

Merton Palmer

-written by Renee Hester

By his own admission Merton Palmer is a man who jumps on bandwagons. He is passionate in his causes and more than capable of passing on his passion to his listeners.

Merton lives across from Eagle Bay Church. I first spoke to him when he popped over to the church for a friendly chat. I learned about his "bandwagons" and how comfortable Merton is jumping on the physical fitness bandwagon, for a brisk walk to White Lake and return is this gentleman's idea of a morning constitutional. On keeping fit, he practices what he preaches! On saving the environment, he is equally dedicated.

Merton is first and foremost an educator. He first honed his teaching skills at a school in Blue River in the late 1950's. Because we lived in Blue River only a few years before this, we were able to spend a few nostalgic moments speaking of this unique community. Merton told me this was where he learned the art of teaching, the skill of organizing more than one grade in a classroom and the type of discipline and mutual respect needed to be an effective teacher with an eager group of learners. He told me of one of his heroes, Bob Petch, a family man who lived in Blue River who gently inspired all who knew him.

Merton taught in many other places after Blue River and continued to educate and be educated. A degree in education was a must and a place to relax after a busy year of teaching and learning was another must. His home in Eagle Bay became his retreat. In Eagle Bay, he met another hero, Herb Ashley, an artist who lived near the top of Ivy Road. Here was another man who passed on his wisdom gently.

It is easy to see why the "education bandwagon" is the one Merton has jumped on with the most enthusiasm, the most dedication and with the most commitment. As well as the pure education field, this gentleman became interested in the theatre. While studying theatre in London, he met someone who was a speech therapist and inquired about courses in this field. With dedication and hard work, he obtained a degree in speech therapy. This served him and Canada well, for he became a traveling expert in the field in all the western provinces of our great land.

I can't remember how many times Merton told me he retired, only to come back to his passion, the education bandwagon. At one point, he substituted for someone on a leave of absence and became challenged by an interest in educational psychology. Soon this added another degree to his resume.

Merton was employed by the Grand Council and became an educator in the band system. It is here where his passion really comes to the fore. It is here where he "sees the need" and it is here where he tells you of jumping with all he has on the "literacy bandwagon". He speaks with passion and sadness of the miserable stats on illiteracy in this country, supposedly the best in the world. He tells you that the rate of non-readers in the north is abysmally high but it is high elsewhere as well. He tells you it is not only in the native Indian population but in every ethnic group. He questions what needs to be done with intensive literacy projects and what needs to be done to get children literate by grade three, since reading is seldom taught past this level. He speaks with passion of rescuing the illiterate in our population. He speaks of an eclectic approach to literacy, to phonics and to the semantics developed with reading.

Merton Palmer travels widely through the north sharing his skills in educational speech therapy and educational psychology. He is currently teaching summer school and will take a leave of absence from his travels and his work with the Grand Council to teach at the University of Regina in the fall of 2000.

Merton Palmer

-written by Renee Hester

I cannot begin to understand all this man has to offer to those seeking literacy. I hear his plea for teenagers regarded as castoffs and I am overwhelmed.

Merton's first hero is Abraham Lincoln. This I can understand. Lincoln removed people from slavery and freed them to be educated and reach their potential. In many ways, Merton Palmer is following in his footsteps or riding on his bandwagon!