The Legacy Of A Loving Mother



LIFE IS MYSTERIOUS
ELLA PRICE



FILE PHOTO SPECIAL TO THE SUN

It was a warm day a little more than a decade ago when Bill Anderson visited the location of his boyhood home on Summer Street. It was then Bank of Greeneville, which operated at the location in 2006-07 before the financial institution's name was changed to American Patriot Bank.

With Mother's Day thoughts still lingering in the not-so-distant past, I cannot help but think of a story I had the privilege to be a very small part of.

It is the story of how a 91-year-old Bill Anderson chose to honor his mother by donating a building to Holston United Methodist Home for Children in her name.

I could share with you all details of how this special gift came about, and Lord knows I am not short on words, but I think this story can be best told by Mr. Bill Anderson himself. The following are his words:

A reporter could find a story here today of more than a gift of giving.

This saga began 100 years ago with the love of a farmer for his daughter. He bought a beautiful Victorian home for her on this site.

But then there came tragedy. There was the Great Depression.

His little girl became an adult and married Nick Anderson. He died in an accident shortly after she gave birth.

Her father was gone. Mrs. Fuschia Stines Anderson was left in a dysfunctional home, living in genteel poverty with her mother, a sister with diabetes and two older teen sons.

And a restless child called Billy Frank Anderson.

Yet there was plenty of food from the farm, but little money. Half of the house was converted to rentals and Mrs. Anderson took clerical jobs on Depot street at JC Penny, Woolworth and a department store.

The education process to become a teacher began — car-pooling to college in Johnson City, working while care-providing for both adults and a toddler.

Her sister died from a diabetic condition. Now there was accreditation. Mrs. Anderson began teaching at what was then called Holston orphanage. She took Billy Frank there for the first grade. In time he became part of the family problem — making unauthorized trips to the World's Fair in New York City and a trip to Miami Beach!

At age 16 the wayward son enlisted in the U.S. Navy. With but little help, Mrs. Anderson had a furnace installed, the house painted, keeping a Dutch couple and a mortician as tenants. The two-car garage remained empty — except for chickens.

By the time her mother died, Mrs. Anderson had taught hundreds of pupils in the lower grades. A meager teacher's income led her to sell Compton's encyclopedias. And then it was discovered she too had diabetes. With failing health the Victorian house was left behind when a teaching position was offered in a climate-friendly Avon Park, Florida.

A renowned physician at the University of Chicago helped Mrs. Anderson tolerate her condition, but even so she would collapse in the classroom. A further challenge was the management of the low-income producing rentals on Summer street.

Then Greeneville Mayor James R. Hardin solved the problem. He had the house burned to the ground! All concerned agreed it was a good move — one to expand parking for the central business by converting the block from single homes to new business in a shopping center. A small branch bank replaced the Victorian house with a long-term lease. The more dependable income allowed Mrs. Anderson to relocate in Lexington, Virginia, where better home care was available.



Fuschia Stines Anderson

Good friends, visiting teachers, a great physician, an English Springer Spaniel named Molly and collecting Blue Ridge china were part of nine years of formal retirement. Her activities also included establishing a classroom to tutor two neighborhood boys.

The children called her "Miss Fuschia," and she still had little gifts from them at death 27 years ago. Her last words to Billy Frank were: "Get back to work."

It was the kind of mandate expected from a teacher and a mother who had survived with purpose through trial and tribulations — but at peace in the end.

Today there is a certain justice for her in that the leadership of Holston United Methodist Home For Children takes ownership of this property. This iconic institution has an earned reputation of good care for decades. It is dedicated like a teacher to youth.

Today their kids have applied skills to improving the property — while management looks ahead to city-center growth.

With respect and appreciation to the many who participated: Stories can just fade away and end. A good cause with purpose supported by volunteers is timeless.

Bill Anderson

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As I stood listening to the President of Holston Home, Bradley Williams, address the crowd, I was awestruck. Seriously, I actually had goosebumps when I heard the story of Miss Fuschia and how her now 91-year-old son was honoring his mother.

I couldn't even get my children to take out the trash when they were young, yet here is Bill Anderson still following his mother's last directive 27 years after her passing. "Get back to work."

Miss Fuschia, I hope you can see that your son Billy Frank is very hard at work. He is leaving a lasting legacy of love and good fortune to those whom he has never even met. Yes, he is hard at work.

"In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" — Acts 20:35 (NIV)

Now, if only everyone would "Get back to work." Life is mysterious.

The "Life Is Mysterious" column by Ella Price, caterer, blogger and now columnist, is published in Lifestyles every other Tuesday.