

Good Afternoon!

My name is Alegonda Biesterveld – wife, mother, grandmother and seamstress. I was born on January 9th, 1907, to Hendrica and Adrian Vande Leygraaf in Little Chute. I was one of three children. I had two brothers, John and Lambert, better known as “Cookie” and “Babe”.

When I was quite young, I took care of my mother who had cancer so I couldn't finish school. After my mom passed away at the age of 55, I landed a job working at Gloudeman's Department Store. It was the only department store in town and they specialized in everything from dry goods and groceries to flooring. I really enjoyed working there! My father remarried after my mother passed away. He married Petronella Verkuilen who had three daughters Ann, Minnie and Sr. Lidwina – now I had 3 stepsisters.

In 1927 I married the love of my life George Biesterveld. We lived at 408 Pine Street and later moved into my parent's home next door at 402 Pine Street. Both of these houses still stand today, right next to the church. Eventually we owned both homes and rented one to our two children after they married. I had five children, a son, Raymond, and four daughters, Joyce, Therese, Ann and Rosemary. Our oldest daughter, Joyce, passed away at the age of 15 from diabetes. My strong faith in the Lord helped me through this very painful time.

As times were tough back then, I began doing my own canning and sewing. Dresses were made out of old feed sacks and coats and jackets were made from new bed blankets. I sewed all of my children's clothing along with my own.

Living across the street from St. John's church made it easy for me to use my good singing voice at daily mass and funeral masses for many years. Laura Gloudemans would accompany me and occasionally my daughter Therese would sing with me. I enjoyed gardening with my husband. We also raised bees at my brother Cookie's farm and sold the honey we produced. I can recall the time I was stung by a bee up my nose. You should have seen me then!

After my children were old enough to be home alone, I returned to work at Gloudeman's Store. Many people can recall all of the sewing I did and my willingness to always help out wherever needed. George and I enjoyed

helping our children maintain their homes and spent special times with our grandchildren, occasionally babysitting them.

Later in life I did a lot of work for St. John's Mission Club like sewing, crocheting, and knitting. I was known as a person who could always make something out of nothing! I was also active in the St. Elizabeth Society, Golden Agers, and volunteered at Parkside Care Center. I spent many hours tending to the flowers in this cemetery too. I loved gardening!

I cared for my husband George at home after he suffered a severe stroke. After two years he was moved into Parkside Nursing Home where I visited him daily until he passed away in 1982, at the age of 78. We were blessed with 53 years of marriage. I enjoyed relatively good health in my later years, but joined George in heaven after an apparent heart attack in 1986. I was 79.

Thank you for coming to hear my story today!

Good Afternoon!

My name is George Eugene Biesterveld and I have been blessed with many talents. I was born on November 25, 1904, to John and Petronella Biesterveld in Dunnville, Wisconsin ~ near Eau Claire. I was the youngest of 16 children! When I was only two years old my mother passed away from a horse and cart accident, and I moved to Appleton with my dad and a few of my brothers. In 1909 I moved back to Dunnville with my father. But we eventually moved back to Little Chute where my father bought a home at 408 Pine Street and I continued to live there into my married life. We then moved next door and my son raised his family in our first home. Both houses still stand today.

I was stricken with polio as a youngster which left me somewhat crippled causing me to walk with a limp. Because of my disability I was only able to work odd jobs that came along. As a young man, I did odd jobs with a neighbor including some construction work. His name was "Peerenboom".

On September 5, 1927, I married the love of my life, Alegonda Vande Leygraaf. We had five children, four daughters... Joyce, Therese, Ann and Rosemary and one son...Raymond.

As a young carpenter, I did a lot of cabinet making and creative woodworking. My wife, Alegonda, and I raised bees on my brother-in-laws farm, and processed honey to sell. We also maintained a large garden on that farm to grow food for my family – my favorite was a bed of cantaloupe! My wife and I, along with our children, also enjoyed weaving rag rugs, which brought in a little extra money for the family.

I eventually landed a full time position as the janitor or “custodian” for St. John’s parish, which included working at the church, schools, and cemetery. Cleaning and maintaining both buildings was a huge job. In the summer months my children helped. There were many rows of desks to be moved in order to scrub and refinish the floors. Other work included fixing desks, cleaning bathrooms and painting projects.

The church was another part of my job; it needed to be kept clean and maintained too. The fun part for our children was ringing the Angelus bells at 6:00 a.m., 12 noon, and 6:00 p.m. The bells were rung by pulling on a huge rope that went from the church entrance high up into the steeple. My children would hang onto the rope and ride on it up to the balcony and then back down. The bells also had to be tolled manually for masses and funerals. The earliest ringing of the bells for Sunday worship was 5:00 in the morning, and if it snowed the sidewalks had to be shoveled before that!

Each summer, parishioners celebrated Corpus Christi with a parade. Six large wooden altars were placed on corners throughout the town. The parade would stop at each altar as we celebrated Benediction. As custodian, my job included maintaining and setting up the altars. My grandchildren decorated the altars with fresh flowers.

The cemetery upkeep was another part of my job. Lawn had to be cut, bushes trimmed, and graves dug and then refilled...all by hand!

Many in the community remember the excellent woodworking I did, but my family remembers me as a free spirit who would do anything for anybody at any time.

I enjoyed my bees and gardening, and continued helping my children and visiting my grandchildren, until I suffered a stroke, which partially paralyzed me. My wife and children cared for me at home, but eventually I moved to Parkside Care Center. I passed away in 1982 at the age of 78.

Thank you for coming today and sharing my story!

Little Chute Historical Society Cemetery Walk 2012

Alegonda 3rd from left in white dress.







