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Pumpkin Seed Tea Cure

Elsie Diamond Smith

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Story: "Pumpkin Seed Tea"

Storyteller: Elsie Diamond Smith

Town: Bangor, ME

NA 392 CD 12 Track 23

Collector: Margaret Small

Date: April 21, 1967

Long before the advent of modern medicine, technologically sublime hospitals, and multinational pharmaceutical companies, people learned to develop remedies from the plants and animals around them. These traditional healing methods, now commonly known as "folk medicine," were passed down from generation to generation the same as folk stories, songs, superstitions, and beliefs. Some of these remedies now seem strange and have generally passed from common usage in Western society, such as a dirty wool sock as a cure for a sore throat, steeped cow manure to provide relief from a chest cold, or sour milk to take away freckles. (All of these were discussed in the interviews conducted by Margaret Small. The point here is *not* to suggest these are inferior remedies or that they do not work.) But others can still be found among commonly used herbal remedies, as is the case with the remedy discussed here: pumpkin seeds, either in tea, eaten whole, or ground up in a mash. The women interviewed here discussed pumpkin seed tea as cure for worms (parasites) and Elsie Smith noted it also helps "water stoppage." Pumpkin seeds are also known around the world as a remedy for gout, impotence, a variety of bladder problems, and prostate ailments (the latter two may be responsible for water stoppage).

In the short anecdote heard here, Elsie Smith explains her experience with pumpkin seed tea and how she saw it work. The healer who provided the cure was later identified by Elsie as Mrs. Close, an elderly white woman. The boy who Elsie saw cured is not mentioned anywhere else, and as such the name printed here is a best guess. The location of the story is also unclear; the events may have taken place in New Brunswick or Bangor. In any case, the boy clearly had a fairly severe case of some kind of parasitic worm and the tea seemed to cure the problem (and quickly).

Transcript:

Where I have seen pumpkin seed to work was [Odom Meeks], when he was a small boy, kept having convulsions. I guess he had about thirty, and an old lady came in and asked his mother if she might give him this. She used the pumpkin seed tea; she boiled the pumpkin seed and made a tea and within fifteen minutes after he had taken this tea hot, he passed great masses of worms. Oh, it would just make you squirm because these things were crawling! It was so- and stopped the convulsions. [Side conversation.] He must have had thirty during the day.