

The Rose We Knew

Written by Olga L. Figueroa, BT Contributor
July 2017

Neighbors remember a woman many considered family



Rose Dougherty's memories were found in the dirt two months ago. More than 13 years after her death, her photo albums, moldy and damaged by humidity and rain, were found in the front yard of her white bungalow on NE 114th Street in Biscayne Park. The home sat unoccupied until a few months ago.

The albums, left behind after her death, were put aside by contractors cleaning out the house, but a bulldozer removing yard debris weeks later scattered the albums in the muddy front yard, where they were recovered by neighbors.

The photos, dating back to the 1940s, portrayed a beautiful woman sporting tailored jackets, pencil skirts, cropped pants, and stylish swimwear.

Born Rose Gerome in Akron, Ohio, Rose wanted to see the world, so she became a travel agent and did just that.

"Nice Italian girls didn't do that in those days," Rose once said to me. "When I told my father what I wanted to do, he called me a *puttana*."

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In the wet, moldy albums were pictures of Paris, Mexico, and San Diego, pictures taken aboard cruise ships, atop mountains, and on Biscayne Bay.



It was in Miami that Rose met and married Patrick J. Dougherty, in the early 1950s. “He was so handsome,” she’d tell me decades later. “We didn’t have too many years, but we had a lot of fun.”

The couple had two children, a son who passed away in 2007, and a daughter who lived a thousand miles away and visited her a couple of times a year.

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Rose was a longtime parishioner at St. Rose of Lima Catholic Church. But when she'd say, "This is my church," she wasn't standing in front of the Miami Shores parish or sitting in the pews, but beneath the tree canopy in her backyard.

The 817-square-foot bungalow was the home she shared with her beloved Patrick, and where she raised their kids and resided until her death. The overgrown canopy was a place of joy and inner peace for her, whether she was picking wild cherries from the hedges Patrick planted decades earlier or sorting avocados from her trees.

Sometimes she'd sing opera while gardening, even in the rain. To say Rose was eccentric would be an understatement, just as it would be to say she was thoughtful and loving.

"I remember sitting around with her under the mango and avocado trees," recalls Heather Vanheveln, who grew up two doors down. "There would be four kids tumbling and swinging on her hammock. She'd bring us marshmallows and drinks in brass goblets. She was like a neighborhood grandma -- she'd watch us swinging from the trees in the median and just keep a watchful eye, but never yell. She let us be kids, and we let Rose be Rose."

Vanheveln's sister, Elizabeth Prince, remembers Rose making her fresh-squeezed juice after she helped her pull weeds from her yard.

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