

Nearly Everyone She Loved Died of the Flu

The Flu and the Author of Anne of Green Gables

I began researching the author of *Anne of Green Gables* for this article. The author's name is Lucy Maud Montgomery (1874–1942), but she went by Maud. She was born and raised on Prince Edward Island, Canada. P.E.I., as the island is often called, is well known for its natural beauty. P.E.I. is a popular vacation spot. It is also the setting for Maud's book.

My research taught me something unexpected about the life and times of Maud Montgomery. I learned that people feared the flu then like they fear Ebola today. That's right, the flu. Nearly everyone Maud loved died of the flu.

Today we don't think much of the flu. After all, it no longer kills healthy adults in a matter of hours. The flu still kills between one-quarter to one-half million people each year worldwide. Far more people died from the flu each year in Maud's lifetime.

So what is the flu? Well, firstly, flu is short for influenza. And, secondly, it's nothing unusual. It's a virus. It usually gives you a stuffy nose, a cough, a sore throat, and a fever. It also makes your body ache. The thing about the flu is



that it spreads easily. It spreads through the air via coughs and sneezes.

The flu spreads so quickly that it can cause an epidemic. An epidemic is an outbreak across a region or country. The flu can also become a pandemic. This is a worldwide outbreak.

One of the worst flu pandemics took place in Maud's lifetime. It was called the Influenza Pandemic of 1918. It lasted for two years. This strain of

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the flu was nicknamed the Spanish Influenza. It could kill you within hours of your first symptom. Literally. A person could start to cough or sneeze on his way to work in the morning. He would be dead on the job a few hours later. People were dying in the streets.

In all, the Spanish Influenza killed 20–50 million people. It's said that it got this name because 8 million people died in one month in Spain in the early days of the pandemic.

World War I (1914–1918) likely helped spread this deadly flu. This war was the first time so many people from all over the world came into contact with each other at the same time. Also, battlefields and army hospitals were breeding grounds for terrible diseases.

The Spanish Influenza was far more deadly even than World War I. The war killed between 24–38 million people worldwide. Up until that point, it was

the deadliest war on record. Somehow, war still seems far more dangerous than any little flu virus should be. And yet it wasn't.

Maud lost a lot of friends and loved-ones to the Spanish influenza. It might be an exaggeration to say it was almost everyone she knew, but it sure was a lot of people. Her good friend, Will, died in 1897. Her boyfriend, Herman, died from the flu in 1899. Maud, herself, nearly died from the Spanish influenza in 1918. She wrote in her diary about the panic in Canada surrounding the flu and the large numbers of people who got sick.

Maud lost her best friend, Frederica, to the Spanish influenza in 1919. The year after, Maud stopped writing books about Anne of Green Gables. Even though the books earned her a lot of money, in her diary she wrote, "It's a pity it doesn't buy happiness."

