

Folk medicine buried many of its mistakes

American people are in better health today than at any time in the history of this nation.

In spite of this, there is a trend today to return to the folk medicines and home cures of the past. It will probably come as a surprise to many of you to hear that I, a witch, feel this is a mistake.

The days of witches brewing steaming cauldrons of medication to be doled out to trusting clients should be a thing of the past.

Witches and folksy old ladies with herbal cures performed a real service to their neighbors when there were no doctors and pharmacies available. At that time in history, if you needed an operation, you went to a barber because he was the one with the sharpest razor.

No one knows for sure how many persons died from the cure in those days.

IT BOTHERS ME a great deal to hear young people today put down modern medicine.

What amazes me more is that these young people, who have never seen a diphtheria epidemic, whole families wiped out by small pox, or a person crippled for life by polio, are being joined in their rush to the health food stores by older people who should know better.

True, many of us did survive childhood without ever seeing a doctor. Grandmas treated our colds with bear oil, goose grease and eucalyptus leaves. But many others did not survive.

Compare today's rate of infant mortality with that at the turn of the century.

Walk through any old cemetery and count the tombstones of mothers who died in childbirth. When is the last time you heard of an otherwise healthy young woman dying in labor, even in cases of breech birth and Caesarian sections?

I DO LIKE herbal teas, and I sometimes use them. They do have real value when taken in small doses for the right purpose. But home doctoring? That can be very dangerous.

Juniper berries, good as a diuretic, can seriously irritate the digestive tract. So can yellow dock, also, senna leaves and countless others.

Shavegrass and horsetail grass, both popular teas, contain nicotine and also a chemical which destroys thiamine. Licorice root can cause heart failure.

Even mild herbal teas, used in excess, can cause skin eruptions, sensitivity to sunlight and hallucinations.

Another danger is that untrained health store personnel may recommend the wrong tea. And it is not uncommon for herbs to be mislabeled or incorrectly identified.

Survivor remembers holocaust

The Nazi holocaust is history for most, but to Livonia businessman Hy Shenkman it is still a way of life.

Shenkman, 58, who runs a drapery business, will be speaking at 8 p.m. tonight at the Zionist Cultural Center, 18451 Ten Mile Road, Southfield, as part of the annual Day of Remembrance held to insure that the Nazi atrocities are not forgotten. It is the anniversary of the liberation of Jews from the German concentration camps 34 years ago.

As a young man in Poland, Shenkman escaped to Russia when the Nazis marched into his small town. Since writing a book on his experiences in 1970, he has spent much of his time speaking on the subject.

"I consider every Jew a survivor," he says. "If they (the Germans) hadn't been stopped at Dunkirk, perhaps there would be no Jews at all."

When the Germans invaded his hometown of Vilna in 1939, he had to choose between staying or escaping to Russia. He chose the latter and jumped aboard a packed train. Later he was drafted into a Russian air force communications unit.

THE UNIT was sent to airlift supplies to a group of partisans, or guerrilla fighters in Stalingrad in 1942.

"We were almost out of fuel when we noticed a faint movement of a cigaret butt. We landed in snow up to our waists.

"When we reached our destination, we found the partisans were half-dead."

Shenkman's unit helped revive the guerrilla fighters, who went on to gain control of several villages.

"When I returned to the cold foxholes of Stalin-

grad," he says, "I realized I didn't have it as bad as the partisans. Every time I heard the artillery zooming into positions, it sounded like beautiful music to me.

"ALTHOUGH I was wounded fighting the Nazis, I consider myself more fortunate than the people in concentration camps because I didn't suffer the human degradation."

"It is not a topic with a happy ending," Shenkman says. "But it is a part of our history.

"We're trying to analyze it, not for the sake of self-pity, but as a lesson to learn and to find a way this horror will never happen again."

When the war had ended and a third of the Jewish people had died, many people asked why the Jews hadn't defended themselves. Shenkman says most believed the Nazis would soon lose the war. Others, he says, have tried to justify the holocaust as being God's will.

"The holocaust was not God's will. The holocaust was the will of evil," Shenkman says. "And evil did not begin in 1933 when Hitler came to power."

HOW DO PEOPLE react when Shenkman tells them of his experiences?

"It depends on the group.

"I do not like to make it sound like a real horror and make people cry," he says.

"Jewish, Armenians, Irish and other nationalities that have a history of persecution are more aware of it. There are other children to whom this is very distant.

"This happened 34 years ago. Since then, so many tragedies have happened in so many countries. To them, this is just one of those things."

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