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Folklore Term Paper: Folk Cures for the Common Cold

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Folk cures for the Common Cold
by Robert C. Ackerman

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Folklore - European + American
Professor Schaemaker

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In my experiences of collecting folkcures for the common cold, I found that some people who would appear to possess a wealth of this type of material come out with the only cure they knew, two Bayer aspirin and a glass of water. While in contacting others we found that some of the younger folks would give the cures that were passed down from their great, great grandparents. The first man I talked to was a freshman here in college. Hal Olinger lives on a 58 acre farm at R.D.#3, Kutztown, Pennsylvania. He is of a very conservative family with a German background. Hal says these cures have been passed down from his great, great grandparents to his elders and in turn to him. The first cure for a common cold is a snort of whiskey in a cup of tea. You go to bed and the sweating removes the cold from you. He said maybe it would not work on anyone who drank alot, but he was always helped by it. He told me of another very interesting cure. You burn goose feathers and put them in a bag under your pillow. This will cure a cold. I tried more of these for a cold so he told me of one that his uncle uses faithfully. You dip a piece of flannel in coal oil, then put this on your chest. Your cold will be gone by morning. Another cure which he told me was, rub a thin layre of saw shit on your chest. Your cold will be gone by morning after a good nights sleep. All these cures are known and used in Berks County. In going

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across the state we interviewed a girl from Somerset County. Hope Sutcliffe is the daughter of a small communities postmaster, who would receive many cures from his customers at the Post Office. One of the cures used in this county is red spider tea. Use three spiders for three doses. But no more. An overdose is dangerous! This will cure a cold quickly. Another cure which was passed down from her great, great grandmother who lived in Somerset County, too. She lived in the early 1800's. Whenever you felt chills you should cut a notch in a stick for every chill you have had. Then put the stick in a running brook and as it floated away your cold went away, too. Shirley Klatybaugh of Baltimore, Maryland, who of German descent told of the cure which is used in Charles County, Maryland. This cure has been passed down through the family to Shirley. To get rid of a cold you tie a piece of yarn from your stocking around a pine tree. Then walk around that pine three times a day for nine days. This cure takes more time than some of the others but is a very good cure for a cold. From these varied counties in Pennsylvania and Maryland we shall now return to Lancaster city. These cures are used in the colored section of Seventh ward here. The first person we contacted was Bertha Smith who has lived here all her life. Her

grandmother, who was in her sixties while Bertha was a small girl, told her of the following cures. For an ordinary cold, you bake onions in an oven until they are brown, then squeeze the juice out of them and add sugar to make sweet juice and drink from a teaspoon. A cure for a chest for chest cold is to cook onions to make a plaster to put on your chest for a cold. Bertha also told us of the many kinds of teas such as Elderberry blossom tea and powdered leaves. These all are used as cures for the common cold. Eleanor Wilson also a neqress, is a housewife in the seventh ward of Lancaster. Eleanor learned these cures as they were passed down through the family. Ten drops of camphor oil in sugar with castor oil in a hot cup of tea. A chest rub of gouse grease with five drops inwardly to keep the bowels open. This is very important to cure a cold. Sheep shit tea, which is shit boiled to make a tea out of it. With these cures we hoped to find a way to keep from getting colds. Eleanor told us of one. Buy a piece of assifity and sew in a little bag and hang this around your neck. With its protection you should never get a cold. We made an attempt to gather our information from various parts of the country side and give a picture of the cures all over. Walter Boston and I worked together in interviewing these people.