

**FLOYD NELSON**  
**Interview 113a**  
**December 10, 1986**  
**Cheri Luce, Interviewer**  
**Retyped by Courtney Lawrence**

**ABSTRACT:** In this short interview with Cheri Luce, Floyd Nelson recalls the home remedies his father would use to keep his family healthy. They included kerosene and turpentine for colds, kerosene for snakebites, and kerosene and tobacco to disinfect a wound caused by a rusty nail. Mr. Nelson also recalls the use of sassafras tea and soda and honey.

**Cheri Luce (hereafter CL):** I am talking with Floyd Nelson. The date is December 10, 1986. He is going to tell me about some home remedies. My name is Cheri Luce. What home remedies do you know much about?

**Floyd Nelson (hereafter FN):** There are about two or three that I know pretty much about.

**CL:** Will you please explain them to us?

**FN:** One of them is for a bad cold. If you took a cold my daddy would fix up a little turpentine and kerosene in a tablespoon of sugar and make everyone of us take a little bit of that. We had to take a spoonful of that. Then if we had a sore throat we would use a sock, a stocking, and put around our necks and sleep on that and the next morning the sore throat was gone. We didn't have a sore throat. Then we had a fireplace and he kept wood on the fire, he would make us pull our shoes off and we would get up there by that fire and he would take that kerosene and a rag and rub it on the bottom of our feet and we had to hold our feet up close to the fire for a little while until that evaporated. You take a cold through your feet, you see, you don't take cold through your head, it comes through your feet, it's the dampness on the damp ground. You get exposed and it comes through your feet. So that helps a lot, you see what I mean? We did that to prevent colds. We would do that and go out and play and it didn't bother us because we were immuned to it. In other words we had guarded against it.

We didn't know anything about a doctor – we didn't have one. We didn't run to the doctor for some cough medicine, we used Watkins' Liniment. An old peddler would come by and sell us a bottle of Watkins's Liniment, about so high, and they kept that all the time.

Then we had tallow – you don't know anything about tallow. Well, you would mix that tallow up with a little, well you would take that tallow and melt it and use that tallow and they would put it on our chests, like you put Vicks salve on your chest later on down the line when we got older and I was raising my children. We used Vicks salve, I never used it, we used kerosene and turpentine because it was a different generation and everything doesn't work on everybody alike. So we used Vicks salve and we would take a flannel rag and put that Vicks salve on there and I put it on their chests and they would go to bed

and sleep and next morning they were all better. We didn't have a doctor either so we didn't know anything about a doctor.

**CL:** Where did you get all these remedies from?

**FM:** From my daddy. He was good about such as that. He was our doctor, or my mama never had anything to do with it, but my daddy did our doctoring. He took care of everything that came along from snakebite. I've been snake bit and we used kerosene to draw the poison out of the snake bite. One of them old copperhead moccasins bit me on the foot three times and it was three weeks before I could walk on it, but they drew all that poison out that night with kerosene.

**CL:** Compare the remedies of years ago to some remedies today, or some of the medicines of today.

**FN:** I think the changes, people change, the weather changes; it's not the same as it used to be. I would think now if you get anything wrong with you that you are not sure what it is you better go consult somebody that does know, not try something. You might try something and it would be wrong and it might not be good for you. Such as a little old simple cold, something like that, I still believe the home remedy is good for that but, otherwise if it gets any worse than that, why you better consult somebody that knows something about it because everything has changed now to what it was when I was a little boy.

**CL:** So what you are saying is that you could try some home remedies for the cold but the major ones...?

**FN:** Yes, the major ones I wouldn't fool with.

**CL:** If you were to step on a nail what would your father or mother do?

**FN:** The first thing he did, he would get the kerosene in a vessel, a pan, and if it was on our foot which it would have to be if you stepped on it, you just stuck the foot down in there and that kerosene would draw all of that infection out, keep it from being infected. When we got through with that he would fix a tobacco poultice, we called it. You chewed tobacco, take that and put it on a cloth and put it right on that sore and tie it up and that tobacco kept the poison out.

**CL:** He rolled it up in the cloth. Did he roll it up in the cloth?

**FN:** No, he put it in the cloth and then pushed it up where it would be next to the wound, or wherever the place was, then tie it down there and the tobacco would be right next to you.

**CL:** The juice would go on it?

**FN:** The juice would go out and all around the infected place.

**CL:** Did you have any remedies that you had to use honey?

**FN:** Yes, sure. Soda and honey. Table soda, Arm and Hammer soda and mix it with honey and take a tablespoon full of that every so often, that was for coughs, that's what we used for cough syrup.

**CL:** You drank or ate that?

**FN:** We had to eat it, you couldn't drink it, it was too thick to drink. You had to eat it.

**CL:** It was just honey?

**FN:** Yes, Arm and Hammer soda and honey, you stir it up, make it real good. When you picked it up and looked at it, it looked like you could make candy out of it. Take a spoonful of that and go to bed.

**CL:** Explain how you would use tea in some of your remedies.

**FN:** In the early part of the winter, when it began, or in the spring of the year when it would come springtime, that's when the sassafras, the sprouts would grow and my daddy would go down in the fields, or in the pasture. It was on sandy land, you would pull them up and they would have long roots on them, cut the roots off, bring them back up there and mama would, my daddy would get out there and take the ax or hatchet, chip the roots up into small pieces and they'd put it on the stove. Had an old wood stove and they would boil it. When it got through it would look just about like ice tea looks today. It would be a brownish looking tea, they would strain it then through a cloth, a cheesecloth. They strained it and, we didn't have a refrigerator or anything like that then. If we had any ice at all we had to buy the ice but, most of the time, we didn't have any ice at all. Once you would strain it you would have a big old jar and put it in it and put it in a grass sack and we would let it down in the well. The well was forty or forty-five feet deep and we would let it down in the well. That cool water kept it cool. They would bring that up and, after supper, we all had a drink of sassafras tea. They would put it on the stove and boil it good. You could either drink it cold or hot and of course, they would sweeten it, they would put some sugar with it and sweeten it. That was our remedy in the spring of the year to help fight off the spring-of-the-year colds that you would have. We were all pretty healthy. I made it through now and I still don't have a doctor, that's pretty good.

**CL:** Thank you for talking with me and thank you for letting me do this interview.

**END OF INTERVIEW**