



February 22, 2017

### *SMALL TOWN FOLKS*

There are some things you do out of love - it's a part of who you are - like being in church, or carrying on the family farm.

Back in the day, a job move took this couple and their six young children to Iowa in the cold of winter. The furniture hadn't arrived yet (they'd been making do with sleeping bags) - when Sunday rolled around. But this new family still showed up at church, and the preacher knew he'd hit the jackpot.

Our church hit the jackpot, too, back in 1980, when Felicia and Burt Payne, new in town, visited Wellesley Hills Congregational, loved the people and the service, especially the music, and decided to stick around. You will see them in the choir on most Sundays. Felicia has served on the Music Committee, and two terms as a Deacon. Burt has also been a Deacon, and has served on the Outreach, Prudential, and Nominating Committees - and on Church Council.

Recently Felicia, Burt, and their daughter, Saranel McGuirk (also in the choir), gave a program on apple farming at a WHCC Senior's Tea. Burt grew up in Williamson, New York, near Lake Ontario, where his father was an Agriculture teacher, and owned an apple farm. Burt's family moved to the 1820 Cobblestone farm house in 1938 when Burt was 4 years old. To this day, Burt owns and actively manages a small part of his father's former Apple farm. He spends about 8-10 weeks a year there. Saranel is his main helper at harvest season. Daughter Kimberley lives in the farm house and raised her children there.

Apple farming is really interesting. Apples have been around in many places in the world throughout recorded history. In the past, sometimes a new kind of apple would be found with unique and desirable qualities. When this happened, cuttings were taken from the tree where it grew, and grafted onto "root stock". Voila! A new kind of apple would come onto the market. These days, apple varieties are not so much "found," but developed - by scientists in special labs.

Burt graduated in engineering from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. Until he retired, his day job was with a single corporation. He started in a research lab and moved through a variety of positions, including President of two different companies within the corporation. He experienced two leveraged buyouts and retired in 1988. Felicia received her RN from Genesee Hospital in Rochester, New York, and later a Bachelor of Science for Nurses at the University of Dubuque. As a nurse, she loved caring for new mothers and preemies, although for most of her years she was a

homemaker. Their children are Stephen (wife Diane), Saranel McGuirk (husband Ed), Kimberley Hannan, Melanie Vagnini (husband Chris), Burt III (wife Anna) and Donald (wife Peggy). In all, counting grandchildren and great-grandchildren, there are 33 in the family!

Burt was baptized Episcopalian and then as a Baptist at age 14. Felicia was raised in the Dutch Reformed Church.

Felicia grew up in the smaller town of East Williamson, New York, and attended a three-room school until the 8th grade when she went to the "BIG" school and met Burt. They began dating at age 14. Their graduating class had just 42 students.

That area of New York has seen a lot of economic challenges – particularly when its large Kodak and Xerox operations downsized. Still, the apple orchards are beautiful, the countryside looks prosperous, and there is nothing more pleasant than being there in the spring, savoring the smell of apple blossoms.

*- By Elizabeth Robertson*