



## Elisabeth Thomi

Born: April 3, 1922, Bern, Switzerland

Died: -May 29, 2007, Salmon Arm, BC

Elisabeth came to Canada in 1955 and worked for John Federer, an orchardist, who lived on North Broadview. Federer, who was also a Swiss, bequeathed the land to Elisabeth upon his death and she continued to operate the almost 35 acres for fruit, hay and honey production.

Salmon Arm resident Dorothy Hannebauer went to work for Elisabeth in 1974 thinning and picking apples and picking cherries. Over the years the two women became friends and Dorothy continued to work for and with Elisabeth every summer for the next 17 years. Dorothy has great admiration for Elisabeth who "worked from dawn to dusk." Dorothy says her late husband, Wally, remarked that Elisabeth did the work of two men.

She was also a great animal lover, recalls Dorothy, who counted 13 cats and four dogs when she first came to the orchard. In her later years, Elisabeth donated a regular sum to the local SPCA and, upon her death, the SPCA took the last three cats and a special dog called Buddy. Buddy had survived an earlier nasty encounter with a coyote and Dorothy says she was pleased when a retired couple adopted the animal. Elisabeth's house dog, Missy, died a few days after her owner and Dorothy believes the animal "died of a broken heart."

Elisabeth never married and was a private person although she did keep in regular contact with family back home in Bern and was visited a few times by her sister and various nieces. Once a month Elisabeth would telephone her family and remarked to Dorothy that while it cost her some \$30 or \$40 "it was worth it."

She also enjoyed young Swiss visitors who came to the orchard on a working holiday. The young people resided in a three-sided screened shed with bunk beds, a magnificent view of the Shuswap and breakfast always ready for them at Elisabeth's house.

Elisabeth never did return to Switzerland although in 1991 the Hannebauers offered to look after her land and animals if she wished to take a trip back to Bern. Elisabeth thought the offer over for a week and decided not to go. Dorothy says when she was cleaning out the house and trunks after Elisabeth's death realized she had only ever travelled by steamship and train and had never flown. "It may have been the reason," Dorothy wondered.

The Shuswap Community Foundation received a gift of some \$929,000 from the Thomi estate. The money, which represented 2/3 of the estate, will be invested by the Foundation and the annual income to be paid to the Shuswap Branch of the SPCA. Thanks to the generosity of Elisabeth Thomi, the Foundation has reached \$3 million in assets. The remaining 1/3 of the estate will be paid to the BC Children's Hospital Foundation.

Notes by: Marg Shand and Dorothy Hannebauer, winter 2008.