

Nursing in the Frozen North

REI PRESTON - THOMAS had always had the feeling that the exciting and unusual jobs some people had were not for her, until she found herself in charge of a cottage hospital in the far north of Canada, looking after the three Indian tribes of Mistawasis, Sandy Lake and Muskeg Lake. She describes the time she spent among those Indians in a series of six talks for the Women's Session, starting from 2YA on Monday, October 21.

It was winter when she arrived at Mistawasis. Although she had her own car, the mid-winter roads were often



impassable for cars and even snow-ploughs, and she found herself travelling in horse-drawn sleighs. Sometimes instead of a sleigh there would be a caboose waiting. On those occasions she felt really important, for a caboose is a little closed-in sleigh with a chimney and little fireplace inside, an appreciated luxury when the temperature goes down to 40 below.

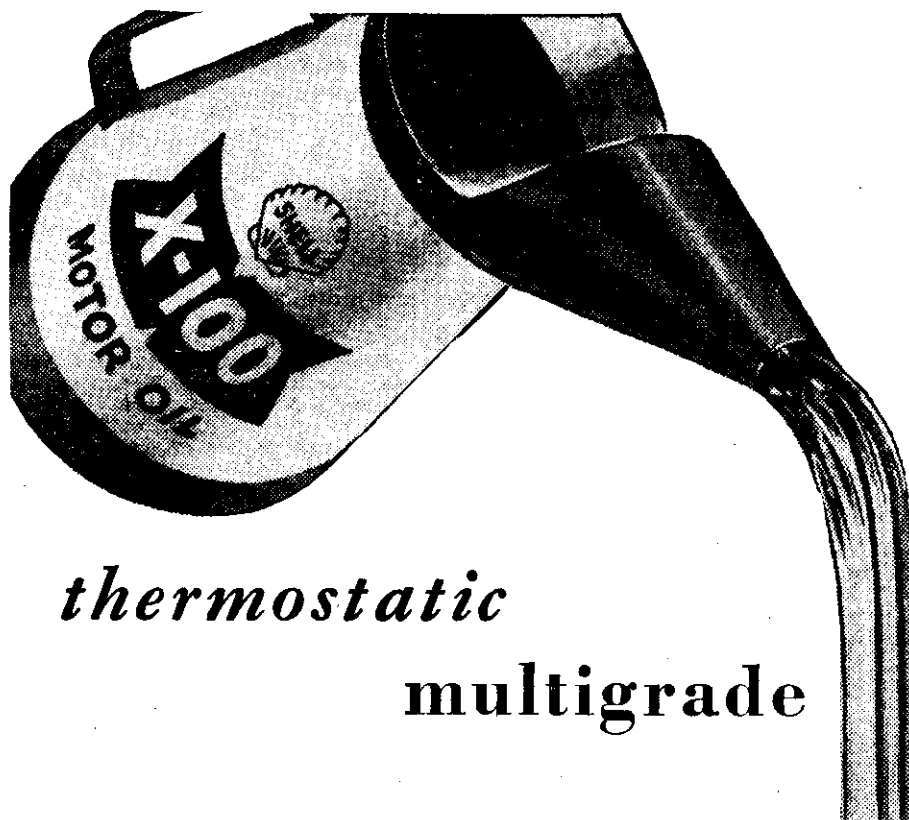
In her talks Miss Preston-Thomas describes the Indians she met, the unforgettable patients like the young mother who came into the home with no clothes for the baby, but who sent her husband 40 miles through winter snow to buy the layette—one pink frilled nylon sun bonnet! She was a feckless mother, and had to be constantly nagged by the nurse to feed and wash the child properly. She never seemed to mind and, like all the Indians, remained pleased to see the nurse at all times.

After a year at Mistawasis Miss Preston-Thomas was asked to go 300 miles further north to open a new hospital in an outpost settlement at Pelican Narrows. Transport to this hospital was by aeroplane, called up by radio. Such an ambulance service was expensive to operate but, as on one occasion when an Indian walked 40 miles with a report of a sick child, any possibility of a wild goose chase had to be firmly ignored. In that instance it was fortunate for the child that a plane was available, for it was one of the more serious cases in the nurse's experience in Canada.

Miss Preston-Thomas has returned to Wellington Hospital, where she trained, and is now a ward sister, with no further travel plans "at the moment."

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