

THE INFLUENZA 1918

In San Francisco

Mabel and I were married on September 20, 1916. We rented a small home at 2235 Gramercy. We were comfortable and happy. War with Germany was declared in April 1917. Ralph was born on July 29, 1917. I was working with my father in the retail lumber business. Because of the war, unnecessary construction was prohibited. The lumber business was very slow. I took a civil service examination in the spring of 1918. I was offered employment with the Naval Supply accounts at the U.S. Naval Training station at Yerba Buena Island (Goat Island) in San Francisco Bay. I accepted the job and reported for work on July 1, 1918.

Arriving in San Francisco, my first task was to find an apartment so that Mabel and baby Ralph could join me. After two weeks I located a three room apartment at 1046 Haight street on the ground floor. This was located near the top of a hill. The street lead to the Golden Gate Park, which was not a far distance away. We frequently walked to the park. We also took the streetcar out to the beach.

Each work day I'd take the Haight street, streetcar down the hill to Market street, then along Market to the ferry building. I'd walk one block to the right (I never knew directions) to the tugboat dock, then across the bay to the Island wharf. Here I had charge of the stock records and the stock of 65 classes of supplies that were used on the island and aboard ship.

Near the end of the war a terrible influenza plague broke out in Europe. It spread over the sea to the east coast of the U.S.A.. It rapidly began spreading west. Dr. Rassiter, in emergency, was in charge of the station. He clamped a quarantine. No one could enter the station and anyone leaving could not return. As a civilian I had the choice of bringing my belongs and staying on the station or staying home. I stayed on the station to pay expenses. Mabel and Ralph stayed ashore. The civilians while on quarantine were allowed one, five minute phone call home each day. We took advantage of this.

The disease was terrible. People were dying by the thousands. Some who were well today were dead tomorrow or even the same day. In San Francisco alone there were over 100 deaths daily. The lungs filled rapidly. Across a narrow lot next to us was a mortuary. Mabel reported that boxes for the dead were piled high daily. It was frightening. People wore cheesecloth masks. At the station we went to the dispensary daily for a throat culture. Mabel and Ralph periodically went to the dock for a throat culture. This is where a serum was developed, which they got along with ^{almost one case in} over 8,000 sailors and civilians on the island.

The quarantine began in late September and lasted until the epidemic waned in November. It was lifted a couple of days before Thanksgiving. It is worthy to note that not one case of flu developed on the island. After inoculation, eight sailors were sent to Mare Island Navy Yard to be with the sick sailors, but not one came down with the flu.

Returning home I immediately came down with the flu. The first evening I had a nose bleed, a pint or more it seemed before I could stop it. Perhaps it was best to bleed thus rather than fill the lungs. I was isolated to the bedroom, which was reached by a hall from the kitchen and livingroom. We engaged the landlord's doctor, a Dr. Putnam, who proved to be very good. The second day later the baby, Ralph, became ill. My bed was moved into the livingroom so that the baby could be bedded with me and Mabel could better care for us. As near as I can remember it was a Saturday. The next day was Sunday. Mabel prepared meals and was serving us, during the middle of the afternoon when she collapsed in the middle of the livingroom floor. Slowly she pulled herself over onto a sofa at the side of the room. There we lay, all alone, all sick unable to do anything. We lay until nine o'clock that evening when a Mrs. Heileman and her small daughter, who lived at a front

apartment, came home. She had a front apartment, ours was toward the rear ground floor. The entrance to the building was at the side between our apartments. The entrance door was locked and she did not have her key so she had to go around to the back of the building past our livingroom door.

She knocked, we answered, "Come in". She opened the door, saw our condition and said, "I'll take my daughter" about five, "put her to bed and return". Shortly she returned. She said, "The land lady", on the floor above, "has a very sick teenage boy, a practical nurse attends him. I'll go up and have her come down and fix you all up for the night".

Not long after Mrs. Heileman returned, the nurse came down and fixed us up for the night, but said hardly a word. When she left Mrs. Heileman said that when she went upstairs and requested the nurse to come down that she refused because we were Mormons. This bothered Mrs. Heileman who said, "Mormons or no Mormons they must have help and you'll come down if I have to drag you down".

We knew that our church headquarters in San Francisco was only a short distance away on Hayes street. We asked Mrs. Heileman to phone them and ask the missionaries to come over. They arrived before Mrs. Heileman left. They were Elders Nun from Cache Valley and Rolapp from Ogden, some of who we knew. They administered to us and stayed with us until morning when they called the doctor and Relief Society President. The doctor came, prescribed medicine and procedures. A Relief Society sister came. The elders went for medicine and groceries then left. The doctor instructed the Relief Society sister to put a mustard plaster on the baby but it was very cold. Monday passed, the elders returned in the evening, Tuesday passed and the Relief Society President came and stayed through the night. In the morning she said she'd try and get us a woman from the emergency relief in the city. During the night I heard Ralph wheeze and wheeze and I knew that he had pneumonia.

About 10:00 that Wednesday morning a knock came at our livingroom hall door, we both said "Come in", whereupon a slender woman about forty-five opened the door and said "Is this where a nurse is wanted". We answered "Yes". She came in and stood at the foot of my bed and said "Are you native Californians?". We said, "No we are from Utah". She said, "Are you Mormons?". "Yes" was our answer. She started to remove her coat saying, "Well, I'm not afraid I'll stay".

She said that she got off the streetcar at the upper corner, walked down the hill to find 1046 Haight and did not see it. She found 1044 but not 1046. She thought, "Why hunt, too many people want help. I'll go back to the relief center and get another place". She thought again "Maybe I better go take another look". Walking slowly past the narrow vacant lot next to our building she noticed the 1046 number at the side door entrance. This she took and followed the hall to our livingroom entrance.

She inquired about our lives, what we were doing in California, etc. The elders came. She soon learned that Elder Nunn was an only child. She had an only daughter. She was a heavy coffee drinker. The elders went for coffee for her. She quickly learned that we did not drink coffee, liquor nor smoke, most peculiar people. She was very efficient, sleeping little. She moved the baby into a crib in the kitchen where I could see it very well from my bed. The baby was very ill and lay quiet like a limp rag.

When the doctor came she said, "Doctor, this is the strangest man I ever met. He doesn't smoke, drink liquor or coffee". He turned asking, "Is that right Balnap?" My answer was "Yes". He said, "That is good, that may be the thing that will save your life".

Each day passed. The doctor came daily. It was Sunday morning and the doctor came earlier than usual and said only "Good morning", and left. He was back again at 10 o'clock. By this time we knew something was pending.

We had prayed and prayed and prayed but could not feel that we would loose the baby. At noon the doctor returned and again at 4:00 p.m. This time he said, "The crisis is over the fever has broke, the baby will live". We learned after this that the doctor had asked Mrs. Heileran down the hall about me, as to temperment, etc., saying, "The man seems high strung. He seems to be wrapped up in that baby. The baby will die and I'm wondering if I'm to loose both the baby and the man".

But to his suprise both lived. He later told us that we were lucky for we were one in a thousand to have our child live. We had a sit in rocking horse that we could put the baby in at times, so he would not have to be held or sit on the floor.

He along with us gradually grew stronger. I was able to report in at work for a short time the day before Christmas. We had all passed through a serious illness, but with the blessings of the Lord we all survived.

Arias G. Belnap

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