

My Heart Sank Into That Deep, Dark, Lonely Sea

Mary Elizabeth (Abplanalp) Anderegg – Her Story

Jackie Layne Partin

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Researched and Written by Jackie Layne Partin

It has been eighty-three years since I passed away in this new country, the United States of America; it never felt like home to me, so I never embraced this promised “New Switzerland.” My life on this earth spanned eighty-one years. Searching, searching, for someone to write my story, I found Jackie Layne Partin who was willing to take on the task. I found her from my own grave. She may stumble from time to time in trying to piece together my travels, my family and my antics, but I expect she will treat me fairly. My desire is that she write of me in “first person” as though she herself were holding my hand throughout my journeys on God’s precious Earth—supporting, encouraging, understanding, loving and even scolding me whenever necessary.

“The Sound of Music,” the movie that so many of you watch over and over, stretches the beauty and lifestyle of the von Trapp family a wee bit; for example, Maria von Trapp was not as beautiful as Julie Andrews. However, the one thing in the movie that is not exaggerated is the beauty of the Alps, especially our Swiss Alps. It was amongst those snowcapped mountains, green, fertile valleys and floral strewn meadows in Meiringen, Bern, Switzerland that I, Mary Elizabeth Abplanalp, was born on **November 24, 1845**. What a beautiful place to be born! My father, Andrew Abplanalp was around thirty-four when I was born, and my mother, Elizabeth, was a year younger. It wasn’t long until they began to call me Lizzie. They were good parents—tough, rugged, stern, frugal, and religious. Hard work was the order of the day for us and all our Swiss friends and neighbors. We raised sheep, goats and cattle, and just like Peter and Heidi in the movie, we took the sheep and goats into the high mountain pastures as soon as the melting snow exposed the green grasses. Heidi would have enjoyed playing with me when I was growing up. I loved the Swiss Alps every bit as much as she and Peter did.

In **1861**, when I was sixteen, I joined the Lutheran Church in our village. My siblings and I enjoyed learning about God and salvation by grace through the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ. I was a little older than my sister, Magdalina, or “Mattie,” as we often called her. Magdalina was born in December of **1850**. Two years later, my mother gave birth to my sister Margret, and then two years later in **1855**, my little brother, Andrew, Jr. was born. Our

spring, summer and fall were completely spent in making preparations for our cold, cold winters. We prepared not only for our own welfare, but also for that of our animals, and if one did not make these preparations, he or she did not make it through the winter. We all worked from the time we were big enough to herd sheep and goats, spin flax and wool, plant gardens and milk cows. Everything my family possessed came directly, or indirectly, from the land; therefore, we developed an attachment to the soil, the fields, pastures, the flowers and the Alps—more than an attachment, an abiding love for it. Of course, there was time off from our labors for a little play with all our friends and a little schooling on the side.

During the 1860's on our continent of Europe, families experienced difficult economic times and had long been looking west. We read about a great civil war between the different states going on in the United States of America. Of course, it was heartening to hear that by the summer of **1865**, the killing and bloodshed had ended. After the close of that war, more and more posters appeared around Switzerland about wonderful mountain land for sale in the state of Tennessee. My parents talked about going to America some day, and meanwhile I had fallen in love with a wonderful fellow named John Anderegg who was twenty-three-years old having been born **May 27, 1844**. He was definitely set on going to this United States and filled my head with dreams of a new country that had mountains like my own beloved Alps. Already several Anderegg families were living in Iowa and Ohio, so John would feel right at home amongst them and the many Swiss families that had already migrated west. His father had already passed away, and his fifty-year-old mother, Catherine, and his twenty-year-old brother, Andrew, wanted to leave the old country for what they believed would be a new beginning with more financial security. Switzerland was a small country in the middle of a depression, but the United States was vast and filled with potential.

John and I got married on **October 22, 1868** in a lovely church building in our village. I was seven months pregnant with our first child, Andrew Lorn Anderegg, who was born on **December 26, 1868**. He was almost a Christmas baby. In Switzerland, one pregnancy out of wedlock was not treated so harshly, but a second one would have brought the whole village and God down on me. John insisted that we make the move to the new country as soon as we could possibly arrange it. The posters and promises of better opportunities in a beautiful land beyond the sea were so enticing to him and his family. Our own government appeared to be pushing us out into the wide, wide world. They told us that our land was overly populated and that the economy was laboring under the load. They worked hard to set up "New Switzerlands" over in the United States. I loved Old Switzerland; I loved the Alps; I wanted to stay in my home country, but it wasn't to be.



Church in Meiringen, Switzerland where John Anderegg and Mary Elizabeth Abplanalp married

On **March 25, 1869**, John, baby Andrew Lorn, who was three months old, and I embarked on our voyage to the United States of America. Even with my mother-in-law Catherine and a brother-in-law Andrew encouraging me along the way, I still was numb with fear of what lay ahead, and I yearned for those left behind. Our voyage on the S. S. William Penn departed London, England and Le Havre, France. As the ship drifted out to sea, I looked back to land and watched twenty-four years of my life fade away over the horizon. I immediately became homesick, a sickness that nothing, no medicine, no words, no prayer can make disappear, but maybe, just maybe, I could come back some day. My parents had promised that they too would follow within a year once their farm was sold and everything set in motion. Turning my face toward the new country and the life that lay in front of me, I mustered new strength. With my son held tightly to my breast and acknowledging my love for John and my desire to be with him, I reasoned that I could surely make a happy life for us all. I came from strong blood; I knew how to dig the soil, raise the food and fend off the cold.

Before our ship came within sight of the new country that was to excite me and raise my enthusiasm about the move, we lost our little son. "Dear God, I'm a believer; I'm one of Yours! Why did this happen to our baby—to me, to John? Aren't mothers supposed to die before their children? I wished I had stayed in Switzerland; maybe my child would have been with me still. Burial at sea! That happens to soldiers, warriors—not little babies! From the time his

little body was slipped into the vast ocean before me, I was never the same. That day, part of my heart sank into that deep, dark, lonely sea. Did John feel the hurt, sadness, anger, depression, and utter loneliness that I was feeling? His mother tried to comfort me, but there were no right words. I wanted the embraces of my own Abplanalp family; I needed their comforting words; I needed my son back.

On **April 02, 1869**, the S. S. William Penn slipped into the wharf in New York, New York to let us off the ship – to dump us on this new land that in certain areas was to remind me of my Alps. I couldn't smile; I'm not sure that I ever smiled again. I do know that I slowly became a controlling and somewhat unbearable person at times. We made our way to a Swiss community in Ohio, which was what usually happened with different nationalities, especially, if we could not speak English. We found our own kind, and once settled in, we immigrants set about preparing for the day we would obtain our citizenship papers for which learning the English language was a prerequisite. John and I nested for at least a couple of years.

By June of **1870**, I was pregnant again. The baby would be born sometime in February of 1871. Good news from Switzerland renewed my spirits when my parents and siblings wrote to say that they were still planning on being in the U. S. A. within the year. I could hardly wait to see them again. Finally in **December of 1870**, my beloved family arrived after crossing the Atlantic on the S. S. Minnesota. Some of the loneliness that had so long filled my heart was taken away when I could once again hold my father, mother and siblings in my arms. My father Andrew, Sr., (we always called him Andreas in the old country), my mother Elizabeth, my sisters Magdalena (sweet Mattie) and Margret, and my little brother Andrew, Jr., who was now fifteen—they all came. On **February 14, 1871**, St. Valentine's Day, our son John Anderegg, Jr. was born. John, Sr. was so proud of him, and being able to hold a child in my arms once again, helped with some of my pain of losing little Andrew Lorn, but any mother will acknowledge that a lost child can never be replaced by another.

We knew of a Swiss Colony taking form in Grundy County, Tennessee, so the decision to go down south was made. We would still be near German speaking people although not right in the midst of the colony itself. Some of those colonists were our friends from Meiringen, Bern. So the Abplanalps and Andereggs prepared for what was hoped to be the final leg of a long journey. Like thousands before me, I was nervous, but a small town called Tracy City was in the planning, so opportunities might be available there for new immigrants. We had read about the coalmines, the railroads, the university in Sewanee, the great farming opportunities and the likeness to our own Alps.

Once John, John, Jr. and I reached Grundy County, Tennessee, we made the decision to live in the small village of Tracy City. I didn't even see it as a town in **1872** when we arrived on the scene. The roads had not yet been laid out in the form of blocks, but it was obvious that some day there would of necessity be a well-planned little town in that area. There were only shacks, a few nicer cabins or houses, a couple of churches, being the Catholic and the Methodist Episcopal—I missed my Lutheran affiliation—and several, little, quickly- thrown-together stores and hotels where the miners and immigrants could get supplies and accommodations. There were lots and lots of doings over coal, making the town about the color of scattered soot. Of course, the railroad, the link with the outside world, had been around about fourteen years, and things were starting to look up for the area, at least economically. It was a dirty little town—not neat and tidy like our villages and mountains back in Switzerland. I could have taken the words uttered ten years before by Mrs. Margaret Reid, right from her mouth and asked, “Oh, John, where have you brought me?” There was a lot to be desired where local scenery was concerned. If one could walk a few miles from the railroad, he could find natural beauty in the land, but not in this gray little village. Our son John, Jr. kept me busy. I set about nesting again, for I was pregnant with our third child, and the need for secure shelter and settlement was growing ever so obvious. On **April 02, 1873**, our first daughter Elizabeth was born. Life was different with a little girl in the house. Just like my parents had done for me, we nicknamed her Lizzie.

I was a seamstress; I could sew by hand as well as machine, so when we finally got our own home, I carefully chose the perfect window in my dining room under which I placed my machine. In the wintertime when the leaves were gone, I could see small hills that I fantasized as being the Swiss Alps. Often I sat and sewed with tears streaming down my face, longing for the old country. I missed the snow-covered mountains, the beautiful lupine covered meadows and the snowflake-like edelweiss that grew in the rock crevices. Even though I loved flowers and planted every kind I could find in my yard and garden, their beauty could not soften my heart toward this place. Tracy City was nothing like my former home. From time to time, I met women who had migrated to this area all in the name of coal and money, and they, too, missed the church spires, the busy shops and the great schools of their former homes. But like me, they kept having babies, working hard and strained from day to day to learn to love this place. And speaking of having babies, John and I really did have our hands full when on **April 06, 1876**, I gave birth to twins. My sister, Magdalina in Nashville had, just a couple years before, given birth to twins. This was getting to be a scary situation. Our little girl was named Katie Katherine—people had never heard such a name.



Mary Elizabeth (Abplanalp) Anderegg on the porch of her home in Tracy City, Tennessee

“Wasn’t Katie short for Katherine?” they’d ask. We liked our name choice for her. Of course, she, like most folks’ children, was named after relatives. Her little twin brother was named Andrew, but we called him Andy. I know what you are thinking. I had already named a son Andrew, the one lost at sea; why would I do something so strange? Andrew, or Andreas, was a popular Swiss named, and my thoughts never left my dead son, so I showed my love for him and our new baby boy by using the same name.

Maybe I should have given our new son his own special name and not that of his dead brother. On **November 16, 1876**, when our son, Andy, was not quite seven months old, he died from what appeared to be a sting or spider bite. Oh, Father in Heaven! What have I done wrong? Am I being punished for nagging John about wanting to go back to Switzerland? Have I become so negative and unhappy that the deaths of my children have become fuel for my unhappiness? How could I now bury another one of my children—another Andrew, little Andy?

The City Cemetery entrance was on the main dirt, wagon road that followed the railroad to Sewanee, a struggling, university town, on the west end of the plateau. The railroad separated the road from the gate to the cemetery. We climbed the hill and chose our little plot for Andrew's burial in an area where already Swiss names could be seen on stones. Later a stone was erected with his name, birth and death at the bottom. I wanted a memorial for our son lost at sea, so I asked that his name, birth and death dates be placed at the top of little Andy's stone whenever we got one. There was confusion years later when the actual stone was set, and my first little Andrew's death date was engraved wrongly, but most of my family knew the correct information, so it was never changed.

There was not much time to linger on my sadness with the house filling up with little Andereggs. On **October 05, 1878**, our son Henry was born. John, Jr. was seven; Lizzie was five; Katie was two and with little Henry's arrival, I was beginning to feel like the "little old lady who lived in the shoe!"

Folks were moving into Tracy City every day to work the coalmines and the railroad. Houses, nice houses, were being built as fast as the wood could be sawed. John was a butcher; the Anderegg family was known for its meat markets. An active coalmine town was just as much in need of men with special trades as it was for men to go beneath the ground and bring out the coal. Eventually, we set up a profitable meat market over in the area that became known later as Smoky Row. Some of the original Swiss colonists, who came to Grundy County in 1869, were already moving over into Tracy City; there was one area called Dutchtown—they were not Dutch, but they all spoke German. They were not happy with the land that had been promised them out in the colony. They had dreams of mountains like our Swiss Alps, but some were greatly disappointed when they saw what was sold to them. Being the strong, determined folks that the Swiss are, they swallowed the lump of disappointment and went to work to make the best of the situation. I really think my lump was too large to swallow; I could never wash it down, no matter how hard I tried.

The Swiss immigrants really made a difference in this small town. Swiss families came from Iowa, Ohio, New York and other cities to be a part of this new coal town. Some of them were lost to the valleys below, and some even moved away to the large cities. So much talent was lost, but those who remained and toughed out the hard times, left their mark in the best kind of ways.

Mother, Father and my brother Andrew, had moved onto a piece of land between Beersheba and Altamont that is now on Besstown Road, but back then, it was in a lonely, very

lonely neck of the woods, and there was no Besstown Road. That suited my Abplanalp family, for they could not speak English, but they knew how to survive and live off the land; there was very little need for them to “go to town” in Altamont. Besides, if they became so lonely for someone to talk with in their own language, the Greeters were not too far away, and of course, the Swiss Colony was being formed over in the area that they chose to call Gruetli. My parents didn’t buy one of the lots that Mr. Staub had sold in that area. The local people called Mother, Father and Andrew the “Nappies,” not out of unkindness, but because they found the name “Abplanalp” hard to remember and pronounce. It was just easier to use the nickname.

They set about planting fruit trees, fixing up a house to call home, and digging in for the duration. By this time my parents were in their sixties, and Andrew was still a teenager. He learned to speak English quickly and was a strong farmhand around the place. While they settled in at Altamont, John and I were busy having babies and getting our business up and running. Butchering was hard work. We had to immediately hit the roads and byways with our freshly butchered animal that was killed the day before a good market day. It was not unusual for us to package our kill and ride off through town on an old mare with fresh meat thrown across her behind. What with caring for all the little ones, helping in the butcher shop, sewing and housekeeping, I didn’t get to see my parents as often as I wished. They were loners and weren’t so inclined to come to Tracy City often.

It was a sad day out in Altamont in those deep, lonely woods when my mother Elizabeth Abplanalp passed away. Often I was sent for when sickness was upon a house. Even though I had become a sad person myself, nothing could make me happier than helping a neighbor or friend in need, but I couldn’t save my mother—she was gone. I believe she was in the same situation as I was in this new land. Maybe she just didn’t want to linger in those woods away from her precious Switzerland. There was a narrow road that split the farm they had tried to cultivate. It was alongside this road that Mother was buried. She didn’t live but a few years in her home away from home. Since, after her death, life was so lonely and sad, by **1880**, Father and Andrew had moved down to Nashville. Father had moved into the house with my sister Magdalina (Abplanalp) Kennedy and her growing family. She had married about three years after our coming to America and gave birth first to a set of twins, Charles and Caroline, or “Lena,” as we called her. Her husband died, and soon she married John R. Kennedy and had two more daughters, Charlotte and Ina. In March 1880, she had a son, Allan. My brother Andrew found work as a laborer on the farm of John Mathew who had also been born in Switzerland. There were several farm hands from the old country with whom he could

exchange stories. I personally was happy for him to have this opportunity. He must have been so lonely in those woods in Altamont.

On **October 15, 1881**, our little Albert was born, and three years later on **May 15, 1884**, our last child Frank was added to the family. I was nearing the age of forty. The toll of birthing and the dying of loved ones were showing up in my appearance. John always looked so gentlemanly in his business suits and perfect barbershop haircuts, but my appearance could not keep up with his. I looked so much older, but my personal appearance wasn't so important to me. Some thought that I just didn't try to be clean and "spruced up," but I always thought of myself as being neat and a good housekeeper—well, as good as one could be with the house full of children and a man who often acted like a child. John loved to hunt coon, minks and even skunks for their hides or just for plain fun. He once had a dead skunk in a bag and brought it into the house. He lifted it out of the bag and then threw the bag into the fire. Of course, I went all to pieces with disgust and anger—what woman wouldn't have lost her cool? It was the most sickening smell my house had ever had. I loved my home and worked hard to keep it clean, but sometimes it was a losing battle.



John Anderegg
(1844-1914)



Mary Elizabeth (Abplanalp) Anderegg
(1845-1926)

“In **1886** the Tennessee Coal and Iron acquired the Pratt Coal and Iron Company with considerable holdings in Alabama.” John kept up with what was going on in the coal companies. He always felt that he could better himself by working for the Company in some manner. As our sons grew older, they helped John and me with the gardening and work in the butcher shop. Katie and Lizzie were a lot of help around the house. They were good, strong children, each with his or her own talent. Once the boys helped me dig a beautiful potato harvest from our garden and bag them for storage in our cellar. I always taught them to handle the potatoes carefully, for our survival of the winters hinged on the proper preservation of the vegetables we grew. After we had done all the hard work, when John came home that afternoon, I asked him if he minded putting the potatoes under the house. He was being quite rough with them, so I reprimanded him about that. He became angry with me and proceeded to haphazardly throw the bags into the cellar crashing them upon each other taking the chance on bruising them. Our marriage was in trouble. The years had taken its toll on our relationship. It appeared that we were growing further and further apart.

Father died. Magdalena and John Kennedy brought his body back to the farm in Altamont and buried him parallel to the little road going to the old house. Just like the deep, dark sea several years before, the farm had become a place of gloom, doom and darkness for me. Again, I asked myself, what has this country done to me, my spirit, my youth? Or was I doing it to myself? When one loses his or her parents, it’s scary; it’s lonely; it’s a different feeling that I’m not sure how to describe. They were not buried side by side, but one after the other along the road leading to their home—well not really home, but their little part of “New Switzerland.” Old Switzerland was their home.

In **1892** when I finally became a naturalized citizen of the United States of America, I didn’t know how to feel. I could speak and read English; I was loved and respected by my neighbors; and we were reasonably successful in the meat market business, and in spite of all the mining problems, the little village of Tracy City had now become a town to be reckoned with. It was growing by leaps and bounds. Just as soon as I thought I might be getting closer to accepting my life here, something happened to bring tears to my eyes. I guess sadness was in every family, but at times, I felt like I had more than my fair share of it. On **August 06, 1893**, my brother Andrew died at the age of forty-two. Once again a trip was made to the old Abplanap burial plot in Altamont. Once again the family dug another grave alongside the little road—three graves, one after the other. This would be the last. Mother, Father and Andrew would soon be forgotten by the people in Altamont and by most of their relatives.



Magdalina and John Kennedy's descendants are to be thanked for this reminder that their ancestors lie quietly resting in Altamont. Even they were not sure of the spelling of the name "Abplanalp." The fence runs parallel to a quickly disappearing road on the farm. Herein lie Andrew Abplanalp, Sr., his wife, Elizabeth and their son Andrew, Jr.

Magdalina and John had moved their family from Nashville to Monteagle. John was a Scotsman who had immigrated to the U. S. A. in 1865. He worked as a stone setter, but in 1905, at the age of sixty, he died and was buried in the Monteagle Cemetery. In all, Magdalina



had given birth to nine children, the twins fathered by her first husband and seven fathered by John. The children became business people around the town. They operated the City Café at a time, worked in grocery and meat markets, worked in the ice plant; they were, like their Swiss ancestors, frugal and ambitious. It was nice to have Magdalina, "Mattie," and her children close to my children and me. I needed her companionship. Either of us could hop on the train and spend the day with each other; of course, both of us would be accompanied by children or grandchildren.

Magdalina (Abplanalp) Kennedy

By 1900, I found myself without a husband. No he had not died, but had decided some time ago, that he was going to move to Birmingham where he could make more money. He asked me to make the move with him, but I simply refused. If I were to ever make another move, it would be back to Switzerland, not to another strange, distant, dirty, coal town. Well, I knew John and I had drifted apart, so far apart that when the 1910 Census taker, William Nelson, asked me what my marital status was, I told him that I was a widow. Even though I knew John was living in Birmingham, he had been gone many years from my life. John had a twenty-two-year old housekeeper and her two children staying in the house with him when the Census taker asked him about his marital status. He did not list himself as a widower; maybe, he had not forgotten me.

My life became full of daughters-in-law, sons-in-laws and wonderful grandchildren. I always kept a bag of peppermint candy sticks close at hand when I knew they were coming to visit. Now, I will have to say that Alfred, Katie Katherine's son, was my favorite grandchild, but I would never want anyone to know that. Of course, he knew it. After I had handed out a peppermint stick to all the grandchildren, and they were not watching, I gave Alfred what was left. There was just something special about him although I loved them all. I understand that he laughed about me sneaking the extra candy to him. So he thought that was funny? That little stinker!

John, Jr. married Irene Henley; Elizabeth married Edward McBride; Katie Katherine married Joseph Jacob Stocker; Henry married Fannie Holloway; Albert married Agnes Reid, daughter of James Napier and Isabell (Patton) Reid of Tracy City, and Frank married Bertie Cunningham. What a big, wonderful family I had! John and I hadn't done so badly after all. They grew up to be hard workers and fine citizens. They did us proud!



Henry Anderegg



Katie Katherine Anderegg



John Anderegg, Jr.



Back: L to R: Joseph Jacob Stocker, Katie Katherine (Anderegg) Stocker holding son Joseph; Mary Elizabeth (Abplanalp) Anderegg; Elizabeth (Anderegg) McBride holding daughter Hazel; and Ed McBride; Front: L to R: John Anderegg, Jr.; Frank Anderegg, Albert Anderegg; Lewis McBride and Henry Anderegg (Photo taken ca. 1900 at Tracy City, TN)

Four years later, after I stated that I was a widow, I really was one. On **March 17, 1914**, John was murdered in Pratt City, Alabama. He was seventy-years-old and on the job when he was hit on the head with what was called a track-walker's wrench. He died the next day. He was robbed of so very little. Our family in Alabama buried him there instead of in the Tracy City Cemetery beside his son Andy. Again, I cannot explain what my feelings were. He was my only husband, the father of our children, and yet, we lived and drifted so far apart that it felt sometimes as though we did not even know each other. But I had no other love, my heart still belonged to John. I wanted to remember him as the young man in Switzerland who had stolen my heart forty-six years ago.

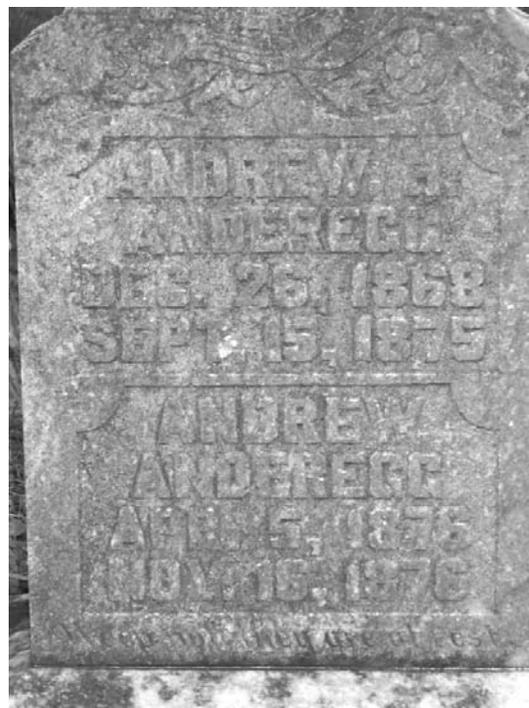
Some of my family grew tired of my tales of the old country. Over and over again, I spoke of its beauty, of my childhood there, of family members left behind. Had my family listened to my stories and dreamed my dreams with me, they would not have been trying to find their origin; they would know. I had boxes of photographs of loved ones and friends from back home and in Swiss colonies in the States, but my family was not interested; now they gaze at the faces in the pictures and wonder who they are, knowing full well that they were important people in my life. Maybe I loved Switzerland more than John; maybe that is why we drifted apart; maybe I had my priorities all confused, but till the day I died, I wanted more than anything to see my Alps, just one more time.

My children were good to me. I eventually moved down to Whitwell, Tennessee where our son Henry was living with a family of his own. He and his family were kind to me. It was there that I took my last breath on **April 03, 1926**, but not before I let it be known where my body was to be buried. My stone stands to the left of our son Andy's that is also a memorial stone for our son Andrew. I was planted right where I should be – if I had to be buried in this country – beside my little one and the memorial of the other.

It was a visit to my parents' and brother's graves on Thursday, October 29, 2009, in Altamont that peaked Jackie Layne Partin's interest in my family. Pulling her deeper into my life was her visit to the Tracy City Cemetery the next day. She stood staring at the stone whereon I had listed two sons with the same name, but different birth and death dates; then she looked to the left and lingered at my stone and could not understand why John was not beside me. It bothered her; it also bothered me.



Mary Elizabeth (Abplanalp) Anderegg



A Stone for Andrew and Andy Anderegg

NOTE: I hope Mary Elizabeth would have thought that I represented her fairly and as accurately as possible. Corrections or additions would be appreciated. You may contact me at jackiepartin@blomand.net .