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### Folklore Term Paper: Research on Folk Cures

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RESEARCH on FOLK CURES

5/18/50

D. R. HANSON

David

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by als

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My research for folklore is in the field of remedies and cures; from asthma to warts. Although I did not visit out in the farm area, my research has been as extensive as the people have been liberal. In my work, the only discouraging thing that I encountered was that some people would not explain to me how these various cures or remedies worked.

Hearing some pow-wow or faith healing tales in class, I was tempted to laugh them off with a "Oh, those people are nuts." But, and I say this sincerely, that hearing people tell me that their cures have actually worked, -- well, I'm thinking I've been nuts to doubt their faith.

Strictly from an academic view (not a hygienic view), I've been unfortunate in not having any ills, pains or so forth when I was young. The only thing I was plagued with was warts. Therefore, I shall begin my cures with my own personal experience.

When I was about ten (10) years old, I had several warts on my hand. I was eating supper one day and asked my father about how or what I could do to get rid of them. He told me to take a new potato, peel it, and rub the peelings on the warts. This was to be done out of sight of anyone. Then, he said, bury

the peelings in a secret place -- being sure to tell no one where I buried the peelings. Well, I was so desperate to be rid of the annoying warts, that I got right up in the middle of my dinner, got a potato and went outside. After faithfully following my fathers instructions, I triumphantly walked back to supper. I had so much faith in my father, that I felt it would be alright to tell him where I buried the skins. I did. I told him I buried them under the porch. And because I told only one person, all but one of my warts went away. I still have one, on my right index finger.

I interviewed a Mrs. Gerfin, from Lancaster, 36 years old, who told me of four cures that her grandfather and grandmother have used. They (her grandparents) are or were from Craley, Pa. and about 72 years of age.

WARTS

Soak a toothpick in castor oil, and then jab it in and around the wart or warts. Mrs. Gerfin told me she has actually seen this performed.

RUPTURED NAVAL

This one I was a little uncertain about, because the lady's job is one where she is constantly being interrupted by customers. Anyway, she claimed she had a ruptured naval when she was young, and her grandmother took her to a woman pow-wower.

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The lady placed a peach stone on her naval and began chanting or sobbing (she wasn't clear on this) to herself. Mrs. Gerfin claims it must have worked, because she has never had any trouble or effects.

### BABY'S FINGER NAILS

She said never cut a baby's finger nails until after (1) one year old. Bite them off, because if you cut a baby's nails, it will steal when it grows older.

### HAIR COMBING

Any time her grandmother would comb her hair, she told her never to throw the loose hair outside, because birds would take it, build a nest and you would lose your hair. She told her always to burn it.

### SORE LIVER

This is a good one, because she said she has actually done it to her nephew. Any time a baby (up to (4) six months old, is moved to different homes, hold the baby and on your knees walk around the table legs three times. This is to prevent a sore liver obtained in the process of carrying the baby from place to place.

### BOILS

Get a small bottle filled with water and heat it, then place the opened end of bottle over the boil, letting the steam that's condensing draw out the infection.

Donald Brubaker from Barnesboro, Pa. told me of a cure for warts.

Rub a peeled potatoe on the wart and then place the potatoe in a rain barrel.

Joseph M<sup>c</sup>Cluskey, said his Grandmother from Middleport, Pa. (formerly from Czech.), cured a boil on his brother, who was about 10 at the time.

She soaked some bread in warm milk and placed it over the boil, wrapping a bandage around it.

He said one he has heard of is that of pissing on warts. He said the acid in the piss is supposed to cut the wart.

Steve Mischissin from Freeland, Pa. related a cure for hiccups which he has tried himself with success but hasn't seen anyone do it.

Take a glass of water and place a small piece of paper on the water, and then tell ailing person to drink the water. He claims that while he's drinking, he's concentrating on not swelling the paper.

Jerry Blewing from Wellesley, Mass. told me of a cure - that he heard of - for rheumatism and arthritis. You place a penny in the heel of your shoe. He said this is some sort

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of chemical reaction from the copper.

Harry Uppercue of Baltimore, Md. told me how his grandmother (60) from York County, Pa. helped a sty and also one his mother had. He claimed all she did was rub her wedding ring over the sty three times. This he swears cured his sty.

I don't know what this means, but he said to keep flies away, hang a string with a piece of cotton on the end in the doorway.

Thomas Moore, Lock Haven, Pa. told of how his father cured his brother (about 5 or 6) of an earache. His father never smoked cigars, but for this occasion he did and he blew cigar smoke in his brother's ear. This appeared to be a remedy.

This remedy has been told to me several times, varying - corn cob pipe and just tobacco smoke of any kind.

I saw at the York Fair years ago, an old lady who claimed she had a cure for baldness. She concocted some secret brew of her own from roots and herbs and mixed it all into a foamy lather. She claimed if you applied this foam to your hair you would never go bald. She was selling the potion

in bottles. Boy, what a term paper I could have compiled from her. But, I never dreamed of folklore there.

Kenneth Stover, Blair County, said when he was around 16, he had a splinter in his finger. His grandmother, then 80, took a fatty piece of bacon and placed it where the splinter was, securing it with a piece of rag. He said in a day or two, it was gone.

He also told of a lady he knew that paints a lot of circles (I figured like a maze) on all her jars that she used when preserving foods. This was for hopes that any spirits trying to get in the food would get lost in all the circles before they reached the food.

Larry Plybread - Steelton, Pa. (age 25) was rather helpful.

A cure for pissing the bed (sorry I forgot the medical term, Doctor) <sup>is</sup> (was) take a bag of clothes pins and tie (them) it around your waist - putting bag in back. This prevents your turning on your back.

This is the one I liked best of any I've gotten. It's a cure for freckles.

Get up before sunrise (in the morning) and walk out into a field - - - stark naked. Then



cover all the areas with freckles with dew. (Some)  
Some dentist from Chester County told him  
this, but he wouldn't reveal his name.

Also, a test for the mumps (to see if  
you have them or not) is to eat a sour pickle.  
If this irritates your throat, you are getting  
the mumps.

I have read of a few cures myself that  
may be of interest. However, these were read,  
not told to me, so I'm not sure of their im-  
portance in a report like this.

To cure a headache, wrap a vinegar-soaked  
brown paper around the head.

For warts, take a piece of stolen bacon  
and rub this on the warts.

Asthma can be relieved by a muskrat  
fur worn on the chest.

A bleeding wound can best be stopped by  
a poultice made of brown sugar and cobwebs.

When the head of a household dies, in China,  
it's customary for the members of his family

to purchase a number of paper replicas of clothes, servants, and horses, which he will might need in the next world.

They also burn them in the belief that the articles will then be certain to accompany him.

This is the extent of my research report on folk cures. I realize it hasn't been 20 and 30 pages long, but if only one cure is different, I'll feel that I've a lot, because so many people all told me the same cures for the same things.

David R. Hanson