



GLEN KASK PHOTO

Muriel Windebank hoists the cane which is helping her recover from breaking her leg in two places. The Windebank family has

had a high profile in Mission for 100 years, and Muriel sees a bright future ahead for her community.

Windebanks go way back

Entrepreneur Hori started a hotel and Mission Power & Light

FOR more than 100 years the Windebank family has played a major role in the development of Mission. Hori Windebank and his wife settled in our town in 1889.

With the new east-west C.P. Railroad under construction, the small community of Mission (St. Mary's Mission) was a frenzy of building activity. Hori, a one-time sea captain, Shanghai policeman, farmer and hotelier, recognized an opportunity when he saw one. He decided to build the Matsqui Hotel on the west side of Horne — south of the tracks (where the Nest Restaurant now stands).

A born entrepreneur, Hori later saw a need for electrical power and after nearly electrocuting himself several times, finally got a water-driven dynamo to work in the basement of his building on Washington (First Avenue) and Downie (Grand Street).

It was 1911 when Hori sent to England for his nephew W.J. 'Bill' Windebank, a plumber and electrician, to come and help out with Hori's thriving Mission Power & Light Co. Bill, wife May, daughter Ella and son John lived in a frame house on Third Avenue built in 1913 by John Gibbard.

Like Hori, Bill was a hard worker and became involved in the community. Bill's wife died in 1914, so Bill sold off everything, rented his

Neville
Cox



Just between us

new house, packed his children off to England and joined the army.

Returning to Mission after the war, Bill met and in 1921 married Dorothy Cotton, whose relatives managed a restaurant in Hori's building, now the Thomas Building (corner of First and Grand). Dorothy was one of the first female employers to work at the Bank of Commerce. Hori added three more children to his family: Gordon, Muriel and Christine.

Muriel was born in the old Boothby house (Mission's first hospital) which still stands on the corner of Third and Birch.

She went to Mission Central and graduated from Mission High (since Jubilee Elementary). After taking teacher training in Vancouver, Muriel got her first teaching position at Naksup for \$100 a month. Homesick for the valley, she returned to teach in Haney, Mission and Victoria but became tired of teaching in cold, dark basements, draughty halls and makeshift

classrooms and quit and came home.

Bill offered her a job in his electrical/plumbing store — \$25 a month plus room and board. June '93 brought the 40th anniversary of Muriel's temporary job as "daughter of the plumber."

As Muriel puts it, "WW II brought money to the town," and Windebank Plumbing & Heating prospered. "Why, we got to fix the dug-out basement so the lino in the living room didn't lift every time the wind blew," she said.

Like her parents, Muriel has always found pleasure in music. A long-time organist for the United Church, she learned to play piano under Miss Winifred Barker, a genteel Irish lady who stood no nonsense.

"We had to keep fingernails short with no polish allowed — and there was to be no loud playing on the keys," Muriel said. "We were always closely associated with our church. Mother had the junior choir, Dad (Bill) taught Sunday school, and I played the organ."

A generous, popular town father, Bill died in '69 at age 86. Dearly remembered still by the old-timers, the elementary school on Stave Lake Street bears his name. Bill was never too busy to help. He would drop everything to fix a plumbing problem at the old hospital on Fifth, or at some school or home.

Gordon managed the family business for eight years after his father's death, and after 50 years in business, the store was sold.

"We had so many — Bruce Dynes, John Janzen, Wilfred Lockley among them — who learned the trade under dad and then went into business for themselves," Muriel said.

Last Thanksgiving, the family held a reunion. John (80) came from Pictou, Nova Scotia, and Christine returned from Freemont, Ca. with her children and grandchildren. Along with Muriel were Gordon (now retired from Mission school district), his wife Hazel and their children Lee, Mark and Karen; John's son Greg; and Ella's son Michael and family.

"It was a wonderful time," they all agreed. "We must do it again".

Looking out over the bridge, across the river and into the mountains, Muriel has seen many changes from the window of the old house on Third where she still lives.

"I'm glad I grew up here when I did. I love this town, the people and its memories. Mission has a great future, but things will change. But I'm fortunate to know and look back on the small friendly community and all the space we enjoyed when I grew up," Muriel said.

Neville Cox's column appears monthly in the Record.