

I was in the middle of planting my garden behind our house in Deloraine when word came that one of the Metis families on the Mountain needed my help. The turnips could wait! The message came by way of a lad not more than 10 years old riding his father's pony. The father had been bed-ridden for nye two weeks with a bad cough.



Spring rains bring freshness to the air, but the trails get a tad slippery. My horse is sure-footed, but the clay bedevils us in low areas. My young friend's work horse is much better off. We slog on, the lad leading the way. "My mum's tried everything," the boy chimes. "When dad first got the cough she made a mustard plaster for his chest. Then she rubbed his back with skunk oil. She's been forcing chokecherry juice down his throat to help with the pain. But he's getting worse. He needs your help Doc."

I've learned Metis families take responsibility for their own health and healing. We doctors are few and far between. Folks rely on teachings handed down through generations. The Metis learn about medicinal herbs and home-made remedies from First Nations kin. Seems prudent and, for the most part, effective.

Independent as local folks may be, they know they can come to me at any time. I've seen all kinds of ailments and accidents since I came to Deloraine in 1887. I learned quickly to speak slowly and curb my Scottish brogue so folks can understand me! The children always laugh

at my thick accent - but laughter's the best home-made medicine!

The lad chatted on as we approached a well-kept soddy. His mother met us at the door. She looked distraught. I slip off my boots and am ushered to the bed. I listen to the man's raspy breathing with my stethoscope. He's burning up with fever and is in a lot of pain. He has pneumonia and will need to be transported to the hospital in Deloraine. I ask if that is okay. She nods – a mix of relief and sadness.

I helped hitch up the family horse, and soon we were on our way, moving carefully back down that trail. Mother sitting in the front with her son. Her husband laying in the back of the cart, wrapped in blankets. She looked at me and smiled. "Thank you, Doctor Thornton," she said.

My name is Robert Thornton. The folks of the area know I truly care for them. I plan on being here a good, long time – wherever I'm called, and, whatever the weather.

Betty Sawatzky and David Neufeld adapted 'Doctor as Needed' from a story written for Vantage Points 4.