

# Tuberculosis

**Contributor:** Winnie O'Dell

**Collector:** Anne O'Brien

**Anne O'Brien:**

Hello this is my name ..... my name is Anne O'Brien and ah.... today is Thursday, November 21<sup>st</sup> and I came to Winnie O'Dell's who's going to tell me about ah.... when she was fourteen years of age, she had TB. Alright Winnie you can go ahead.

**Winnie O'Dell:**

In 19 and 56, I got sick and I had to go to the hospital at Forteau. So ah... the nurse there ah... sent me ... said well she couldn't do anything 'fer me so she sent me over to St. Anthony and when I got to St. Anthony ah... they wouldn't take me in the hospital because they thought that I might have TB, not knowing that I did. But anyway, they .....I found a place to stay for two nights and ah... then, on a Monday, we went to the hospital and took x-rays and put me to bed.

So two days after I got there, after I was in bed, the doctor came in, he said "Winnie" he said, "you got to stay for a while" I said "How long?" He said "Anywhere from six months to twelve". I said "Oh, my God, no, I'm not, I'm going home" (laughs). He said "Well we'll talk to your parents". Now there was no phones then, or nothing like that, you couldn't talk to nobody only you had to send a message to the nurse here in Forteau and they would talk to your parents here at home. And anyway, he said ah.... "well, we'll take care of it tomorrow".

So anyway, the next day they came in, and the big decision, you're gonna ..... you got to stay. I said "No, I'm not staying, no" I cried and I bawled and the next thing I knew I see this fly, as I thought it was, dropped on my bed and this was a cockroach. (laughs). I said "Well, for sure I'm not staying now, I wants to go home, send me home." (laughs).

For the first three months, I cried night and day, I was so terrified of the cockroaches and I was starving, I'd be starved to death and they bring me in the food and I perhaps, soup especially, I use to like the soup and I take up a spoonful and when I take up the second one, here there'd be the cockroach. Well, then I'd put that back and I'd cry some more. But anyway, mom and dad sent me over a electric kettle and a little hot plate. So I'd get a can of beans then from the store, send someone to go to the store and I'd get a can of beans, or a can of sausages, or whatever 'til the old fellow that had to do with the electricity found out that I had it there and he come and took that away.

So now you can imagine what kind of time..... what kind of fuss, I was in. But there was four girls of us in what you'd call a sun porch. And my bed was along by the window, like something, like a patio door that you got now where you could see, where all the patients, the other patients not TB patients because we weren't allowed to go there. Ah... and I'd be there, that's where I spent days and days watching for somebody to come from L'Anse au Loup.

**Anne O'Brien:**

And was there anyone else over there from this area, that you knew?

**Winnie O'Dell:**

Oh, yes. Well we was in what you'd call a sun porch, four girls, and then out in the sanitarian that's where they used to put all the patients with active TB, they use to call it. So there was a man from, L'Anse au Loup, and a woman. Ah... but I wasn't allowed to go out there. Because, I might get a germ, right? So then when we get letters from home, ah..... I write whatever news I had on my letter, I'd write to them. And whatever news they had on there letters, they'd write the little notes back to me and tell me what was going on back home.

**Anne O'Brien:**

And who were the people that....

**Winnie O'Dell:**

Cecil Earle and Lucy Ryland, Aunt Lucy Ryland, that's what we use to call her, hey?

**Anne O'Brien:**

Yeah

**Winnie O'Dell:**

Now Christmas day, I was allowed to get up and dress and go to mass. They had mass downstairs in a little room, the priest came in. So that day, that's the only day I was allowed to put on me clothes, to dress, and go downstairs.

And ah.... but I use to take 30 pills a day and every second day they use to give me a needle that they called streptomycin and when the year was up, they came in and he said, well I could go home, but ah... shortly after that I was gettin' ready to go home, anyway, and the doctor came in he said "Winnie" he said "you can't go home, you got to have surgery".

I said "Nope" I said, "this is twice ye told me I had to have surgery" I said "I'm going home, now this is the time I'm going home". I had all me boxes packed, everything I had 'fer Christmas, 'cause mom and dad use to send me over a lot of stuff, hey? Especially Christmas time, and Santa Claus was good to us.... Santa Claus over there came twice. And ah.... but he have, whatever was available at that time, like socks, or beads or your neck.... to go around your neck, but they wasn't like the ones you get now, they were plastic ones and you'd haul, play with 'em, put them together and haul them aboard. And ah....but anyway, I said "Nope, I'm going home".

Well, so two specialist come in then from down the states and they went over all the x-rays, with the TB patients and they came up and said "No, you can go home". So now I .... that was like, right? I came home on the 28<sup>th</sup> of March that was a full year that I was there.

But cockroaches, the cockroaches was in thousands, I use to be frightened to get in the bathtub, I'd be frightened to get in the shower, I'd be frightened to go wash me hair, because I never .... I was always afraid of insects, flies before.... (laughs) . They fall down on the white sheets.... Oh my God.

**Anne O'Brien:**

So did they have those cockroaches for any particular reason?

**Winnie O'Dell:**

Yes, they said they use to clean up some of the .... At that time was what ... the bed bugs, and lice, and stuff and they use to say they use to clean up some of the dirt around the hospital or whatever. But now I came home in March and I had to go back again in July, and when I went back in July, ah... the Department of Health was all..... was after being in and cleaned it all up, there was no more cockroaches and there was no more dirty, dirty plastic dishes. That's all we had was plastic dishes, the pink and green ones and they were just as brown as the sand out be the door.

**Anne O'Brien:**

And would those cockroaches bite?

**Winnie O'Dell:**

No, No, they didn't bite, no, no, or they didn't fly either. But where the heaters was too, like when you go over to get in the bathtub, where the heaters was too .... In the bathrooms, that 's where I use to be afraid. That's where they use to breath too, hey? I use to be .... I saw mom, once, she came down on steamer, on the Springdale we use to call it then, the mail boat, they use to call it. She came down in October and when she came and when the boat came back from St. John's, she got on the boat and came home again.

**Anne O'Brien:**

So was she allowed to stay there with you?

**Winnie O'Dell:**

No, No. She only have visiting hours, come in so often twice a day or three times a day.

**Anne O'Brien:**

So did they have a place ah... for your family members to stay?

**Winnie O'Dell:**

No, No

**Anne O'Brien:**

Or did she just stay....

**Winnie O'Dell:**

No, No, You had to find a place to stay.

**Anne O'Brien:**

..... a friend or.....

**Winnie O'Dell:**

Yeah, well there was a bed and breakfast that mom stayed. That's what you call it now, I don't know what you called it then.

**Anne O'Brien:**

Okay. Yeah

**Winnie O'Dell:**

But that's where she stayed.

**Anne O'Brien:**

And how did you come home then, in March?

**Winnie O'Dell:**

Come home on the plane.

**Anne O'Brien:**

And the year you went down, you went on the plane too?

**Winnie O'Dell:**

Yeah, went on the plane too, yeah, yeah.

**Annie O'Brien:**

Okay.

**Winnie O'Dell:**

Hmm...

**Annie O'Brien:**

Yeah, well did you go to school after you came home Winnie?

**Winnie O'Dell:**

No, I didn't go to school. Nope. Nope. 'Cause I had a year of rest, every three months I had to go back to St. Anthony, and I had to rest at home for a year.

**Anne O'Brien:**

So you still wasn't completely better then?

**Winnie O'Dell:**

Yes, oh yes. They say you had to finish whatever treatment that you was on, you had to finish those treatment..... this treatment, right? With all those pills.

**Anne O'Brien:**

Hmmm

**Winnie O'Dell:**

Not with the needle after I came home, but.....

**Anne O'Brien:**

So were all your family members checked after?

**Winnie O'Dell:**

Oh yes, oh yes. And after I got married, all the children ..... the.... the... the boat the Stratacona ... the ah...ah....

**Anne O'Brien:**

Christmas Seal?

**Winnie O'Dell:**

The Christmas Seal, use to come around and I use to take the children and I always had x-rays. Yeah had to get checked after that.

**Anne O'Brien:**

Well, thank you very much Winnie for that story and ah

**Winnie O'Dell:**

You try that first now

**Anne O'Brien:**

And you have a good day now.