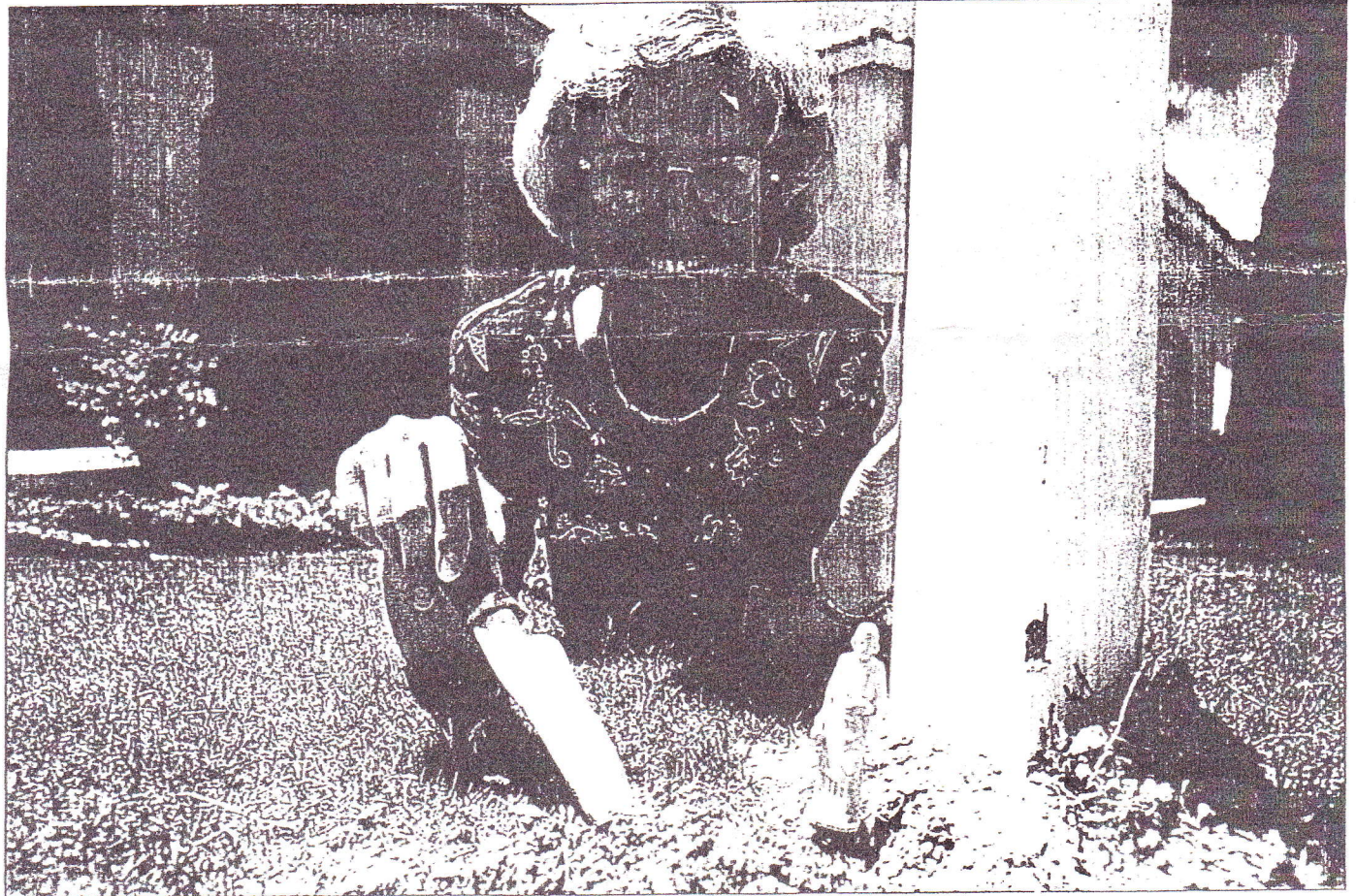
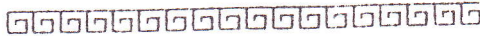


Jessy M **B**
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St. Joseph at the ready, real-estate agent Judy Nelson prepares to make another sale. Nelson insists that the practice gets results.

Bury a saint to sell a house?

Desperate owners, agents leave no stone unturned

By Linda Helser
 The Arizona Republic

Four months had gone by and not one bite. Norma Deckley's four-bedroom home in west Phoenix wouldn't sell.

Desperate because she'd already purchased a new home and was making double payments, Deckley was open to any suggestion.

So when several Catholic friends told her

to bury a religious statue of St. Joseph upside down in her yard, she didn't even flinch.

"I thought it was baloney, but my husband buried it on a Thursday and we sold the house that weekend."

Suddenly, Deckley the Baptist was a believer in the power of St. Joseph, the patron saint of home and family.

Judy Nelson, the multimillion-dollar real estate agent, is another convert.

"I got turned on to this several years ago by a client whose home we couldn't seem to sell," she said. "So she went and bought four St. Joseph statues and had them blessed by a priest."

After the statues were buried, the home sold immediately.

Nelson, struck by the concept of such divine intervention, dug up the statues and has used them successfully for the past decade, through both good and bad real estate markets.

See **BURIED**, page B2

Buried St. Josephs said to sell houses

— BURIED, from page B1

"I took four new listings over the Memorial Day holiday weekend, and they all sold by last Friday, and they all had a St. Joseph buried in the yard," said the West USA Realty agent.

Nelson said she always buries the statues upside down, facing away from the house and toward the road.

"Sometimes I tell the client about it if they have a sense of humor and then we have a little ceremony," she said. "But other times I just bury him quietly by myself."

There's nothing flippant, however, about Nelson's reverence for St. Joseph. "I'm sure they work because they've been blessed. I've even lent them to other realtors, and they've worked for them, too."

But real-estate agents aren't the only ones snapping up the saint.

"I did it because I felt it couldn't hurt," said Linda Elias of Glendale, who takes the power of faith very seriously. "If nothing else, it was a good opportunity for my family to come together and pray as we buried him in the yard. Praying together as a family is something I can really believe in."

It also seemed to work, almost immediately.

"We were anticipating that it would take much longer, like six months, to sell," she said. "So we passed it on to someone else and they also sold."

Passing along a victorious St. Joseph has become customary, according to Elias. But buying new ones is becoming more common.

"He's my single bestselling item, over even Bibles and rosaries," said Anne Lunsford, owner of Treasures of Faith, a Catholic religious-goods shop near Tatum Boulevard and Thunderbird Road. "I've sold 200 in the last year, and we even have them in kits."

And denomination has nothing to do with it. "I had someone come in last week who said a rabbi had sent them," Lunsford said.

The kits, which sell for \$6.25 and include a prayer card and introduction to the use of the St. Joseph home-sale practice, were created by Jerry Micklewright, a certified public accountant in Cary, Ill.

"It was back in 1980 or 1981, and I was trying to sell this monstrosity of a house," Micklewright said. "I'd already bought something smaller, but I had five kids and I was going broke waiting to sell my big house."

He said he then recalled something his father had told him years earlier.

"Dad said if you ever get in trouble trying to sell your house, that you should say a prayer and bury St. Joseph."

So Micklewright, a practicing Catholic, ran straight to his Nativity set and grabbed Joseph, burying him in the yard.

The next day, he sold his home for the asking price, although it took a week to work out the financing.

Remembering the experience, Micklewright created his St. Joseph home-sale kit in 1994, making 8,000 his first year. Last year, he sold 47,000 and this year he expects to hit 75,000.

Micklewright says St. Joseph has always been near and dear to his heart. He believes the saint "has a direct road to Christ, so you can ask his help on anything having to do with the home and family."

Manuel Corrales, an agent with West USA Realty, is inclined to rely on a bullish market and salesmanship.

"If your house doesn't sell in this market, then you ought to bury your realtor upside down in the yard."