

Nurse's talks with the Lord guides her life

BY PAULINE CUSACK
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When Bill McIvor had triple bypass surgery in Halifax recently, one of the people who constantly sat beside his bed was Margaret, his wife of 56 years.

But the five week road to recovery, during the warmest days of summer, took their toll, and Margaret McIvor, while sitting by her husband's bed one day, took a poor turn herself and had to spend several hours in the I.C.U. undergoing a battery of tests.

Surprisingly the episode didn't scare her.

"After checking me out, and finding everything okay they let me go, she explains, "so I went back to the 'lodge' where I was staying, had a good night's sleep and next day was back at Bill's bedside again until he was well enough to come home." Home to the McIvors is Borden, P.E.I.

"You know I never prayed that Bill would recover," Mrs. McIvor stresses, "I just left everything in God's hands. But I'm awfully glad we both came out of it so well," she adds with a warm chuckle.

Margaret McIvor laughs easily and often. Nothing fazes her. Well groomed and always fashionably dressed, this 84-year-old grandmother shows a zest for life which could rival that of women half her age.

Mrs. McIvor feels that she copes fairly well with most things thanks to her Catholic upbringing, her ongoing relationship with the Lord and her nurse's training. She acknowledges she is in constant conversation with God. "Without him I'd be lost. I guess I depend on him for everything."

The eighth child in a family of twelve, she grew up on a farm at Emerald Junction, P.E.I.

"My mother was very mild, but my father was really outgoing. He played the violin, loved music and loved people." Her father was also the person who led the rosary each night in the family farmhouse.

At 18 she went to Bangor, Me., to pursue a career in nursing. Part of her training was spent at Bellevue Hospital in New York. One of the things that seemed to impress her there was the fact that although Bellevue was not a Catholic hospital, each day began with a hymn to the Lord!



Margaret McIvor is admired by Borden residents for her concern for others.

A year after graduation she returned to P.E.I. upon the death of a much loved older sister. She calls her sister's death at 24 her first encounter with real grief, a deep sadness in her life.

But at home on P.E.I. her nursing skills were greatly in demand and in the role of health care-giver, Mrs. McIvor was in her element. She did "specializing" at the hospitals, and went into dozens of Island homes. "I was awfully busy, maybe that was because I wasn't scared of a darned thing," Margaret adds with a deep chuckle. "Regardless of the illness involved, whether it was diphtheria, scarlet fever, or pneumonia, I went wherever I was called."

Those years were an education in themselves. Apart from routine procedures, she also learned how to give an anaesthetic. But most of all she learned how to be resourceful.

"We hadn't telephones, at least not to the extent that one sees them today, nor had we the transport back then either, so until such time as contact could be made with the doctor, the care of the patient fell to the nurse on the case." It was important to be able to cope.

In 1936 she married Bill McIvor, who worked as Chief Steward with Marine Atlantic, and they had six children. While her children were growing up Mrs. McIvor was busy, but never too busy to reach out to others. The town of Borden

was without the services of a resident doctor for many years. The locals, however, had their own solution to this dilemma. "Call Margaret McIvor," was the first suggestion whenever anyone had a problem. The amazing thing was that Mrs. McIvor not only answered these calls, but she enjoyed doing it.

"I loved doing things for people, in fact there is nothing I like better, and come to think of it I was only doing what I saw my own parents doing when I was growing up."

No one of course is more aware of her capabilities than her own husband. To illustrate, Mr. McIvor now recounts a tragedy that occurred quite a number of years ago aboard one of the island ferries.

A young couple, on their first trip to P.E.I. were travelling with their young family. One of their children, a five-year-old boy accidentally fell overboard. "It was awful (Bill recalled) I remember how all the other passengers had left the boat and there was this poor couple just sitting there — in a trance — waiting while the divers searched for their little boy," his voice falters, and Margaret breaks in, "Bill was so upset and felt so sorry for them that he couldn't leave them there, so he took them home here to me."

And in was in the warm and caring atmosphere of the McIvor home that the local policeman later called to tell the couple that the body of their son had been recovered by the divers.

"We did everything we possibly could to help to ease their grief, said Mrs. McIvor. "I called in the priest, he comforted them, and we had to contact the undertaker. I also had them stay with us overnight, but they left next morning to go back home," she said. "It's such a long time ago now but we've never forgotten them." It seems the couple didn't forget them either, a few months later the father of the little boy returned to P.E.I. to express his gratitude to them.

Over the years Mrs. McIvor has been an active participant in church and community affairs, but where she comes across strongest is always in her concern for others.

As her closest neighbor puts it, "She's a very caring person, supportive with other people's problems, quite courageous when tackling her own."

(Pauline Cusack is a writer living in Borden, P.E.I.)