

Sophie and Beer

We've had some interesting neighbours in the fifty years that we have lived in this house. Sophie Parko was one of our neighbours. She lived across our back lane in a small bungalow with a large backyard and garden. Into her eighties, she would work in the garden in the early hours and then rest on a bench under a tree. She would often chat and she told me and Carol about her early life in Edmonton.

The family came in a Red River cart from Winnipeg when she was about nine years old. They travelled with another family who had a son slightly older than Sophie. The families promised the children to each other in marriage when they grew up.

Sophie said that at about age eighteen she had worked at the Strathcona Hotel and later was working at the Dominion Hotel on Whyte Avenue in Edmonton as a chambermaid. Her Edmonton boyfriend had proposed to her and she accepted. The wedding was to take place in a week. The promised boy was away working in the goldfields in Field, British Columbia, in the Rockies, at the time. Sophie told us that she sent a message saying, "I'm getting married this coming weekend and if you can make it back in time, I'll marry you." She said, "He did, and I married him." We said, "What about the other guy?"and she said, "Ooh...he was mad....!", but there was beer at both places.

She told us about "my son, dat wrassler...." and then we met him. He went by the name of Reg Park, and he was a "good guy" wrestler, all over the United States. He trained with Stu Hartt and was a personal friend of Arnold Schwarzenegger.

I met him as he sunned himself in Sophie's back yard, stretched out in a lounge chair, working on his tan for the wrestling ring, while visiting his mother. I told Carol to go over and meet him as she is particularly fond of big men. Much later we found out that Reg had designed the big belts that were awarded wrestlers for championships.

Sophie broke her hip in her early nineties and never returned to her home and garden. Her older son, Frank, who farmed out by Nisku, told me I could use the garden as we watched out for the place.

I really enjoyed gardening. Carol was not interested at all in washing carrots and freezing beans at the beginning of her year of energy in September - pottery, kids back to school and winter open house event plans to be made.

I really enjoyed going over in the morning to see what had come up. A favorite was the long row of kohlrabi. Carol was shocked and asked, "Why so many?" I said I liked them because they looked like alien spaceships. Frank eventually sold the house and thus, my gardening career ended. The last renter was a woman friend with two large huskies who had the nasty habit of digging up and eating all my carrots.