



Dear Abby
Teen's fear is keeping her out of the driver's seat.
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A P.E.I. family travels to the Netherlands to visit the grave of a loved one killed in action during the Second World War and to track down the family of his wartime sweetheart.

A journey of the heart

Irene Doyle of Charlottetown and Wilfred Cannon of Mount Mellick recently travelled with another family member to the Netherlands to visit the grave of William “Willie” Cannon, who was killed in action on Feb. 16, 1945. They also tracked down the family of his wartime sweetheart, Annie van den Berg, who corresponded with the family until her premature death in 1957. Guardian photo by Mary MacKay

By MARY MACKAY
THE GUARDIAN

For a short time in 1944/45 William Cannon of Mount Mellick, P.E.I., and Annie van den Berg of Nijmegen in the Netherlands were Second World War sweethearts.

Few details are known about their short-lived wartime courtship that sadly ended when Willie was killed in action in the Netherlands on Feb. 14, 1945. But after that an unusual cross-Atlantic bond was forged between Annie and Willie's mother in the form of correspondence that lasted until Annie's untimely death in 1957.

Now 63 years after the war's end, some of the Cannon family have crossed that same oceanic divide to visit Willie's final resting place and to meet the members of Annie's family who also got to know the 24-year-old Canadian soldier in his final year of life.

“When we were going to find Uncle Willie's grave, I said, ‘I'm going to find Annie's family,’ ... and then I thought, ‘oh that's so farfetched,’” smiles Irene Doyle of Charlottetown, who had yet to be born when her Uncle Willie died in battle.

Still, over the years she had heard plenty of stories about him and his Dutch sweetheart who he regarded as “the best.” She also knew about the letters that her grandmother, Celia Cannon, and Annie had exchanged and the friendship they had formed.

So when her uncle, Wilfred Cannon of Mount Mellick, let it be known he wished to visit the gravesite of his eldest brother in the war cemetery in Groesbeek, which is only about 10 kilometres from Nijmegen, she included this search for Annie's family to their early October trip.

The letters were in the possession of another uncle, Leo Cannon. Having survived a house fire and more than 60 years of potential house-cleaning heave-hos, they pro-

vided the one clue Doyle needed to start her search for the van den Bergs — an actual Nijmegen address scrawled in now-faded ink.

“I thought, ‘I'm just going to write it the same way that they wrote it down and maybe somebody over there will know what it is,’” she remembers.

First on their must-do list was to see Willie's grave in

William “Willie” Cannon of Mount Mellick was about 23 years of age when he met his wartime sweetheart, Annie van Den Berg in Nijmegen, the Netherlands. Submitted photo



Nelly van den Berg, right, her sister, Tonny, and their husbands were given a surprise visit this month by the family members of the fallen P.E.I. soldier, William “Willie” Cannon, who was their older sister's sweetheart in 1944/45. Submitted photo

the Groesbeek War Cemetery. “It was just exactly how it was pictured; the care that is taken of it,” Cannon says of the immaculately kept site. “He's buried underneath a big tree there and I liked it. It was good to be there.”

While in the Groesbeek War Museum, he met two women, one of whom lives on the Belgium border, the other on the German border. Once a year they visit the cemetery in Groesbeek.

“When they found out we

went through and did for them.”

Meanwhile, Doyle was playing amateur detective. By fluke she found someone who knew instantly that it was a street called Driehuizerweg that she sought. Someone else nearby knew where it was and



Annie van den Berg, left, was just 21 when she met Island soldier William “Willie” Cannon, who in his letters home said she was “the best.” Submitted photo



Wilfred Cannon of Mount Mellick was just 15 when his older brother, Willie, was killed in action in the Netherlands in 1945. Last month, he visited his grave in the Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery in the Netherlands. Submitted photo

it looked like there was nobody home. And I said, ‘I'm not coming all this way to not knock on the door,’” Doyle remembers.

Bicy Fischer answered the door.

“I was surprised; we went on holiday to Canada last summer so I thought they were maybe friends of my Canadian friends ... so, I was wondering what brought these people to my house,” Fischer, who is a dietician instructor, said via an e-mail

This letter came to P.E.I. from Annie van den Berg in the late 1940s. Submitted image

interview this week.

“I invited them to come in the house and then they start(ed) telling their story. I got really interested and became anxious to help these kind and friendly people.”

Although she was not a member of the van den Berg family, Fischer knew from the property deed that they had once lived there. She also knew a woman, Trees Francissen, who had lived in the neighbourhood for a long time.

And so with Fischer in tow as a translator, they struck off for this next destination.

The elderly woman remembered the van den Berg family. After some thought she directed them to a local electronics shop, the owner of which she thought was connected to one of the van den Berg sisters by marriage.

They hit the jackpot there
See A journey, C2

A journey ... continued from page C1

Fischer called to explain what was up and they made an appointment to meet Tonny, her sister, Nelly, and their husbands later that evening.

"I was just dancing, I was high as a freaking kite. They were really surprised that we would hunt them up," Doyle says.

From September 1944 to the end of the war, the van den Berg family, as did most residents in the community, opened their doors to civilians who were evacuated from the areas receiving heavy German shellfire. They then also made room for Canadian and English soldiers, one of whom was Willie, or Bill, as the van den Bergs called him.

“We, our family (father, mother and nine children), slept in the basement for safety reasons and lived on the ground floor. The evacuated civilians slept and lived

“Bill did stay with us three times for a whole week just as the other soldiers, being in the frontline for one week and then had a rest of a week in their quarters at the Driehuizerweg, then again a week in the frontline and so on for some months.”

“He was very impressed by Bill who gave him, with some other boys his age, the privilege to come into his tank (which was a heavy armoured scout car). . . . He (also) remembers that they sat together and ate food from the army kitchen and in return Bill ate with us at the family table.”

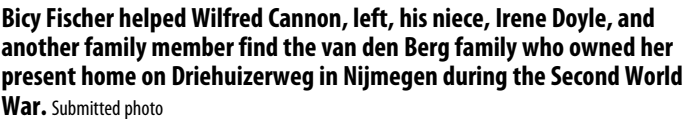
Nelly had few memories of her sister and her Canadian beau dating, but she did remember Annie and two of her older sisters and their accompanying soldiers head-

"I was 14 years old; Annie was 21 years old. At that age, seven years difference is very important. To me, my little brother and my sister, Tonny, the soldiers were our wonderful big brothers, having liberated us from the enemy and strongly protecting us against him, the enemy being still very dangerous."

"I remembered Bill, his name in my booklet and very sharply, the awful moment I had to place a little crucifix behind his name as we learned that he had fallen in action. As a little girl at that time I was sure that it would help him to come in Heaven," Nelly said.

After Willie was killed, his mother in P.E.I. wrote to Annie to tell her the terrible news. Their correspondence continued, and gifts made their way from P.E.I. to Holland, as well as photos.

In one, dated May 6, 1948, Annie provides comfort to the grieving mother and a connection to her son buried



"These days the people of Holland celebrate their liberation after a day of remembrance to our killed friends on liberation day (4th of May). I've been to Bill's grave, of course, to do so! God keep his soul, dear Mother Cannon, so don't feel too hard about him! I can and especially my Mother can understand your sorrow about Bill, but we all hope to see him again!" Annie wrote.

In another, Annie acknowledges receiving a parcel from Willie's mother. "I'm very glad about your

By March of 1949, it was Nelly who was keeping up the correspondence because Annie had become very ill.

“My dear family, this time it is me again who is answering your letter,” writes Nelly. “Very many thanks for the nice parcel. Annie was especially very glad with the woolen stockings. She is not able to write by herself for she is in the hospital again. The doctor in Nijmegen could not find the cause of her illness. Now he has sent her to the well-known doctor who lives in Utrecht. We hope they will find the cause. I hope they can cure her. . . .”

Annie's health continued to deteriorate from what was later diagnosed as multiple sclerosis. She died in 1957.

For Doyle and Cannon this recent journey into the past has brought loads of new insight into Willie's final year and his Dutch sweetheart.

For the van den Berg family, it was an unexpected but welcomed wartime reunion.

"It was a very good and highly remarkable meeting with very nice people," Nelly says.

"It gave a lot of satisfaction that we could give them, I do hope, a good picture of (those) days in 1944/45 from which we have the best of remembrances

of their brother and uncle Bill and that we could give them the feeling of the hospital-ity, the friendship and the warmth that our family hopes to have given to Bill and his comrades.

“When we had to say farewell to our Canadian visitors it was more touching than you could have (thought), like good old friends leaving.”

Church hosts
Remembrance
Day tributes
on Nov. 9

Special guests will include members of the Lest We Forget Committee, three of the students from Three Oaks who will be travelling to Ortona, Italy in two weeks (Olivia Richardson, Pat DesRoches and Lucas MacLean), pipers Andrew Dunford, Shanae Rogers and Scott Byrne and drummers from the College of Piping and trumpeter Dylan Maddix from Three Oaks Senior High School.

Photos and wartime memorabilia will be on display upstairs in the Strong Memorial Auditorium, and a special edition of the newspaper, *Canada Remembers Times* will be available.

Everyone is welcome to come and greet the family members of the late Lloyd Frost, the late Archie Martin and Reg MacLean, honoured by youth representatives.

Tea and coffee will be served following the service.
For information check out the website at www.trinitysummerside.ca.

Humane Society launches Foster Fest

The P.E.I. Humane Society is hosting its first ever Foster Fest to promote the adoption of cats, kittens and adult dogs living in temporary foster homes.

"It has been a very busy fall at the society with a large number of incoming animals. Many of those animals were placed into temporary care through our network of foster homes," explains shelter manager Dr. Els Cawthorn. "Now these animals are ready for adoption and we simply can't accommodate them all back at the shelter. We're holding this event in the hope that we will adopt these pets into new, permanent homes directly from their foster homes, without ever having to reincorporate them back into the shelter population. Another benefit is that adoption directly from foster homes is much less stressful for the animals."

The adoption fees for cats, kittens and adult dogs adopted directly from foster homes will be reduced by 50 per cent until Nov. 15 (\$72.50 for a cat or kitten or \$97.50 for a dog). The reduced fees still include all of the regular services provided by the society.

Photographs and descriptions of animals in Foster Fest are at www.peihumanesociety.com. Hard copies are also available for review at the shelter, 309 Sherwood Rd., or call 892-1190.

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