

Heartbreak On South Manitou Island, MI ... a Child of the Island Was Lost

Many island girls married Coast Guards. Mae Tobin was one of them. She met, and married Francis H. Caron, from Suttons Bay, Michigan. They were married on May 11, 1930.

They started their married life living in a house built by her grandfather George Hutzler Jr. This house was built in 1906 for his daughter Charlotte (Lottie), and her husband, John Tobin. The Tobins were living at the old Hutzler farm at the time.

George Hutzler married Selma Erickson. Selma's family lived near the George Johann Hutzler farm on the northwest corner of the island. Selma's father Andrew was a fisherman. He and his wife Ulrica are buried in the island cemetery.

During the fall after the crops were reaped, canning of the vegetables, fruit, and meat was in full swing. These were stored in the pantries and root cellars. As the island was surrounded by ice most of the winter, it made going to the mainland almost impossible. The men kept busy cutting wood for the cooking stoves and for heating their homes.

Mae Tobin Caron was settled down by the warmth of the potbellied stove that heated the store, her mother owned. She had navy beans to shell. Her son Gerald (Jerry), 16 months was nearby playing with his toys and looking through the big Sears catalogue. He loved looking at the pages with the babies. Mother had told him that he was going to have a new brother or sister to play with in the summer. He would point at the pictures and say, "Baby", and smile as wide as he could. Mother was careful not to drop any of the small pebble like beans on the floor.

That evening as she was preparing Jerry for bed, he had symptoms of choking. He was crying and very restless. As the evening progressed his breathing became labored. Mother became very concerned.

A wonderful friend of mother's, June Warner, son of August and Rosie Warner, stopped in the store for a visit with mother and to say goodnight to Jerry, as he often did... Mother told June about Jerry. June hurried down to the Coast Guard station to fetch dad, telling him that Jerry was ill. Reaching the store and looking the situation over, dad immediately summoned the



station. The crew at the coast guard station hurriedly launched the lifeboat for a trip to Glen Haven. It was snowing heavily and ice was forming on Lake Michigan. The lifeboat was built to crush through thin ice. Dad carried Jerry to the boat, mother in tow. She had just enough time to pack a bottle of milk for the baby and a few small blankets.

Upon reaching the dock in Glen Haven, after what seemed like hours, they were met by a friend who drove them to the hospital in Traverse City. Doctors' there were unable to help the baby and sent them to a hospital in Ann Arbor, several hundred miles south Traverse City.

The long freezing drive, with a baby in distress was agonizing. The car was without a heater. It was very cold, keeping the baby warm was almost impossible. Mother kept him snuggled to her breast as they traveled the icy roads. It was so cold the milk froze in the bottle.

Arriving at the hospital , Jerry was now gasping for air. They were to late, the baby passed away. The dreaded navy bean had swollen twice its size and lodged in Jerry's windpipe, blocking the air to his lungs.

A beautiful child that "God" had given to Mae and Francis, would not return to his home on the island. He was buried beside his brother Douglas (who had died at birth) at his parental grandparents grave site in Maple City, Michigan.

This having been their second infant son to pass away, mother could have become a second Bertha Peth due to the grief of losing the babies, but by the grace of God, mother was several months pregnant with me. You see I was also along on the fateful trip.... I entered the world on July 24, 1935. A sister for Jerry had been born, Named Bonnie Jean.

Mae and Francis were blessed with three more children., Roger Wayne in 1938, Donna Mae in 1944, and John Alan in 1948.

Mother is still here on earth with us. She is living with my brother John Caron at his elder care home called, "Autumn Joy" near Charlevoix, Mi. On her birthday March 29th., she was 95. Her memories of the her relatives and friends, are ever present in her wonderful stones and photo albums.

Who would have thought, a harmless navy bean, a winter's necessity, could claim the life of a wee toddler? Many hearts were broken on that cold winter day.

Bonnie Bellmer Petoskey, MI