

Over the Back Fence  
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Approx 620 words

Protected information  
By Alva Wood

Minister Sid Carter has been finding time hanging a little heavy on her hands. It's only a half-time position to start with, and because that time is split between the Anglican and United Churches, she has two sets of church meetings to attend, which doesn't leave a lot of time for pastoral work.

But there's hasn't been much anyway. No one has joined the church. "Just as well," she tells Terry Brown while they were having supper one night, "because then they don't have to decide which church they're not going to attend on Sunday morning."

"Or pay for," says Terry.

But there haven't been any baptisms. Or weddings. And only a couple of funerals, even including the memorial service for Nellie Rinehart's dog Susanna.

"I need something to do," Sid says. "Something that makes me useful to the community."

"The school district is looking for someone to drive the school bus," suggests Terry.

"Hey," says Sid, "that's an idea! If I can get a motorcycle licence, I can probably get a bus licence."

She goes down to River City to see the superintendent of the school district, a guy who was christened Belvedere Kerve.

"Mr. Kerve," she says, holding out her hand.

"Bel," he corrects her.

"Thanks, Bill," she says.

"No, BEL," he corrects her.

She thinks this is not a good way to start a job interview. But she plugs on. And to her surprise, she gets the job.

Subject to a few provisions.

Like a police records check. "You're working with children, so we need a Level Two check," says Bel Kerve.

"That's no problem," Sid assures him. "I got one when I went to Schist Creek as minister a couple of years ago. They're good for six years, I believe. I'll get hold of it and send it along."

Easier said than done, Sid discovers.

She calls the Anglican bishop in River City. "Sure," he says. "I'll have my secretary send a copy over to the school district."

Then she gets a call back from the bishop's secretary. "We don't have it," she says. "I think the bishop forgot that you were appointed by the United Church. He's not a detail person, you know."

Sid knew. She had been to a couple of Anglican clergy retreats. The bishop tended to wander around in a well-meaning haze.

She called the United Church offices in Vancouver. "Yes," they said efficiently, "certainly, we have your personnel file. The documents in question will be in there."

"Good," Sid says, "Could you send a copy to--"

She gets interrupted. "We can't do that," she's told. "That's contrary to privacy regulations."

"That's up to me, not you," Sid protests.

"Sorry," comes the reply. "It's federal law, the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act, Bill C-6, April 2000."

"It's my information, isn't it?" Sid demands. "I can release it to anyone I choose!"

"I'm afraid not," the office says. "Once we've got it into our personnel files, it's considered confidential, privileged, and protected. We have a 23-page policy document setting out restrictions on the use and abuse of personal information."

"Summarize it for me," Sid persists.

"No."

"Why not?"

“I just did,” comes the reply. “The rules boil down to one word. No.”

Sid still wants to know why.

The voice quotes some relevant passages of the regulations: “Personal information shall not be used or disclosed for the purposes other than those for which it was originally collected... The church is committed to the safeguarding of personal information of members, adherents, donors and employees in order to prevent its loss, theft, unauthorized access, disclosure, duplication, use, or modification...”

“Forget it,” says Sid. “I’ll get the police check done again. They’re easier to deal with.”