

A Mystery Letter with Family Connections to St. Luke's



In among items dropped off for our Spring Fair at the end of April, we found a mystery envelope with a letter and photos. We sent this information out to our parishioners and those on our Cemetery News e-mail list. Through some detective work by one of our readers, we found an obituary for Vera Palmer Beischer, who was the letter writer.

After sending out a notice about the letter, we were connected with two of the letter writer's daughters. We also realized that Vera's parents, Annie E. Palmer and Ernie Palmer, are buried in St. Luke's churchyard, in Row D Plot 38. Vera's daughters shared family memories with us.

Joanne, one of the daughters, sent these comments: *"Thank you to you and the person who found this treasure. I didn't recognize anyone in the photos, but knew instantly the letter was from Mom by her handwriting. It was like walking down memory lane while reading her letter. She must have written the letter within two months of when Mom, Dad, Barb and I (Joanne) moved into the house, followed a few years later by Sue (deceased in 1994) and our brother Billy. Mom lived in the house for more than 70 years.*

For as long as I can remember, Mom and Dad fostered and loved 63 foster children and cared for many more daily (babysitting and overnights). All of this, for love, as in those days she received a mere \$1 per day for fostering and not much more for babysitting many of the neighbours and friends of friends. Mom truly did keep children safe in the home on the hill, overlooking the Blenkinsop Valley.

Mom always had many milking cows over the years for all but two years when she gave up the cows, after which she returned to getting another cow, a Dexter she called Bonus, whose job was to keep the grass in the pastures from getting too tall. She also raised chickens, rabbits, turkeys, mink at different times but always cats, dogs, chickens, and cows with most of their names still remembered.

In Mom's letter, she referred to Alf and Joyce (her brother and sister-in-law), her sister Dorothy and brother-in-law Bill Duncan, and her youngest brother Roy Palmer. Vera also referred to Rolly, Johnny, Peter, Craig, and Fred. All of these friends were welcomed into the home of Annie Palmer (Mom's mother and our grandmother) to enjoy a home cooked meal while on leave from the Army or Navy. Gram met them while volunteering at the Salvation Army hostel. Annie Palmer and her family lived in the house at 3970 Braefoot Rd.(directly across from Andrews Road), where there is a bench commemorating the lives of both Gram and my sister Susan (Sue).

Gram started and operated her store from about 1945 until after 1970. Barb, Sue and I loved helping out at the store, where she sold canned foods, bread, sugar, fresh fruit, etc., but most popularly, penny candies, 5 and 10 cent candy bars, pop and chips. Everyone in the neighbourhood knew Gram. I don't think she made much money but she loved all the visitors/customers and welcomed them all. Annie was also instrumental in the beginning of Braefoot Park, using her back acre, which was later taken over by Saanich. It was a hub for all the neighbourhood children and was supported by the families in its beginning.



Both Annie E. Palmer and Ernie Palmer were buried in St. Luke's Churchyard. My Mom, Vera and Dad, William (Bill) Beischer were married at St. Luke's as well as my Aunt Dorothy and Uncle Bill Duncan. Also my husband Bill

Sanderson and I (Joanne), Barbara and her first husband Rick, and Billy and his wife Joslynn were all married at St. Luke's. There is also a long list of christenings at St. Luke's for the Beischer children and our many children and cousins."

Another daughter, Barb (Beischer) Huonker wrote from Hawaii, "Our family had attended St. Luke's Church probably from the 1940s and my grandparents graves are in the cemetery. My grandfather was buried there about 1940 and my grandmother's ashes were buried at the foot of my grandfather's grave in 1986. I visited the graves all my life even when I would come home for a visit. I even sang in the church choir when I was a young teenager (early 1960s) and remember David Foster playing the organ. All of my generation's kids have been christened there. So St. Luke's is a big part of our family's history.

Gram's store (Palmer's Confectionary) was on what is now Braefoot Park. My grandmother donated the first acre that was Braefoot Park where we played during our childhood. Her store was at 3970 Braefoot Road. If you drive up Braefoot Road from McKenzie, you will see a wooden bench just off the sidewalk facing the part of the park where the store used to be, right across from Andrew Road and Braefoot Elementary.

I really appreciate all of the effort that you and your friends have made to get Mom's letter to us. It was so much fun reading what she wrote as a 27 year old in her own words at that time. We still have not figured out how she got the letter back from Rolly, if he ever got it. That will probably always remain in mystery."

To see a copy of the envelope, letter, and pictures which triggered these memories, visit St. Luke's website: <http://www.stlukesvictoria.ca/news/a-mystery-letter-and-photos>. Once we found the letter writer's family, we returned the envelope, letter, and pictures to Vera's daughter, Joanne Sanderson.

Source: St. Luke's Prescription, Fall 2023