get the door open. That is typical of Vilna. Forty minutes ago I was planning on arranging linen. Then the patient arrived. Now she is comfortably tucked in bed, and her new baby is sleeping in the nursery. It was a very close call. Did you know that team came twelve miles in one hour? It is a wonder the horses didn't drop from exhaustion. Apparently the poor man would rather lose a team than a wife and baby.

There goes the doorbell again—probably another patient! It is too cold for visitors. Excuse me, please, while I see what's up . . . This patient is an old lady, who seems to be in a very serious condition. She has had a stroke. All we can do is make her comfortable until the doctor sees her. In the meantime, let us go to the chapel and say some prayers.

### "This Little Pig Went to Market"

Really, it must be your visit that is keeping us at such a high pitch of activity today. The old lady has been having seizures similar to epilepsy. And a little girl had an abscess opened. I peeked in at her; she's very sweet. She told me her name is Ilene and said: "Want somethin' t'eat." So I tried to distract her with "This little pig went to market, etc." . . . Listen, she is calling now. Shall we see what she wants? "What is it Ilene?" "I want Sister." "Sister has gone away." No, she isn't, you is her." "What did you want Sister for?" "Which little pig had bread and butter?" She is bright for two years, isn't she? Father is coming to anoint our old lady, so I must get everything prepared. Yes, I think she will die tonight. How good God is! Had she died at home, she would certainly not have received the Last Sacraments. Probably she will live only long enough to receive them.

Have you found the day tiring? I hope not. Of course every day does not see a birth, and probably a death, or even an operation. But monotony is unknown at Vilna. Each day brings its own events, all different from the day before. Just when you have made up your mind that nothing will ever surprise you again, the biggest surprise of all comes along, like the woman whose son chopped his thumb off with an axe. Along with the boy she brought the thumb, wrapped up in her purse, to have it sewn on again. Then there was the man who insisted on taking his wife home three days after her baby was born because he had twelve cows to milk and it was too much for him!

## The Office on Mail Night

If you think the clock is crazy as you go through the hall, don't be alarmed. The hands occasionally fall back two hours or so, and usually choose mail night for this when everything is at sixes and seven. Yes, this is a mail night. Can't you hear the typewriter pounding furiously? The letters must go out on tomorrow's train, for there is no daily mail service in Vilna. Were you to look into the office, you would see a sight that you could not soon forget. Sister Superior and Sister Bookkeeper do a marathon around the office and each other three times a week. To see them you would not believe they could ever get anything done, but they do, so they must have a little method all their own.

## The "Out-Door" Department

No visit to Vilna Hospital would be complete without an inspection of the "live-stock" department. Bill, who attends to the furnace, makes minor plumbing and electrical repairs, takes meticulous care of the Diesel engine which supplies light and power for the institution, is also manager of this important branch of the work at Vilna. For the past twelve years or so he has devoted himself wholeheartedly to the expansion of a miniature farm. Four cows supply all the milk and nearly all the butter used in the Hospital. (Bill does the churning). Not less interesting to the general Hospital Staff are the hens and chickens, especially in the Spring when 200 little chicks (white Wyandotts this year) arrive from Edmonton. These are put in an improvised incubator, for summer does not come to Vilna in April.

The tiny chicklets receive many visits each day, for every Sister manages to steal a few minutes to take a little peek at them and be amused at their antics. Since chickens were first introduced into Vilna in 1940 not only has the Hospital had all the eggs required but there have been enough also for our two houses in Edmonton which, from an economic viewpoint, is most gratifying.

All in all, we like our chickens immensely except in the wee small hours when the crowing of early rising roosters is not exactly conducive to peaceful slumber. It is then we think with pleasure of the nice dinner we shall have when their "crow" is stilled by death.

## Does It Appeal to You?

In conclusion—a word to our young Catholic nurses. The incidents related above give evidence of the inestimable service rendered to ailing bodies and troubled souls in the rural hospitals of the West. At Vilna, a little village in one of the greatest wheat districts of Canada, six Sisters provide 24 hours of service for 365 days of the year to suffering humanity. Catholic Nurses of Canada, does this opportunity for helping "others" strike a responsive chord in your hearts! Had we but the nurses, we could open many of these little hospitals in the rural districts of our great West. Does the need, so graphically portrayed in this article, inspire you with a desire to make a generous sacrifice of your life as a missionary nurse to the sick and suffering members of the mystical Body of Christ?

**Field at Home Vol. XX, No. 2, April 1944, p 14**

### In A Rural Hospital WHAT GOES ON IN VILNA

*[We print the following extracts from a letter received from our Vilna hospital, hoping our readers will read with interest an account of the various happenings in a "doctorless" rural hospital.—Ed.]*

At present there is no resident doctor in Vilna. The doctor comes a distance of thirty miles once a week to attend to necessary office work and urgent cases, principally first babies. In other instances the Sisters have to nurse maternity cases themselves, although the doctor is always notified, in case of emergency.

Fortunately, many of the patients have only minor ailments that can usually be cured with an aspirin or an enema, although one old lady fared not only too well but unwisely—result, gall bladder colic! But each of these cases means a walk for a Sister of at least a mile, the hospital must be looked after also, and it is not unusual to go out for an hour and come back to find waiting patients.

"We inoculate for diphtheria and whooping cough, do dressings, and twice we have put in stitches to repair lacerations. One man was hit in the face with an axe by an old lady of 75. How it happened that she didn't kill him is a mystery! Another eighth of an inch and his teeth would have been seen through his cheek. He got quite drunk before coming in for



repairs. We put in eight stitches and he came back sober a week later to have them out.

“Lately we have been going down to the village to attend an old man. He has many relatives in the district, but not one wants to be bothered with him. The first day we visited him, bathed him and changed his clothing, padded his bed with newspapers and sheets, then made it. Sister washed the dishes and swept the house. We fed him and then went home. This act was repeated yesterday and today. Each time we take food with us and remove a little more of the refuse from the house. This man is not sick and should be in an old people's home. But he is quite determined to remain where he is, so until local authorities decide to take the matter over there is little to be done.

“Daily we visited a rheumatic fever patient—not so much because he needed us, but because the family needed reassurance. Not having a doctor has made people very dependent on the Sisters. He got along fine, and was going to go fishing, promising that surely the Sisters would have fresh fish all winter. The winter is nearly over—and no fish!

“One day I came up from downstairs to be met by a woman very much excited and distraught. ‘Would Sister come to see my sick baby?’ After obtaining some information about symptoms, I gathered together what was needed and went. The baby was sick, very sick, but mothers are not inclined to let their babies out of sight if they can prevent it, so baby stayed at home instead of returning with me to the hospital. I gave needed medication and left tablets and instructions with the mother. I went back that night and again the next day, and when the doctor came to town, asked him to go over and see the child. He insisted on its being hospitalized, and it made an uneventful recovery from pneumonia.

“Thus life goes on. The small things are endless and when the day is done we wonder just what has been accomplished. That God be glorified is the main thing and perhaps the seemingly small things give Him more glory than big ones.

Field at Home Vol. XXII, No. 1, January 1946, p 9

### NEWS BRIEFS FROM VILNA

#### The Doctor's Visit

It is over two years now since we have had a resident doctor in Vilna but we are very grateful for the kind and gracious assistance of our neighboring doctor at Smoky Lake, thirty miles away. Every Thursday afternoon he holds office hours in our hospital and appointments are made a week or two in advance.

If by chance you had been a guest of ours one evening in summer your ears would have caught the sound of children's laughter, your eyes would have seen in the glimmer of a bonfire, the covered wagons, and you would have known that the Indians from some of the local Reserves were camping in the bush near-by, just to see the Doctor on the morrow. Travelling thirty or forty miles to see the Doctor means nothing to some of our people. If by chance he is delayed in coming it is quite late before all receive attention. Covered wagon days are not over as you will see by the picture. On the discharge of one of our mothers from the Hospital, the Sisters found this covered wagon waiting to take their patient and wee one home.



Field at Home Vol. XXII, No. 2, April 1946, p 9-10

#### Ladies' Auxiliary Formed

After consideration and discussion, it was thought advisable to form an Auxiliary to assist the hospital in various ways. Invitations were therefore sent to a number of the towns women to meet for this purpose. The response was remarkably encouraging, both as to numbers and goodwill. The first meeting was held at the hospital, the officers named and all the usual preliminaries satisfactorily concluded. The name chosen was “Auxiliary of Our Lady's Hospital.” On December 13<sup>th</sup> the new Auxiliary held

its first activity in the form of a Whist and Rummy Drive; there was also a raffle and a small grab box. The proceeds of this effort amounted to \$125.00, which was given to the hospital and very gratefully received. The Auxiliary plans to meet monthly. We are proud of them, and feel much encouraged by their cheerful helpfulness.

## Diphtheria

One day a man came to the hospital, bringing a little girl who was suffering from a sore mouth and throat. Sister examined the throat, had another Sister look at it, and then telephoned the doctor, who is thirty miles distant. We were sure the child had diphtheria. By phone the doctor ordered that antitoxin be given in case it were that dread disease and he said he would come up and go out to their house. They went home, and that night and the next day we had a real blizzard. The highway was impassable; the only feasible mode of travel would be by team and sleigh. The doctor and Sister Superior talked the situation over and it was decided that the Sisters would try to go out, take swabs from the child's throat and give the "contacts" immunizing doses of antitoxin. But how to get out!

About four o'clock that afternoon (two days after the child had returned home) a boy and his mother came to visit a member of their family who was ill in the hospital; they lived about a half a mile from the sick family. They said they would be glad to take us out and, if necessary, bring us back. So we telephoned the doctor for instructions and at five p.m. two Sisters started out with the family in their sleigh.

It was an eight-mile trip, with banks of snow drifted across the road here and there, but we were well bundled up and the ride was a real treat. We arrived at the home at eight o'clock and found the little girl who had received the antitoxin very much improved. There were ten people in the house, the father (a widower) seven children, the oldest a girl of 16 who was taking the mother's place, and the old grandparents. Three children were ill with very bad throats and two other children had slightly sore throats.

We took swabs from all of their throats, giving the sick children antitoxin. The other members of the family received immunizing doses. We gave the needful attention, helped the girl to fix separate quarters for the sick and taught her how to care for them, to keep herself and the sick children in one

room and the other children with the grandparents in a little house on the grounds. Above all, they must stay at home and not let anyone visit them. She seemed very anxious to do the right thing. After nearly three hours' work we returned to the hospital, leaving instructions with the girl that if the children seemed to be worse she was to send for us at once.

When the report from the Provincial Lab came back it showed there were nine positive throats for diphtheria. The doctor went out to visit the family and found all improving. During the three weeks of their quarantine they sent word in each week that they were fine. At the end of that time we visited them once a week for four more weeks, and taught the girl how to clean and air the house so as to guard against a recurrence.

## Home Visiting

One night at eleven o'clock the doorbell rang. It was a man wanting the Sisters to go out and see his wife, who was very ill. It was so cold and stormy he was afraid to bring her to the hospital. The Sisters dressed warmly and taking a few things that might be needed went out with him. Arriving at the home, they made the patient comfortable and gave the necessary care. The family was very grateful for this visit. With no doctor, we often have to go to the homes, not only in the country, but also in the village. Never a day passes without someone, and sometimes several, coming in for advice and minor treatments. Sometimes they go down to see the doctor and come back to us for hospital care. These years without a doctor have been very trying at times, but there is a brighter side; the people are realizing more and more how much they depend on the hospital, and appreciate what the Sisters are doing for them.

**Field at Home Vol. XXIII, No. 3, July 1947, p 19-21**

## Per Corpus at Animam

The Golden West—the Land of Promise! Such it was—and such it is—golden in its acres of waving wheat; golden in the sunrise that sweeps the prairie and touches the distant snows of the Rockies; golden in its promise of peace and plenty. The multitudes that followed the adventurer and missioner in this new land received of these natural riches, and, in return, gave to the West its spirit of daring, independence and hospitality. But in



choosing to break land in this vast expanse, many there were who thus condemned themselves to an isolation which was almost complete. In possessing the riches of the land, they were yet deprived of spiritual guidance and physical help. It was in an effort to remedy this situation that the Sisters of Service, shortly after their foundation, opened in 1925 their first hospital in Vilna, Alberta, a farming district northeast of Edmonton, and in 1926, the second hospital at Edson, in the same Province.

Although a Catholic hospital must at all times represent the principles of Christ-like charity, a small rural hospital, because it is such, must be a centre from which this charity goes forth, not only in the care of the sick, but in every other form of apostolate. It is in preparing souls for heaven that our chief work lies. The religious nurse has countless and precious opportunities for doing this. But besides the apostolate of the hospital, from these two centres are sent catechists who gather together the children of new-Canadians to teach them the saving doctrines of their religion; there are also visits to homes where distance and impassable roads make these calls something to remember; and always there is an attempt to keep up contacts by letters and literature, and the encouragement to take advantage of the Sisters of Service Religious Correspondence Course.

### **The Harvest is Waiting**

We, who have the privilege of working in our hospitals, glory in the vocation which is ours, and are sincerely grateful to the Lord for giving us part in His mission of bringing souls to the Father. But, like Xavier, we could cry, "Souls, Lord, give us souls", for in this prairie and in this wooded land that surrounds our hospitals, we knew of the numbers who have forgotten, who will never know the glories of the faith that should be theirs. Surprising to some would be the fact that missionary possibilities and problems present themselves in the West in the same degree as they do in foreign missions. Before the prairies and the mountains resound with the name of "Jesus", many must come to sacrifice themselves to this work of Home Missions. The field is still great, and more than ready for the harvest—and the labourers are still few.

**Field at Home Vol. XXIV, No. 3, July 1948, p 8**

### **VILNA VIGNETTES**

*We never miss the water  
'til the pump breaks down.*

Have you ever experienced the inconvenience of not having sufficient water, and of trying to economize and conserve the little you have? Well, this was our condition in Our Lady's Hospital, Vilna, recently—and what a catastrophe to befall a hospital! As soon as the distressing situation was noticed a hurried inspection of the water pump was made. This revealed that a new cylinder was needed; also that the plunger had fallen into the well and would have to be removed before the pump could operate again. A long-distance call was made to the ever-reliable Canadian Fairbanks-Morse firm and the parts were dispatched to us promptly.

The old proverb "Every cross has its blessing" proved true on this occasion, for the men of the village were most self-sacrificing in offering their time and efforts to relieve the situation. While one group went with the dray to the town pump to draw water for the large containers provided, the town secretary travelled forty miles in his car to petition the man who originally drilled the well and installed the pump to come to Vilna.

The old gentleman kindly consented, and with many willing and young bands to do the heavy work, he supervised the operations. The town secretary spent a half day devising a grapnel to remove the plunger, and his efforts were successful at the first attempt. The sound of the water pump in operation, and the happy voices of the men floating through the Hospital wards announced to us the glad tidings that all was well again. Though the "waterless" days were not without worry and anxiety, they had their moments of consolation in the satisfaction of knowing that the men of the community thought nothing of their own sacrifices, but only of helping their hospital.

### **Made Ready for Heaven**

It was on a cold winter's morning at about 5:00 a.m., shortly after Mass had been celebrated in our Convent chapel, that a girl of fifteen arrived with her father at our front door. They had travelled ten miles over snow-covered country roads to reach the hospital at this hour. They must have left their home

very early. No, neither one wanted to be admitted as a patient, but Wanda had a petition—she wanted to receive the Sacraments. It was an unusual request coming from one who evidently had not had the privilege of frequenting the Sacraments or receiving much in the way of religious instruction. However, the message was given to Father, who immediately left the breakfast table and went to the chapel where Wanda was waiting to go to Confession. Afterwards, kneeling at the Crib, she prepared her heart and received Jesus in Holy Communion.

Later in the morning we learned that Wanda's father was taking her to Edmonton, where she would probably have to undergo an operation for the removal of a brain tumour. Realizing the seriousness of the impending operation, Sister procured a rosary with the intention of teaching the child at least the "Hail Mary" which she might recite in her long and lonesome hours in hospital. Much to Sister's astonishment, Wanda knew how to say the Rosary, although she did not possess one. Who had taught her? A few words told the story. She and her brothers and sisters were receiving catechism lessons by correspondence from our Sisters in Edmonton. This is another instance of the correlation of S.O.S. activities. She departed with her father and a few days later we listened to a message flashed over the radio that Wanda had died—never regaining consciousness after the operation.

### **A Real Auxiliary**

The Sisters at Vilna are proud of their Auxiliary. They are also sincerely grateful for the generous donations and gifts made to the Hospital since the Auxiliary was formed less than four years ago. At a tea held recently in the Hospital for the members of the Auxiliary, Sister Superior extended a vote of thanks to the ladies for the spirit of generosity and self-sacrifice evidenced by the many social events sponsored in aid of the Hospital. Mrs. P. W. Frobb, President of the Auxiliary, presided at the prettily decorated tea table. This occasion gave the ladies an opportunity to view with pride the pediatric ward which has been recently renovated through their efforts and also the new type of crib provided by them for the comfort of the little ones being cared for in Our Lady's Hospital. The latest contribution of the Auxiliary is an incubator which will be installed shortly in the nursery.

### **Thanks to the League**

We would like to take this opportunity of extending our thanks to our many friends of the Catholic Women's League who have been so faithful and generous in sending us supplies, especially during the war years when we were without a resident doctor. We appreciate their kindness more than these few words can express, and it is with grateful hearts that we say "Thank you—and God bless you." To those who have wondered and asked if we were fortunate enough to obtain a doctor since the war ended, we can happily reply in the affirmative. We are thankful to God Who has seen fit to answer the prayers for this intention.

**Field at Home Vol. XXVII, No. 3, July 1951, p 8-9**

### **YES! WE HAVE NEWS FROM VILNA**

#### **Corpus Christi Procession**

Seldom has June had a more auspicious beginning than this year. On June 1<sup>st</sup>, we celebrated the feast of the Sacred Heart and the First Friday; on June 2<sup>nd</sup>, the First Saturday of our Blessed Mother, and, in Vilna, on June 3<sup>rd</sup>, the solemnity of the patron saint's feast of the parish, which was made memorable by a public procession of the Blessed Sacrament from the Church to the Hospital. Immediately after the parish Mass, the procession formed. The cross-bearer was followed by nine little flower-girls whom Sister Profit had trained. The tiniest one was Enid Frobb, our doctor's little daughter, who is only four. She was so proud and pleased each time she threw a handful of flowers. Sister Profit walked with the little ones who, in the exuberance of their throwing, thoroughly pelted her with petals. Then came the acolytes with censers and bells; then the Blessed Sacrament, followed by the choir and the faithful.

English and Polish hymns were sung all the way and Benediction of the Most Blessed Sacrament with the Acts of Consecration and of Reparation and a touching sermon by Father Warczak, our pastor, were given at an altar constructed on the hospital steps.

We were very proud of the canopy which was home-made. At first it seemed such a monumental task—and it was a lot of work—but as plans progressed and various trunks and boxes revealed almost forgotten treasures, our satisfaction deepened, so



that on Saturday night it was a very complacent group who gazed on the finished product. Of course the ones who made the canopy had a right to be complacent but those of us who didn't, rejoiced in the ability of our brethren.

We hope and pray that the procession has accomplished much good in the parish. It was a real demonstration of faith, unique in the annals of Vilna. The ceremony did not end until one o'clock and the majority of the people were still fasting. Such efforts do not go unrewarded by Our Lord; may He be prodigal with His grace during the forthcoming parish retreat.

### Indian Infants

Our Lady's month was a very busy one in the hospital; our beds were filled almost faster than we could empty them. Many of the May admissions were our Indian friends, who are always numbered among our favorite patients. We had two little gentlemen in the children's ward, though, who threatened to mar the good name of their race; Ronald Redcrow, 3 months, who had only one aim and occupation in life—crying; and Johnny Memnook, a dissolute character of 11 months who was only happy with a bottle. Johnny could telescope his bottle heavenwards from any position. Standing, sitting, lying on back or tummy, the bottle was always in Johnny's mouth and with Johnny it was always a case of "bottoms up."

### And Gary!

Gary was another interesting occupant of the children's ward. Gary was 6 and had cherished a desire to be in hospital for a long time. We called him "Doctor" because he was so interested in all that went on about him. At first he objected; "I ain't no doctor," but later on he accepted the title because, as he said, "You're gonna call me doctor anyway so I might as well be one." A very well behaved child, Gary could spend hours amusing himself.

One day he was telling the story of the three little pigs and the big bad wolf, he described the wolf's frustration at not being able to blow the house down, but, said Gary "on top of that he got an idea, so he climbed down the chimney and went—*kersplash*." Came the day when Gary was well enough to be discharged—well enough, that is, until he heard he was going home. Then he developed a bad cold, oh,

a very bad cold. We showed him how to use the phone and he called the doctor. "This is Gary," he said. "I'm catching a cold." So of course the doctor played up and Gary went to bed with a hot water bottle to his head. Just in case the cold was genuine the doctor decided to keep him until next day. The cold was not genuine—it disappeared as soon as the danger of being discharged was averted. But next day we kept quiet about home until the time came for Gary to go. He bore up manfully and shook hands all round—but it was with obvious regret that he left us.

**Field at Home Vol. XXVIII, No. 4, October 1952, p 12, 16**

### WHATS "COOKIN" IN VILNA

Vilna, having been out of the F.A.H. (*Field at Home*) news for some time (though not through the fault of the Sister Editor) the Vilna reporters must repair their sins of omission by delving back seven months into the past.

November did an about-face in 1951. It was not the dreary, weary end-of-the-year to us, but a month of dreams-come-true. On All Saints Day the re-wiring had been completed in the hospital. For the first time in 26 years, the electric power was not being supplied by our own Diesel Engine and generator, but by the Canadian Utilities Company power plant in Vermilion. The power headache ended simultaneously with the honourable retirement of the Diesel. From then on our electrical troubles would be resolved by calling the service man in our district. Only those who have lived here can realize what a boon that is.

### St. Andrew and X-Ray

Every dark cloud has a silver lining, it is said, and apparently that is conversely true. The dark lining to our silver cloud peeped through when our X-ray machine, which had been on active service since 1928, died of shock when it came in contact with the new power. The staff suffered shock at that moment too. One cannot imagine a hospital without an X-ray in 1952, but the outlook for a new machine was poor. However, our Father in Heaven, who clothes the lilies of the field and watches over the birds of the air,

Members of Vilna Hospital Auxiliary did not forsake us. From out of a blue sky, it seemed, there

came a golden opportunity to buy a very adequate X-ray machine at a price that was not too far beyond our means. The machine was installed on the feast of St. Andrew. Dear St. Andrew! And not a Scotchman among us!

### First Saturday Exposition

November also brought a great spiritual privilege with the initiation of Exposition of the Most Blessed Sacrament in our chapel on the first Saturday of each month. The First Saturday was chosen because the hospital is dedicated to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Monthly Exposition is a tremendous source of consolation and strength to us, nor do we believe that its benefits are confined within the boundaries of our own property. Even on busy days—and so often the First Saturday really is busy—even when it is not possible to spend as much time in the chapel as one would like, even then, the realization that our Lord is there in the Monstrance brings a warm glow with it. On Exposition Day there is little effort required to do all things for Him and with Him and in Him. For Christmas, our reverend Pastor made a throne for the Blessed Sacrament. It fits on top of the tabernacle and not only provides a more fitting resting place for our Lord, but greatly enhances the beauty of the chapel.

### Converted Communist

The old year ended, the New Year began. Patients came and went; beds filled up almost as soon as they were empty. So often a nursing Sister stops short and asks herself: "What am I doing for souls?" Most often she has to leave her work in the hands of God, letting Him decide where and when some fruit of her labour may appear. Occasionally, however, we are permitted to witness the working of grace and its ultimate victory in a soul. A short time ago a patient, who had been an avowed Communist for many years, died here. A long illness had given him time to ponder in his heart. He became a Catholic of the Greek Rite and died a most edifying death. His suffering was acute and long-drawn-out, but his patience was unwavering. We were told that this man's Catholic funeral was a bitter disappointment to the die-hard Reds in his home town.

### Hospital Day

Monday, May 12<sup>th</sup>, the anniversary of Florence Nightingale's birth, was National Hospital Day throughout Canada and the United States. This year

Our Lady's Hospital joined in the observance of Hospital Day. An Essay Contest for the Senior High School students was sponsored by the hospital. The subject: "*What a Small Hospital Means to the Community.*"

On May 12<sup>th</sup> we had Open House from 3:00 to 5:00 p.m. in the afternoon. Members of the Hospital Auxiliary served refreshments on the lawn. Two of the Auxiliary members who are nurses and who have worked here, conducted the visitors through the hospital. During the afternoon there was a short outdoor programme which consisted of speeches and the presentation of prizes to the winners of the Essay Contest. Dr. P. W. Frobb was chairman for the occasion. Mayor John Kureluk of Vilna and Mr. J. R. Sweeney were the speakers. Reverend J. Warczak, S.T.D., announced the winners and presented the prizes. In a short talk Father Warczak emphasized the fact that a hospital is a living institution which draws its life from the dedication of doctors and nurses to the ideals of their vocation. The response of the people, to this first Hospital Day in many years, was gratifying. Our purpose was to bring the public to a realization of the hospital as a community institution which does not stand alone and aloof from the people, but exists for the people and cannot attain a full efficiency unless strongly supported in its efforts by the people.

**Field at Home Vol. XXX, No. 4, December 1954, p 9, 16**

### A HOSPITAL CHRISTMAS IS DIFFERENT

*Jingle Bells, Jingle Bells!*" Santa jingled his hand-bell uncertainly and said: "You know, I've never done this before. I'm not at all sure how to act." "Oh, you'll be fine." said the doctor's wife, as she gave a finishing pat or two to the red costume. "Just laugh a lot and wish them all Merry Christmas. The youngsters will think you're grand." Santa was not too reassured. Despite many responsible posts admirably filled, to say nothing of his successful fathering of six grown and growing daughters, he was nervous. But we finally got him downstairs to the waiting children and the Christmas Season was officially launched in Vilna.

It was Sunday afternoon and the members of the Hospital Auxiliary had been, at least figuratively, "decking the halls with boughs of holly" for several hours before Santa's debut. Patients wandered



about supervising, suggesting and helping with the decorating. The record-player filled the house with familiar Christmas music. The Auxiliary members were happy to help and we were happy to have them. Some hung garlands, some hung wreaths, some stuck "Frosties" in windows and some made place-cards for trays and decorated tray-covers with gay cut-outs from old cards.

Finally the corridor and wards were decorated except for a few last touches; the children of the parish had gone home happily clutching their candy and gifts from Santa Claus, and the latter, perspiring profusely, had crept out from under his red and white costume and his padding of pillows.

"All was quiet, all was still," as we entered the final few days of expectation of the Divine Messiah.

On the day before Christmas Eve our Bishop called to give us his Christmas message personally; his deep sincerity moved us to a more intensified preparation for the birth of Christ in our own hearts.

Then it was Christmas Eve. The chapel was hushed and ready for the Little King. In the hospital, facing the front door was a "blue" Crib. All the figures were blue and the work of Sylvia Daoust. The set was a gift to us from a Mission Group in Valois, Quebec. On the tree around this crib there were only blue lights set in clear plastic reflectors, and over the whole tree there was Angel Hair with its fine lacy effect. The blue lights could be seen far down the road and the comments on the ensemble were gratifying. Each of the wards had its own crib.

One is amazed at how much these little cribs mean to patients and more amazed at the ignorance of the Christmas Story which one encounters. Very early on Christmas morning Santa came to the patients. It was a synthetic Santa peeping out of a simulated brick chimney which was run around to the wards on the little cart which normally holds the suction. Each patient received a gift from the Auxiliary and one from the Sisters.

At breakfast each tray had a small cardboard crib, a souvenir of Christmas in Our Lady's Hospital. We had very few patients which, strangely enough, makes Christmas a less happy day for the patients. It tends to be lonely if there are only a few, whereas a full hospital means more to get together for meals, special radio programmes,

opening of gifts, etc. However, our patients always seem to enjoy themselves and by evening when the gaily decorated trays have been admired and their contents consumed, we usually receive many expressions of gratitude from patients. One young woman thanked us for "the best Christmas of my life, Sister."

### Surprise for the Sisters

For some years past, the Sisters have entertained the members of the Hospital Auxiliary at Tea during the Christmas week. This year, though we did not realize it, the tables were turned and the Sisters were the ones entertained. This is the story. It all started with a request to borrow a sewing machine. The lady whose machine was borrowed thought to herself, and later expressed her thought to others, that the Sisters should have a good machine. And the campaign was on! Letters were mimeographed and sent around to all the residents of the district, asking for one dollar and requesting that nothing be said to the Sisters about the project. The response was truly wonderful. The letter stated that though many things had been done for the hospital, nothing had ever been done for the Sisters. When one old gentleman made his contribution he said: "Someone should have thought of this year's ago."

Meanwhile we proceeded with plans for the Christmas Tea, sent the invitations, did the baking, decorated the laundry and finally the day arrived. The Tea was scheduled for 3 to 5 p.m. When at 1:30 people who had not been invited began to arrive, some concern was felt. As the number of uninvited rose, so did the concern—particularly regarding the elasticity of the food supply, to say nothing of the lack of space. When a guest came and asked the Sisters who were busy as bees in the kitchen to come to the laundry for a moment, at least one of us was really indignant, though she managed to conceal it as she went with the rest to the laundry.

Once there we were paraded to seats of honour and for some moments nothing happened. The indignant one was having considerable difficulty concealing her indignation as she looked over the crowd to be fed and thought of tea and coffee spoiling in the kitchen. She learned later that her struggle for composure was quite obvious and had tickled the funny-bones of more than one among those present. Finally things really did happen—with a speed and a bang worthy of this atomic age. A door opened

and two ladies walked in carrying between them the beautiful red-ribbon-bedecked sewing machine, which was set down right in front of the indignant one. A third lady carried a bench for the machine, a fourth appeared with a huge bouquet of flowers, a fifth, the President of the Auxiliary, read an address which completely dissolved all indignation and gave rise to an impulse to tears.

When the address had been read the Sisters were presented with the flowers, with a \$20 gift certificate for records, with cards bearing 350 names of contributors to *our* Christmas; in addition to all this, pinned to the ribbon on the sewing machine was \$125 to be used as we saw fit.

I don't suppose any of the Sisters who were there that day will ever forget the little ceremony. It was not any one of the gifts we had received; it was not all of them together that brought lumps to our throats and made the room seem a bit blurred. It was the thought behind the gifts, the individual offerings of so many people; it was the group of happy, beaming faces before us, the faces of people who were *our* people, who, we now knew, appreciated our being in Vilna, were grateful for what their hospital had done and was doing for them, and had expressed their gratitude in a way which is immemorial—the way of gift-giving. It was with very full hearts that we bade all our good friends *au revoir* that evening. If we had felt at times that we stood pretty much alone, we knew at last that such is not the case. The people are behind us; it is our blessed privilege to serve and love them in their sick and through them and in them the Christ Who has given us Christmas.

*A Nurse*

**Field at Home Vol. XXXII, No. 3, July-October 1956, p 6-7, 31**

## VILNA VIGNETTES

### Hospital

As I prepared to get off the train at my new mission, a Grey nun with whom I had become acquainted said, "You are in real missionary country now!" Sister was right! But what a beautiful country it is! None of the mental pictures I had formed of Vilna compared with the real Vilna. It is a perfect gem set in the peace and quiet of the lush Alberta prairie, with just enough stores to let one know that it is a town.

Our small hospital of fifteen beds is situated just outside the town limits. I discovered that the interior was a beehive of activity in contrast to the tranquility of outdoors! Little did I realize then how one can be deceived by such pastoral peace. It has taken me some time to grow accustomed to nature's alarm clocks—the busy, excited call of the birds at dawn, and the neighbor's persistent rooster! And only today we spent most of our afternoon chasing little piglets out of our garden. They live at the farm next to us but have taken a great liking to our side of the fence and to the rose bushes in particular. Every environment is beset by its peculiar hazards! I am trying not to think of what will happen when the piglets become pigs.

### Jenny

Jenny was one of our pediatric patients. She used to entertain us with her singing. Her voice was very sweet, and she sang with such sincerity that we could not help but listen to her renditions of the English and Ukrainian selections. Her one ambition was to appear on a local Amateur Show, a goal she finally realized. During Jenny's stay with us, a younger patient was admitted to her room, but she found the newcomer disturbing and so a letter was promptly dispatched to her sister.

Dear Lucille,

The sitters (Sisters) are all nice to me. I went to Mass on Monday. I like the food the sitters gave me. I have a cry baby in my room her name is Bernice. A very nice cry baby! Joan is a cry baby too.

from Jenny.

The "sitters" were glad to have Jenny. Being hospitalized not only afforded her physical recovery but gave her a chance to receive Our Lord in Communion. For many patients, admission to hospital means re-admission to God's love.

### Examinations!

Examinations! This is a hard word—especially if you are the one being examined! The local troop of Boy Scouts, instructed by Dr. Frobb, had just finished their First Aid Course. The lot fell to Sister Knechtel to examine them. Since it is some years since Sister was a Girl Guide, she thought it better to practice on us. Then for two evenings the boys were questioned privately. They bandaged and made the



required knots and slings. They were eager, anxious candidates as they stood and waited their turn, but as they were dismissed, they looked confident, and we feel sure the examiner was not too severe.

*Sister M. Roberts*

**Field at Home Vol. XXXIII, No. 1, January 1957, p 15-19**

### **A DAY IN A HOSPITAL**

“The Catholic Hospital in the mission field stands out as one of the highest expressions and living symbols of Christian Charity. It has always ranked in the vanguard of our missionary efforts, often blazing the way to the return to, or the acceptance of, the true Faith. For as Pius IX said to Ozanam and his worthy disciples, ‘When the world has ceased to believe in miracles and sermons, it still believes in charity,’ ... In accordance with their missionary ideal, the Sisters of Service have gone to the fringe of the country to minister to the sick and dying. Moreover the rule of their institute prohibits them from accepting large institutions ... It is essentially a missionary endeavour. Pioneer work is the special calling of the Sisters who have taken as the motto of their life the words of the Master, ‘I have come to serve.’”

*Father Daly in The Field at Home, January 1927*



**Routine care keeps Sister Knechtel busy in Our Lady's Hospital, Vilna.**



**Our Lady's Hospital  
Vilna, Alberta**



**Sister Roberts with a small occupant of the children's ward in Vilna.**



## HOMECOMING TO VILNA

*By Sister Pawlowski*

The countryside was a veritable fairyland as we boarded the train in Edmonton that day last February. Jack Frost had been busy the night before and had robed the trees in frosty splendour. The sky was crystal blue and the sentinel fir trees along the track still held their heavy burden of snow. To Sister Profit, travelling with me, this was a return to one of her old missions, and to me, though coming to my first mission; it was also a home-coming. I was "back West" and only a Westerner can understand the depth of meaning in those two words. Many times as I grew up I had travelled this road but this was the first time I was so eager to see the countryside. Passing through the towns along the line I watched for the changes the past few years might have brought, but, to my delight, each town still bore a familiar appearance.

It was dusk as we drove from the station to the hospital set at the head of a spruce-lined drive. The statue of Our Lady, Queen of Hearts, waved a welcome from her pedestal in the front window—we were home. As Sister Superior showed us through our new home she was enthusiastic about the dream of a sewing room about to come true. Within a day or two the carpenters arrived, set about their work and, shortly, what had been open basement space had become our new sewing room. The spacious cupboards, brightly tiled floor, new table and fluorescent chandeliers pleased all the Sisters who fondled the thought that this would be an ideal recreation room for the evenings.

Onwards, things seemed much the same; the babies cried when they saw you were going to leave them, the old ladies "didn't like those needles", and in the men's ward, where all are neighbors, even the late hours couldn't stop them from discussing whether the Liberals or Conservatives would win the oncoming election. Yes, in a way it seemed the same after so long an absence from hospital duty, but here there was apparent that family spirit so typical of a small hospital. This spirit was vividly exemplified, one busy afternoon, when Bella, a long-term patient being treated for burns, became a baby-sitting problem. After hearing her pitiful sobs for some time, Sister Kinch, in the office, succumbed and came to my rescue. Spreading a blanket on the office floor she

relieved me of one problem. Needless to say Bella found the filing cabinets, typewriter, and desk most intriguing to her adventurous mind. In her childish chatter she seemed to be telling Sister how highly she thought of her office and how, in her standards, it far surpassed the crib she had been occupying until now. It was a sleepy and contented little girl whom I put back into the crib that evening and a thankful Sister who continued her other nursing duties.

Carl was another youngster who craved attention. Although only four years old he was already a veteran patient, this visit, being the result of a broken leg. To him a plaster cast was sheer novelty which he made a point of displaying to all who passed the Sister E. Donnelly with Bella ward. He was more than bewildered when the cast was finally removed exposing the foot he hadn't seen for six weeks. This confusion was short lived for the doctor replaced it with a shorter cast. To add to his happiness his mother arrived with an entirely new outfit in which to take him home.

The spirit of adventure by no means left with Carl. A few days later, unknown to the town residents, Sister Superior arranged with the Fire Chief for a fire drill in which the town would be called. Until now only the hospital staff participated in the regular fire drills. The alarm sounded as scheduled and in about five minutes the men of the town turned out full force to evacuate the hospital. When the last phantom flame was extinguished the youthful fire chief proceeded to get his brigade familiar with the general hospital layout. As they passed by the nursery for newborns he said, with a wave of the hand, "and this is a laboratory". One of the men in the brigade nudged his neighbor, winked, and retorted, "He hasn't been a father yet."

Spring arrived quickly, dressed in green, decked with pussy willows and dandelions, and accompanied by a chorus of robins and meadowlarks. As always she is irresistible despite the fact that she brings with her the demand for annual housecleaning and its resulting aches. Everyone develops a "green thumb" until the lawn and flower plants are set out with the hope they will be blooming for Hospital day when our hospital holds "open house". This day provides an opportunity for the public to see their hospital at close range, to show their interest in it and meet its auxiliary members as their hostesses. You are all invited to come!

Field at Home Vol. XXXV, No. 3, July 1959, p 24-25

## I'LL TAKE A SMALL HOSPITAL

*By Sister M. Roberts*

In the friendly exchange of news and views at a Hospital Convention, one is frequently asked, 'How many beds do you have in your hospital?' The answer, "Fourteen beds and three bassinets" can be depended upon to cause a variety of facial expressions. One face may register envy, because the questioner has known the joys of working in a small hospital. Others, whose knowledge is exclusively of large hospitals, simply look incredulous. Fourteen beds!

I have just spent nine days in a large city hospital which I regard very highly because I am a graduate of its School of Nursing. But not for worlds would I change places with any graduate on the staff there, regardless of her position. True, there are many more advantages as regards convenience and equipment, but there is not the warmth towards or interest in each patient that we find in the small, rural hospital. What makes a small hospital so interesting from a nurse's point of view? Well, the staff is like a big family, for one thing. Then there is a wealth of experience to be gained in almost every phase of nursing. The nurse must learn both to use every minute of her time and to use her head.

Because Vilna is a farming community with a fixed population, we know our families and, even more important, they know us. Occasionally when the doctor is away and a patient is advised to go to the hospital in a nearby town we meet the objection, "But, Sister, this is our hospital. We never go anywhere else."

Although our district is small, we have a very active Hospital Auxiliary. The members meet once a month, usually in one or other of their homes. Three or four times a year they meet at the hospital. Funds are raised in various ways and are used to buy equipment for the hospital. Over the years the contributions of the Auxiliary, in terms of furnishings and equipment, mount to a most impressive total. This year, to date, the Auxiliary has given us a resuscitator for the Case Room and a new Hi-Low bed for the men's ward. The Hi-Low bed can be raised to the working height of a hospital bed, for the convenience of the doctor or nurse, and lowered to the height of an ordinary bed, for the

convenience of the patient. Auxiliary members also help with various items of hospital sewing and they take charge of most of the arrangements for Hospital Day. We try to show our appreciation, in a very small way, by entertaining the Auxiliary during Christmas week—usually this event takes the form of a Tea.

Through the generosity of Michael Shysh, our Town Druggist, we now have an excellent electric Wangenstein Suction Machine. Gone, forever we hope, are the days of crawling up to the attic and crawling down again laden with Winchesters, miles of tubing, dozens of glass connectors and adapters; gone are the hours, it always seemed like hours, spent assembling the contraption, only to discover that it did not work.

This year we decided to celebrate, in a spiritual way, the feast of St. Luke, patron of physicians. Invitations with an explanation of the significance of the Feast were sent to our doctor and to the nurses of the district. On the morning of the Feast, Holy Mass was celebrated in our chapel by Reverend Father Orlinki for the intentions of Dr. P. W. Frobb, who, through his years in Vilna, has been a shining example of professional devotion and integrity. All the invited nurses were present for Mass and the breakfast which followed. It was agreed that this manner of celebrating the feast of St. Luke was a step in the right direction and should be repeated. None of the happenings I have recorded here have made any stir outside our own particular little puddle. We are not concerned that they should. They do form a tie which unites priest, sisters, hospital personnel and people into that unit which forms our hospital family. From our small hospital family and through it we derive the tremendous satisfaction of giving and receiving which we would not exchange for all the conveniences, for all the luxuries, for all the advantages of all the large hospitals in Canada.

Field at Home Vol. XXXVI, No. 2, April 1960, p 10-11

## BREAKING THE LANGUAGE BARRIER

*By Sister O. Pawloski*

Who has seen and not understood some small boy with his nose pressed white against a bakeshop window, or a little girl beside a window display of dolls? "Oh, if only I had one," is voiced by their intent expressions. To children with their candid

manner and simple desires, language presents no barriers. It is only with the ensuing years that language barriers become problems.

Language difficulties harass the youngster bent over his grammar assignment as well as the grey-haired patient whose native tongue is not English. As in many of life's problems where a solution is not forthcoming, a reasonable compromise is ever welcome. Here at Our Lady's Hospital in Vilna, where many of our older patients speak little or no English, the Sisters are forced to such compromise. It is not unusual to hear Sister Donnelly, who speaks only English, having an old-fashioned visit with Mrs. K., who speaks only Ukrainian. In true pioneer spirit, they cross the language barrier. The resulting conversation, if translated, would run something like this:

"Hello, Mrs. K. How are you feeling today?"

"Oh, Sister, you must be working nights. I have not seen you around all day."

"Yes, it is much warmer out today."

"You will have to give me a sleeping pill and one for my headache. It has been bothering me all day."

"Did you say you want to get out of bed? No. Oh, you will feel better by tomorrow."

An awkward conversation, perhaps, but satisfying to the patient who appreciates a personal interest! To cope with this problem it was decided that we make an effort to learn Ukrainian. In a regular do-it-yourself fashion we began. Sister Superior started the project by buying a Ukrainian Primary Reader and Grammar. Despite my limited knowledge of Ukrainian I boldly offered to help the less learned. At the same time I planned to learn to read and write the language. After counting the applications for the venture we had a total of one pupil and a fraction of a teacher. Class time was decided upon and one lesson taken.

I hesitate to divulge my teaching technique because I soon learned that my pupil was packing her trunk and leaving for the other side of the country. Am I glad that the Cameron report on education had already been published as I fear it might have had even greater repercussions! As for learning Cree, thus far no attempts have been made. Common knowledge of it stands at an average of 3-5 words

and one sentence, namely, "I want to go home." Past experience urges me to use my spare time trying out the new paint box Santa left last Christmas.

**Field at Home Vol. XXXVII, No. 1, January 1961, p 10-11**

## **PEOPLE, PARTIES AND PRESENTS**

*By Sister B. Knopic*

Our Christmas was delightful. We started off on the Sunday prior to the feast with a party given the Sisters by the staff. Ann Haydak, of course, was the chief hostess. Good games were played with everyone enjoying the fun. The prizes were good too. When the games and the players were exhausted, a large, decorated clothes-basket was brought in with ribbon ends hanging over its edge. *Afishing* we did go and such parcels as popped out! To top it all we were told that this was not our real Christmas present. The evening finished, need I say, with a delicious lunch daintily served and supplied by the girls. They, of course, were pleased as Punch with our enjoyment of the "do".

The next few days were busy with preparations for Christmas. The hospital corridors were festive with streamers, bells and green boughs. We had a tree at the front door with blue lights and the blue crib-set tucked in at the base. Our own dining room was beautiful too. As all was in readiness we went off to bed on Christmas Eve shortly after 8 p.m. I had been to Midnight Mass at the Church for two consecutive years so I offered to keep (*sic*) for Sister Brunning. At 11:15 I came on duty and was met by a maternity patient to be admitted and a young couple with a sick baby. The doctor got away to Mass a few minutes after midnight.

He had no sooner gone than things began to happen. It was dreadful! I have never been so thankful to see Sisters as I was when they returned from Mass. They heard the resuscitator so they came directly to the O.R. The doctor came too and we all worked until 4:00 a.m. The Sisters went down in relays for a cup of coffee. In the midst of the melee we got an accident case. He had to be cleaned up and sutured so the poor doctor was here until 5 a.m. By 5 a.m. I was not interested in gifts. I just read my letter from home and had a quick look at the TV tables, the steam-iron and the beautiful white linen tablecloth and serviettes which were among the gifts to the Sisters. Christmas had not had too auspicious



a beginning. However, a few hours later when we came back on duty, the dear Infant had brought quiet and serenity to the hospital. One would not have known it for the same place. The peace was permanent, too—for that day anyway.

Lunch was served at noon and Christmas dinner in the evening. We pushed the four tables in the maternity ward together. When they were covered with a Christmas tablecloth and decorated with candles, holly and the trimmings the effect was pleasing and homelike. In one of the semi-private wards we did the same for the few other patients. They all enjoyed themselves thoroughly, said it was just like home. We enjoyed our dinner in peace, too. The only girl on duty that day watched the floor for us. The nurses took turns going up to check—just to be sure.

We had realized when the staff gave us the party in the laundry, that it would be too small for the Auxiliary party. So we decided to have it in the convent basement. On December 26<sup>th</sup> the transformation began. It was finished and completely successful by 8 p.m. when the party was due to begin. Twenty-six ladies came and did they have fun! They played games, alternating between fast and slow. The ladies laughed so much that we were in spasms just watching them. It was past 10:30 when the games stopped and we adjourned to our Community Room for the refreshments. The party had been strenuous so everyone had a hearty appetite. When the guests left we knew the party had truly been a success. You may imagine how pleased and grateful we were to return to the kitchen, after saying goodbye to the Auxiliary, and find everything *spic and span*. The girls had cleaned up for us.

On December 30<sup>th</sup> six Sisters of Charity came from Radway for the day and three of our Sisters returned the visit on January 3<sup>rd</sup>. Sister Profit, with Sister Pawlowski's help, had a party for her catechism class. In tune with all the other parties, it too went over in great style. Now I must go. As it is, this has been written in three "sittings." So, God bless you and happy New Year to all.

Field at Home Vol. XXXVIII, No. 1, January 1962, p 14-15

## DONNA MEANS GIFT

By Sister B. Knopic

Donna means gift. The Donna of whom I write was indeed a gift from God to parents who had waited five years for a child. She was born by Caesarian section in an Edmonton hospital and the happiness of her mother and father was boundless. But before they could get to know and love Donna they were to endure long days of anxious trial.

At barely three weeks old, Donna was readmitted to the hospital with a bowel infection. She remained there for six weeks. At last the day arrived when the joyful parents brought their little girl home to the country. At home, they thought, she would grow strong in the radiance of their love. But further trials were ahead.

It was at this point that Donna came into the lives of the staff of Our Lady's Hospital in Vilna. She had weighed seven and a half pounds at birth. Now, at a little less than three months, she weighed twelve pounds. She was admitted to Our Lady's Hospital for observation. Soon a diagnosis of staphylococcus aureus infection was made. This is a dreadful and insidious type of infection which was just going to burn itself out and, we feared, cost Donna her life in the process.

A two month battle followed and I use the word battle advisedly. Our hospital is a very small one with a homelike atmosphere. When a patient is seriously ill our one doctor and the entire nursing staff concentrate on that one patient. Perhaps you can visualize our wee tyke of humanity hovering between life and death with a doctor and six R.N.'s ever on the alert and doing all in their power to save the little life.

It was a tremendous test of medical science and good nursing skills. For weeks Donna lived on interstitials, blood transfusions and antibiotics. What a tragic picture she made—all hollows and bones with her thin white skin pulled tightly over them. Although she had lost four pounds she was growing in stature which made her look even worse. One could hardly stand the pitiful expression in her large eyes when time came for yet another needle. No one could have worked harder than Dr. Frobb.

No one could reckon the hours spent on cut-downs, draining abscesses *et cetera*. One day when all seemed lost he said, "Guess she's had it." It was then we realized that we had not been praying to Sister Donnelly who for years had been in charge of Pediatrics and had dearly loved all little children. Sister had died in the early fall of 1960.

From that day on Donna showed signs of recovery. How spoiled she became but how we loved her! She had expensive tastes and developed an appetite—well you just couldn't fill her. She could not tolerate milk so her diet consisted of Nutramagen, bananas and meat—either veal or chicken. Bananas were her specialty—she just loved them. The little rascal had such a discerning taste that all her food had to be camouflaged with bananas in order to have her eat it peacefully. On the day Donna was five months old she was discharged from the hospital. She was a beautiful baby and weighed thirteen pounds. Her parents had had her for only two weeks out of the five months.

Donna has been back to see us several times. Each time she comes she has another chin and is getting to be a real roly-poly. Her mother and dad are so proud of their little daughter. We have warned her father that he may have to work a larger farm to keep up with the expensive tastes of Miss Donna. Somehow he doesn't seem to mind.

**Field at Home Vol. XL, No. 3, July 1964, p 13-15**

### **ECUMENISM IS WHERE YOU FIND IT**

*By Sister B. Knopic*

It is now nearly forty years since the Sisters of Service opened Our Lady's Hospital in Vilna. From the beginning, teaching catechism was as much a part of our apostolate as was nursing. But as years passed, the attendance at the Saturday Religion classes became poor, then poorer. Obviously we had to find a new way of bringing the good news of God's love to His little ones.

This was the state of affairs when, one day, three Indian children came to the hospital to ask if they could take catechism from us. We suggested that their mother come to see us. From her we learned that there were three Catholic Indian families whose children were coming, by school bus, to the Vilna school. They were not getting any religious

instruction at all. This disturbed the good parents who wondered if the children could come to the hospital for instruction during the noon hour. When we learned that there were twelve children involved we knew this would not be possible. Some other way must be found.

With the permission of the School Board and the co-operation of Mr. William Neczyk, the Principal, we arranged to teach catechism in the school each Tuesday at noon. There were three teachers the first year and the attendance was excellent. The enrolment increased to over eighty children instead of the ten or twelve who had come to the Saturday classes. Reverend Father Stangret, the Greek Catholic priest, was very interested and made arrangements to teach his young parishioners at the same time as we taught.

Last September the religion classes expanded into a truly ecumenical endeavour, in which all denominations made a united effort in teaching religion, each to their own students. There are now three Greek Catholic teachers, one Orthodox, one United Church, one Pentecostal and the four of us.

We realized the necessity of being properly equipped to teach. So we invited Sister Mary Jackson, who is Catechetical Consultant to the Edmonton Separate School Board, to come out for a weekend and help us with the kerygmatic method of teaching. While here Sister Jackson spoke to the parents of their responsibility with regard to the religious education of their children. We are grateful to Sister for the immense help she gave in sparking our activity.

Nursing, of course, proceeds as usual around Our Lady's Hospital. Our beds are occupied most of the time, frequently by our dear Indian friends from the Saddle Lake and Goodfish Lake Reservations. Names like Whiskeyjack, Sparklingeyes and Moosewah Brighteyes are not at all strange to us.

Recently we had a rather unusual situation here when four generations of one family were represented in our fourteen-bed hospital at the same time. We had a grandmother, her granddaughter, great granddaughter and great-great-grandson. It was unique, we thought.

For weeks and weeks we had Roddy who, in the manner of youngsters-in-hospital, very soon had us—exactly where he wanted us. The poor little lad

was in traction which, though it didn't really inhibit him unduly, did arouse our pity.

He had a habit of using "me" in the wrong place; "me did this; me did that." Sister Quinn could stand it no longer. She said, "Roddy, please don't say me, me. Say, Roddy is a good boy." He smiled sweetly at her and said, "Yes, you are a good girl." Vilna is still proof that for home likeness, for friendliness, for opportunities to identify, as missionaries must, with the people among whom they work, there is no hospital like a small hospital.