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Cream Line was 50% In This Dairyman's Milk

By Harold Hartley

Times Staff Writer

CAMDEN, Me. -- This is the day they laid Carl Hardy away in a simple little chapel just past the monument at the top of the hill.

For years he was the farmer on Cranberry Isle. He planned gardens for the summer folk, took care of some of their houses, sailed with them.

THEN ARTHRITIS CAME. In this damp climate arthritis thrives. The sun is bright but the air is always cool and damp. First his fingers, then his legs, and finally the wheel chair.

He used to plant gardens for us, complete with Maine potatoes, long on white radishes and cucumbers.

One summer I stayed late and decided to live out of the garden. There was not much left except cucumbers. So I had them every day. To this day I do not like cucumbers.

It was Carl Sr., whose son still carries on where he left off, in the same faithful way, cutting the lawns, opening the houses and closing them, putting up the big winter shutters.

CARL SR.'S WIFE was stricken too. I went to call on them a few years ago. I knocked and knocked and no one answered. Only the dog barked. Then I realized that neither he nor his wife could get to the door. So I went in. His face was still lighted with a radiant smile although I knew he must have been uncomfortable and probably in pain.

The end came for Carl Sr., at a summer camp he loved about 30 miles inland in the cool of the mountains. He had a stroke.

People come up here to get away from it all. But they seldom realize that they also are getting away from a way of life on which they depend. Doctors, for instance. They are few, but willing, up here, and dedicated. When the chips are down they are with you all the way.

They moved Carl Hardy Sr., to the Ellsworth hospital. There was a doctor waiting. He said it was a "stroke." That was the beginning of a merciful end which pulled me like a magnet to the little orange-lighted funeral chapel in Camden.

MOST OF THE PEOPLE SAT in the back room where they could see through a large open double door. I sat in the front room near the casket. Soon an elderly woman came in and sat beside me in her Sunday best dress, a deep blue with little brown maple leaves on it. I could smell mothballs.

The service was the usual Bible readings and a few poems. It did not last long, about 20 minutes. Then the pallbearers filed out and waited for the closed casket.

I kept thinking about all of the energy Carl Hardy had, his willingness and his industry. He believed in working and never spared himself. And the smile was always there.

From the chapel they took Carl over to Lincolnville a short distance, and out to the cemetery for the final rites. It was man rejoining the dust of which he was made.

On Cranberry Isle Carl Hardy Sr. was the only dairyman the island ever had. He kept a cow or two in our pasture. He did the milking right there in the pasture and bottled the milk. Sometimes when he delivered it it was still warm.

I had never seen milk like Carl Hardy delivered. After a night in the refrigerator the cream line was half way down the bottle. He had Jersey cows- 14 at one time. He understood animals, and they seemed to understand him.

In Lincolnville, as the final prayer was being said, over in a nearby pasture a cow raised her voice to the sky, as if joining in.

Of course it was a coincidence. But it made me think.