

2gether

// I KNOW A STORY //

UNLIKELY REMEDY

How Uncle Victor escaped deadly flu pandemic of 1918

D. GARTH WISE
SPECIAL TO LNP

The sight of an old Sloan's Liniment bottle at a flea market ignited a long-dormant memory. The memory was a tale from my mother about the deadly flu pandemic of 1918 and its effect on her family.

Mother, her six brothers and parents relocated from Ephrata to Philadelphia in 1916. Family lore cites the reason for leaving the serenity of Spring Garden Street for Philadelphia as the lack of jobs in the Ephrata area for my grandfather and the older boys.

Two years later, in 1918, as World War I was drawing to a close, what has been described as "an unusually deadly influenza pandemic," reached the United States.

About 500 million people across the world were infected and an estimated 50 to 100 million people died. Philadelphia was the epicenter of the pandemic in the United States, with 47,094 persons affected and 12,191 deaths, according to one source.

Oddly, the 1918 pandemic disproportionately killed otherwise healthy young adults. Brother Victor, who fit the bill, was infected and appeared to be well on the way to becoming another statistic. Hospital space was not available and treatment at home consisted of an occasional visit from a doctor and regular doses of a medicine administered by family members. Dosing was a round-the-clock task.

Late one night, it was younger brother Carl's turn to administer the dose. A sleepy Carl reached for the medicine bottle but retrieved a bottle of Sloan's Liniment instead.

Sloan's Liniment had been developed as a horse liniment by Andrew Sloan, a self-taught veterinarian. The strong-smelling concoction was applied to horses' shoulders when they stiffened from plowing. It was later advertised as good for man or beast. The primary active ingredients of capsicum, cayenne pepper and turpentine should have made the



COURTESY OF D. GARTH WISE

Who knew that Sloan's Liniment would be a cure for flu?

warning "for external use only" superfluous.

The effect of an oral dose on Victor was dramatic. He rose from what had been feared would be his death bed, demonstrating by word and action his strong desire to inflict bodily harm on his brother.

The participants are long gone and Mother's tale didn't include the short-term recovery details

beyond the fact that either the liniment or his violent reaction to the dosage exorcised the influenza from Victor's system.

The uncle that I nearly never knew lived a long and productive life as a farmer and farm equipment dealer. He was well into his 90s when the man that influenza couldn't kill left friends and family.

The writer lives in Denver.

If you know an interesting story, please send it to Jon Ferguson, PO Box 1328, Lancaster PA 17608, or email it to jferguson@lnpnews.com.