

A Summer's Work With The International Grenfell Association

JUDITH HAMMERLING, '65

In northern Newfoundland near the Strait of Belle Isle is a small town, Saint Anthony. It has become the largest town in the area, for it is the centre of the International Grenfell Association. The hospital there contains one hundred and fifty beds, an out-patient clinic, two operating theaters, a labor room, x-ray and laboratory facilities.

Every June the regular staff is supplemented with summer workers. Among these are medical students. This past year there were five students, all just having completed third year medicine. Merle Darbasie and I were sent from Dalhousie.

In late June we found ourselves on a plane at 5.30 a.m. heading for Newfoundland. The weather in Halifax was warm and clear; in Stephenville it was cold and foggy. We took a taxi over an appalling road to Cornerbrook, there to wait the arrival of the hospital plane. Due to the fog, the plane was unable to land, so we were driven the four hundred miles to Saint Anthony. The fog lifted, and the scenery was magnificent, but the road seemed never ending. Finally, after having taken several wrong turns, we reached Saint Anthony at 2.30 a.m. We found the hospital, no mean feat, in a scattered, unlit town. We immediately asked where we could sleep and were told, "You are to live in the Orphanage".

There were three other students there from Vermont, Toronto and Belfast, Northern Ireland. We made up a rotation so that each of us spent three weeks on Medicine, three on Surgery, and two on Pediatrics. Besides this, we had a night-call list.

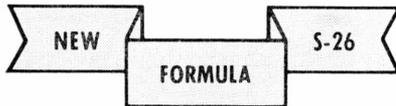
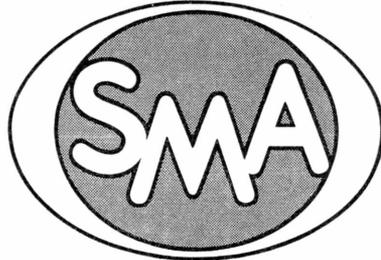
The hospital is the center of the International Grenfell Association. The I.G.A. provides medical services to northern Newfoundland and Labrador. Besides the Saint Anthony hospital, it maintains a number of nursing stations along the coast, for example, Flower's Cove on the West Coast; Roddickton, Conche and Harbour Deep on the East Coast; Harrington, Mary's Harbour and Forteau, in Labrador. There are also three small hospitals at Happy Valley, Northwest River and Cartwright, all in Labrador.

The nursing stations are staffed by nurses and midwives, almost all from England. They are in constant contact with Saint Anthony by radio telephone. A doctor visits each station regularly, the frequency depending upon the particular needs. These visits are done by boat or seaplane. The stations operate as out-patient clinics mainly, treating minor illnesses and casualties, as well as giving ante-natal care, well-baby care and handling all normal deliveries. When in doubt as to treatment, the nurse calls the Saint Anthony hospital and is advised by a doctor.

The medical students were able to accompany a doctor on his trip to a nursing station. We took turns doing so, for it was an invaluable opportunity to visit the villages and see the methods of treatment practiced. Except for the Flower's Cove area, seventy miles away by road, these trips were done in the hospital plane, an Otter. We also acted as medical escorts when the plane flew ambulance.

One of my trips was to the lumber town of Roddickton. First we flew to Mainbrook, a nearby village, and held a clinic in a room of the schoolhouse. Then we

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drove to Roddickton in the nurse's jeep where we cared for several people with very severe axe cuts. The next day we went by open boat forty-five miles down Canada Bay to Englee. The day was beautiful, the hills seemed to grow out of the water on either side—a lovely way to go to clinic! The clinic was held all day in Englee, and by the end of the day the weather began to close in, but the plane was able to land and we flew back to Saint Anthony.

One of the other students ran a nursing station in Labrador for a week when the nurse had to go to the neighboring villages. He conducted the daily clinics, took care of the in-patients and got some first hand experience in the care and feeding of a newborn baby.

Another student accompanied one of the doctors on a trip along the North Labrador coast for two weeks. They held daily clinics on the tiny one-cabin boat, and pulled a great number of teeth besides.

In Saint Anthony itself, where we spent most of the time, we were more or less, interns. We did the histories and physicals on all patients, wrote the daily orders, assisted in the O.R. and followed the deliveries. At night, one of us was always called before the doctor on duty which gave us some first-hand experience with emergencies. I shall never forget suturing two large lacerations on a boy's forearm at 4 a.m. not too long after we arrived.

We were also on first call on weekends. One Sunday Merle and I found ourselves running an unofficial clinic. In those few hours we saw three cases of scarlet fever, also German measles and chickenpox, sutured a few lacerations, put a cast on a fellow who had put his ankle in front of a bowling ball, plus other equally interesting things. On these weekends we also ran the X-ray machine, if needed, and did house calls.

All this, for a student just through third year, was fascinating and impressive, each experience not to be forgotten.

In our free time we often took long walks, for the scenery was very beautiful. Occasionally someone would take us out in a sailboat, or we would go out fishing in one of the local boats. There is also a tiny movie theatre in town. One night the hospital boat, the *Gould*, came in and the captain told of an iceberg just off the harbor. Everyone had to see it, of course, and soon we were going down the harbour. It was early evening and after half an hour we approached the iceberg. An immense thing, it rose strongly out of the water, amber and sapphire in the twilight. On one side was a large arch through which came sprays of sea. We were all rather awed by the iceberg, for it seemed so much more powerful than our little boat.

It is difficult to write about such an experience as this work for each of gained something different from it. As a medical student, it was marvellous summer—we had unlimited opportunities in the hospital to observe a variety of diseases and to participate actively in their treatment. We became well acquainted with tuberculosis, with the practice of medicine dependent upon weather conditions, and with medicine as general practice. We not only saw many and varied operations, we also assisted at them; we were able to apply our knowledge of obstetrics and gynecology for the first time. Above all, we appreciated the opportunity to be an active part of the hospital and felt more confident in entering fourth year on our return.

It was an ideal way to spend the summer after third year, and we believe the experience invaluable. Perhaps this year more students from Dalhousie will be able to go to Saint Anthony. I certainly would encourage them to do so.

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