



AN ANTHOLOGY

The Older Adults in Our Lives

**OLDER
AMERICANS
MONTH**



MAKE YOUR MARK: MAY 2020

Published July 2020

**THEIR TIME,
EXPERIENCE,
AND TALENTS
BENEFIT FAMILY,
PEERS, AND
NEIGHBORS
EVERY DAY**

People across the aging network were asked to share how an older adult has impacted their life. These are their stories.



Momo Stella

BY MICHELLE COPE

My Grandmother was very influential in my life. Momo Stella as we called her was the most welcoming person I have ever known. We didn't live close, and as I was growing up we didn't get to see each other often. But when we did get together, she pulled out all the stops. "Let's bake a cake! I'm sure we missed someone's birthday!" There was a cookie jar full of cookies waiting for us when we arrived, and likely as not I would be asked to sit on the ice cream freezer while someone turned the handle before we left. She was a wonderful cook and always had her own garden. She gave us all her attention while we were there, and made us feel special. She taught this left-handed girl to crochet by sitting across from me so I could mirror her movements. She took me to church and shared how to love God and all people. Every day at work and at home, I try to use the characteristics she showed me through the example of how she lived her life. She wasn't glamorous or rich, but I hope to be just like her as I age! When she passed I was asked what of hers I wanted to keep. Her recipe boxes of course! So now I can actually taste memories of our precious time together.

Love her dearly!

Michelle Cope is the Outreach Library Associate at the Bloomington Public Library. "I love working with seniors to connect them with any resources they might need."



“If I had to be in a hospital dying today...”

BY TERRY GOODE

Years ago my husband was in the Air Force and I was a full-time mom to two young children. We returned from vacation and I learned that my friend, Ida, a single mom with a 16-year old son, was in the hospital terminally ill with cancer. Ida wasn't expected to live through the weekend, so I rushed to her bedside. But the doctors didn't know how much Ida loved her son, so she struggled and lived seven more weeks. Several of us from church took turns staying with her.

One day as I watched Ida, the nurse brought me a tray of food. I told her that Ida couldn't eat, and she replied that the tray was for me. The nurse said they always brought the loved one a meal on the day a patient was dying. I was in my 20's and I'd never been with anyone when they died before. I felt panicky, but my first thought was that I needed to get her son there, so he could say good-bye to his mama. Incredulously, no one had called him, and I didn't have the high school's number. (This was before cell phones were invented.)

I tried calling my friend's Bishop, her attorney, and other friends. I got voice mail machines or busy signals. Then I called an older woman from church who also helped visit Ida. She was a strong and determined woman who had lost a sister and raised her nieces and nephews on top of her own children. I knew Phayla Tatum would know what to do. When she answered that phone, I shed tears of relief. Phayla listened and assured me that she would get everyone there. Then she said, “Now Terry, there's something you need to know. If I had to be in a hospital dying today, there's no one I would rather were sitting beside me holding my hand as I passed.” That touched my soul. I realized that I'd been so concerned with getting other people there, that I'd forgotten what a blessing it was to be able to enjoy a final quiet moment serving my friend. I took Ida's hand, stroked her arm, expressed my love and sang some songs she loved.

Phayla was true to her word and Ida's son, Bishop and attorney all showed up in time. Decades have passed and so has Phayla, but her lesson lives on in my heart. In the toughest moments, simply being there for someone else is often what's needed the most. And we can all do that, no matter our age.

*Terry Goode is the Development Director and Volunteer Manager at Family Service Senior Resource Center.
“I love helping people to give; it makes them happier and live longer and better!”*

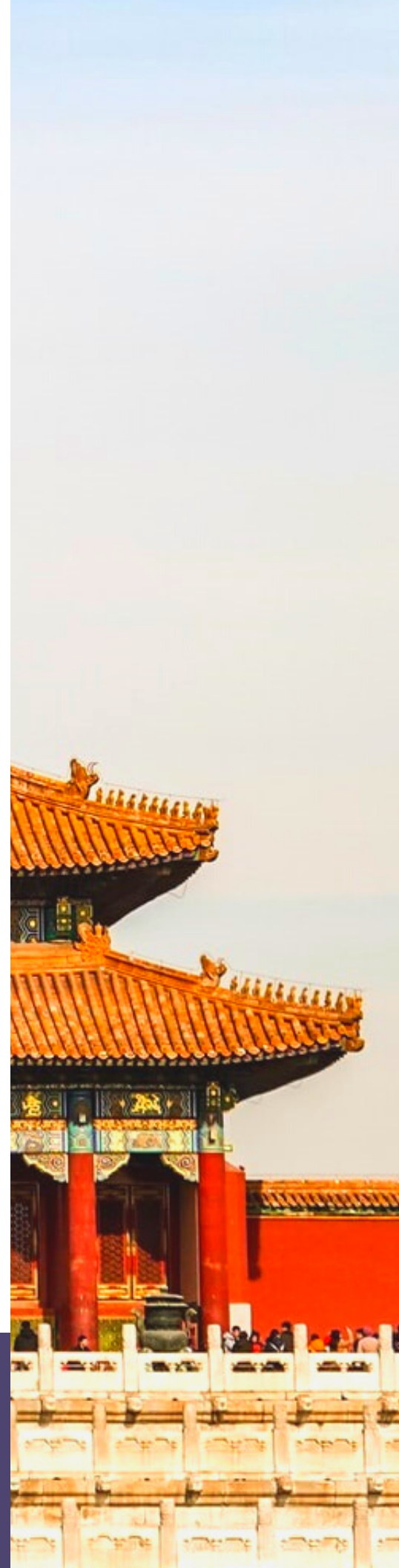
Perseverance or Just Luck

BY LAURA SERVERSON, M.A.

Ben was one of my best mentors of survival, naiveté, innocence and patience. He was only four-ish when his parents divorced. His amahs and other servants left the compound and his mother had custody. His father continued on with his UN work as an interpreter and his parents shared visitation. Upon one visitation, his father kidnapped him and left. His mother had no idea where they were and left for Shanghai for work. At this time Japan had just invaded China. Ben and his father were about to board a train to escape the Japanese occupancy, but were captured, arrested and placed in a concentration camp in northern China.

Meanwhile in Shanghai, Ben's mother was waitressing and heard that her son and ex-husband lost their lives in the train bombing. She never really believed the story, and after meeting a Missionary, Rev. A.B. Coole[l] and his wife who were on their way to Peking to do Mission work, she asked if they could keep a look out for a white Russian boy. The odds.

Ben and his father were prisoners of war for about 2 years. Ben's father was able to obtain food for the two of them with his interpreter skills. Ben's father was an alcoholic and once they were released from the prisoner camp, he could not take care of Ben. In his desperation, he left Ben with a church where monks took him in. Ben was now an orphan in Peking playing in the Forbidden Palace and running in the streets of Peking.



Rev. Coole was in the area at this time and was asking about a white Russian boy that could possibly be in an orphanage. He found him. Rev. Coole told Ben that he knew where his mother was and asked if he wanted to be with her or stay in Peking. Ben opted for the latter. Rev. Coole and Mrs. Coole were now Ben's guardians. Ben received his first suit, shoes, and a trip to the U.S.A. Ben's mother since then had met a U.S. sailor, married and was already in the states.

Ben's journey started in Peking, then to Shanghai, where he boarded a boat to the U.S. Two weeks later he was in Seattle. He then flew to Oakland, California and boarded a train that took him across the U.S. to St Louis, Missouri. There, he got off the train at 10 years of age, and saw his mother for the first time in 6 years.

Ben attended high school and graduated from college. He married, had 2 kids and had many hobbies. He passed away 7 years ago and leaves a wife of 50+ years. I don't know if he was just lucky, or had a super guardian angel, regardless, he had a life that many of us could not imagine in today's world. If he was alive today, his story could start with, "COVID-19? Phewt, that's nothing. When I was young..."

Benedict Walther Munsell,
1938-2013, my father.

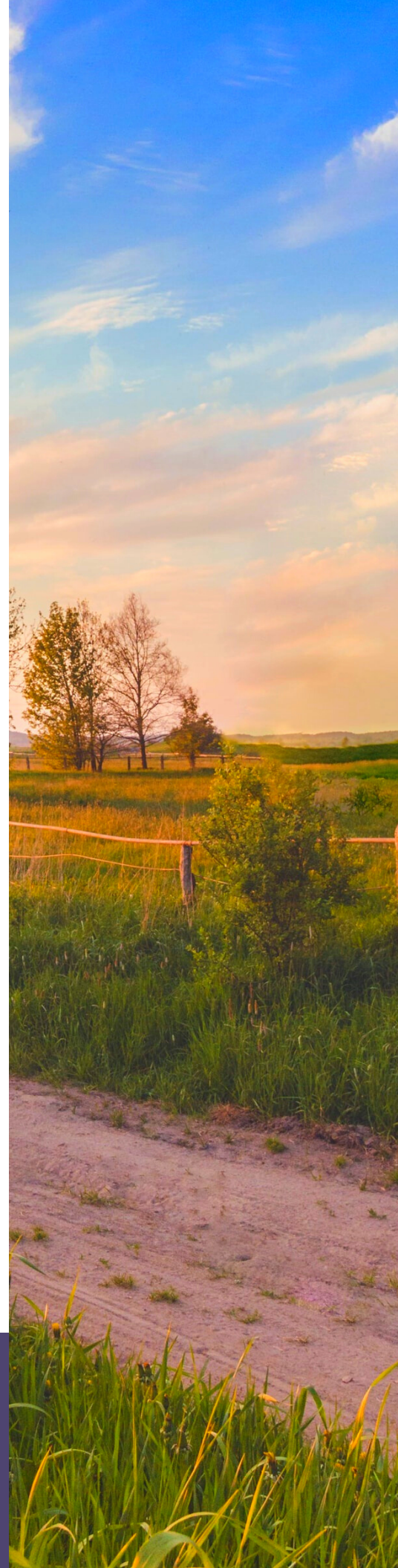
[1] <http://archiveswest.orbiscascade.org/ark:/80444/xv01037>

It all started with a Cy

BY ANNETTE MORRISON, M.S., CRS-A/D

I was in college, studying Fine Arts when my Mom called me for my hometown update and told me Grandpa Cy wasn't doing so well. He was the only grandparent I had left and he lived at the top of a hill in a small town in Iowa, the town I grew up in. He was in charge of maintaining the grounds of several churches and cemeteries and could be seen most days on his lawnmower, or with it loaded up on his flatbed on his way to a job. He was so independent and loved to tell stories. He was also very shrewd and could tell someone who was trying to con him right away. I remember listening to his stories and being amazed at the wisdom, the change he experienced – milking cows by hand? And now we just throw a suction cup nipple on the cow and let a machine pull the milk out. As I worked on my various classes in art, I would find myself drawing portraits of him or recreating pieces that reminded me of my hometown or his stories. That summer when I went back home, Grandpa had a stroke and Mom struggled with her sisters on deciding how to best take care of Grandpa. He couldn't walk well on his own, and he obviously was beyond being able to do the maintenance work that he so loved.

I remember when they signed him up for in-home services so someone would come in and help him clean. He wasn't happy to have another woman in the house that wasn't his wife, but he eventually accepted the help, grudgingly. Unable to walk long distances anymore, he would get on his lawnmower, ride it down to the community center and chat with the guys while they ate their congregate meals.



This worked for a while but his health declined further, until my Mom & Aunts decided that Grandpa needed a higher level of care than he was getting. They toured several nursing homes and decided on one where there were several people he knew, figuring it would be a better transition for him. He moved in at 3:00 pm in the afternoon. He stayed only one night. Mom received a call the next morning that Grandpa Cy died in his sleep. Natural causes, they said. But we knew, grandpa died because he didn't want to lose his independence; he gave up. My Mom made the comment that she, too, would rather die than go into a nursing home.

I returned to college in the fall a bit angry at my Grandfather and Mother – that they would give up on life so easily just because of where they lived. I still studied art, but added in a minor in Psychology to try to wrap my brain around what motivated attitudes towards aging and in particular, the misconception that living in a skilled care facility was a ticket to death. I pursued a Master's Degree in Human Development & Family Studies, focusing on the Later lifespan and Gerontology. My thesis research was a qualitative study of how aging adults in a specific nursing home made a successful transition from the community to facility life. I interviewed 3 residents in-depth over the course of a summer and was amazed at their resilience. Though each had a completely different personality and multiple health issues, they all had this in common: everything they valued most was internal. Their spirit could manifest no matter where they lived – they found ways to enrich others (through volunteerism, service) so the nursing home wasn't viewed as their “final stop” but rather the next step of their journey. They had never lost a sense of purpose and their identity was fluid, adapting to who they were at any given point instead of clinging to their past roles.

I have been blessed to be influenced by older adults so independent, adaptable, and rich in spirit that they make me reflect on my own attitudes and in turn, make me want to help others change theirs to see the potential in life. I dedicated my Master's Thesis to my Grandpa Cy, without whom I would never have questioned common attitudes about aging and skilled facilities. Little did I know at that time that years later, those changes in attitudes would have such a major impact on my life. My daughter, Megan, was born with brain stem damage and required 24/7 nursing care. We maintained a medical home for two years but the caregiver stress eventually lead us to looking into skilled care for her. If I had maintained my Grandfather and Mother's attitude towards skilled care, I could never have placed Megan. Instead, we worked diligently with the facility to ensure her care, visited frequently, and the staff eventually became much like an extended family to us.

Eventually, when Megan died, the staff at the facility rallied around us and to this day we maintain friendships with many of them. One of my best friends had been one of Megan's nurses and even accompanied us on Megan's Make-A-Wish trip. Our family was enriched by our experience. Our attitudes towards staying involved in Megan's care and involvement in her life was the next step in our journey. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to see the evolution of how attitudes about how we age and what is considered "home" can affect quality of life.

I work in the aging field and encounter older adults every day who struggle with maintaining basic needs, prioritizing care for their loved ones and struggling internally with generally held attitudes versus care decisions they will need to make. My experience and the wisdom I have gleaned from the older generation helps me illustrate to others that it is their attitude that matters and can make the most difference. When we share our stories, we help change those old attitudes and enrich everyone's lives. I have received great wisdom, and I am trying in my small way to pay it back to a generation that has so much to teach us all.

Carolyn Sue Shackles (Watt), My Mom

BY KATHI GARVEY

The older adult who made a difference in my life was my mom. In May of 2003, My mom had the worst headache of her life and eventually decided to have my dad call the ambulance, little did we know this day would forever change our lives!

My mom had two brain aneurysms - one was leaking and had to be repaired or risk sudden death. She gave the go ahead for the surgery, knowing the risks and complications that may come afterwards. The first surgery went OK, she came out of it still able to recognize us and talk like her old normal self. Then her brain started to swell, she had several mini strokes, fluid built up and the aneurysm was still leaking. My dad went against my mom's DNR order and brought her back a couple times because she stopped breathing during all of this trauma to her body. They kept her in a medically induced coma for almost 48 hours until the doctors at OSF Peoria were forced to go back in and perform a second aneurysm repair surgery. This time the leaking aneurysm was clipped but it changed my mom. It left her unable to recognize us, she couldn't talk, eat, use the bathroom or any of the other normal activities of daily living that all of us healthy able-bodied adults are able to do on our own. She was no longer the mom I had known for 26 years of my life. She spent the next several weeks in the hospital and then transferred to Eastview Terrace here in Sullivan for a month of rehabilitation services that would help her get back to a new normal.



During her time at the nursing home she had a feeding tube and a tracheostomy, both of which my mom would always pull and tug on trying to take them out of her body. It was a struggle to keep them in place.

We were introduced to the Traumatic Brain Injury Program through the Illinois Department of Rehabilitation. This program enables individuals who have suffered a traumatic brain injury such as my mom's, an opportunity to live in their own homes and have a full-time caregiver 24/7 who is paid through the program. I was enrolled at Lake Land College at the time and was almost finished completing my pre-requisite classes to enroll into the RN program. I chose to put my career plans on hold to become my mom's full time caregiver. I had recently acquired my CNA certificate so I thought I was fully prepared to handle my mother's care. LITTLE DID I KNOW that this would not only be the hardest job I had ever had in my life, it was also the most heart-wrenching, gut-punching, bittersweet, beautifully sad story that I would become a big part of. The full time care of my mom was tough, it was rough on my dad who had to get used to his wife of over 40 years who had always worked full time jobs in her life, took care of the kids, house, garden, DAD... was now the one who needed the care and to be taken care of. Things were very different and eventually it became too much for my dad to handle mentally and physically. My dad was fully disabled about 20 years before this so he wasn't able to care for her the way he would have liked to and it was mentally challenging for him to have mom living with him the way she was now. My husband (who had been a CNA when he was younger) and I decided it was best to

move mom in with us and our son (he was 2 years old at the time) full time so we could take the pressure and stress off of my dad. The days turned into months, turned into years and before we knew it, we had been through 10 years of caregiving for my mom 24/7.

Over those 10 years, as a family, we didn't get to do things that families do together because we didn't trust just anyone to care for my mom. She was extremely fragile, she had always been small, standing only 4'11" and MAYBE 125 pounds at the most when she was healthy, but now her weight was down to the low 90's, her skin was like crepe paper and her weight was dropping with each passing year. My mom started out with a feeding tube when she first came out of the nursing home but it didn't work for her because she tends to fiddle with things and would pull her tube out of her stomach and mess with it, causing infections. She wouldn't eat food, she would pocket it in her cheek like a chipmunk and then not swallow it. This became a choking hazard so we decided to buy very high calorie nutrition drinks for her and she would drink them without an issue, so this is what kept her alive for all of those years of not eating solid food. Carnation - VHC drinks (Very High Calorie), Boost and Ensure were our go-to brands that she preferred.

Reversing the roles from mother/daughter to caregiver/care recipient is very bittersweet to say the least. I had to separate myself as my mother's daughter some days so my emotions wouldn't get the better of me and start feeling sorry for myself. My mom would call me by my oldest sister's name and it bothered me at first, always correcting her to let her know that "NO, Mom, I'm Kathi, your youngest daughter." Over the years, I changed. I stopped correcting her and just went along with it. I let her believe she was still working her full time job, I let her believe that she had just went out to feed the chickens with her sisters, I let her believe that my name was Terri and sometimes my name was Momma. Even though it broke my heart some days, I let her believe whatever made her happiest. She seemed to be oblivious to what was going on around her and in the outside world and some days I was envious of that. Through the loss of one of the grandsons that she raised for my oldest sister (2010 my nephew passed away due to an undiagnosed enlarged heart at age 21) and then her own husband of 46 years (my dad in 2012), she was oblivious.

Mom would always participate in her activities of daily living the best she could. She didn't have the ability to know to do it for herself but if you told her what to do and helped her, she would show you that a glimmer of her old self was in there somewhere deep inside shining through. Showering, bathing and getting "ready for the day" were always her big activities for the day, she would sleep like a baby after she was all clean, freshly clothed and had her hair dried. My husband and I always did this for her and when I returned to work after that first year, my husband was her primary caregiver with me assisting in the evenings and on the weekends. I am proud to say that my mom NEVER had a pressure ulcer, never sat in her own waste, and was always clean and happy. If you've ever worked in long term healthcare, those are things that you can't always say about your loved ones, even in the BEST of facilities.

January 2014: It got to where we were almost having to force my mom to drink her drinks, drink water or anything to help keep her alive. It seemed as though she was ready to give up her fight. She wasn't smiling anymore. She wasn't laughing like she used to. Something had changed.

A day in late February, early March, after I got to work that day, I got a text from my husband that mom wasn't herself, she wasn't using one side of her body and something was wrong. I had him call the ambulance and we rushed to follow. Because of the metal in the aneurysm clip and her permanent shunt in her brain, the hospital wasn't able to perform an MRI to see if there was additional problems with her brain. They said that she had probably had another stroke and they suggested a feeding tube at that time.

After everything my mom had been through there was NO WAY I was going to allow them to place another feeding tube in her and put her through any of that again. She had been through enough and she was SCREAMING (without saying a word) for us to let her go!! We decided that it would be best to call in Harbor Light Hospice and let my mom start the dying process with peace, dignity and respect. We brought her back to Eastview, where it all began and let her live out the last 2 days of her life there surrounded by my sister, husband, her best friend and I. My mom and I had a special bond that only grew stronger in the last few years she was on this earth. I was there until her very last breath, letting her softly listen to some of her favorite music as her soul was whisked away to heaven, music was always playing in our house when I grew up, my mom loved to sing and dance and I thought it was only fitting.

Caregiving for my mom changed my husband and I. We are better people for the struggles we went through and for all the times we felt as though we couldn't go on, stressed to the max because she wasn't "getting better". As caregivers, you always want your care recipient to "get better" but sometimes we aren't there to make them better, we are there to help them along their journey to heaven and make it as full of love and comfort as we possibly can at the time and in the end....sometimes, THEY MAKE US BETTER!! ♥

Kathi Garvey is the Director for Mid-Illinois Senior Services, Inc. "Helping our clients feel better, more comfortable and safe is by far the best thing about my job! Everyday we are given the opportunity to make a difference in people's lives and everyday I am thankful and grateful for that opportunity!"

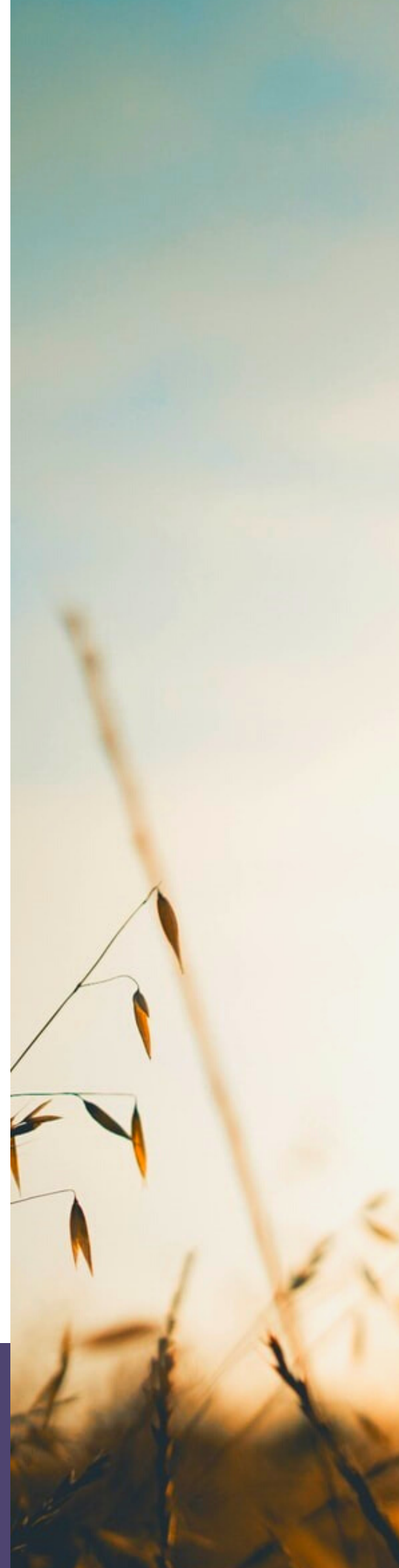
Definition of Love

BY KIM NIX, M.A.

My granny, Jessie Lee Jones.

A Mississippi jewel, and a mother of 16 children-but she raised several others. My granny was one of the strongest women I knew. She was so pure. As a child, I couldn't understand how this little 5-foot woman could be so powerful. I never saw weakness; I never saw pain. I was blessed to have walked in her light. She taught me to understand that a mother's job is to be who you want your children to become. My grandmother saw something special in everyone who crossed her path. She raised her children and grandchildren to always treat others with dignity and respect, regardless of differences and that true peace comes from within. Grandma Jessie just turned 84 on May 12, 2020 and gained her wings on June 2, 2020. Heaven has gained an Angel like no other. I couldn't have been blessed with anything greater than being a part of her. Now, I am able to share my light with others, as an Adult Protective Caseworker at Family Senior Services in Champaign, Illinois. I joined a unique force, with aging adults. Now I can truly make a difference!

Kim Nix, M.A., is an Adult Protective Services caseworker at Family Service Senior Resource Center.



A Trusted and Authentic Role Model

BY MARCIA HEINBAUGH

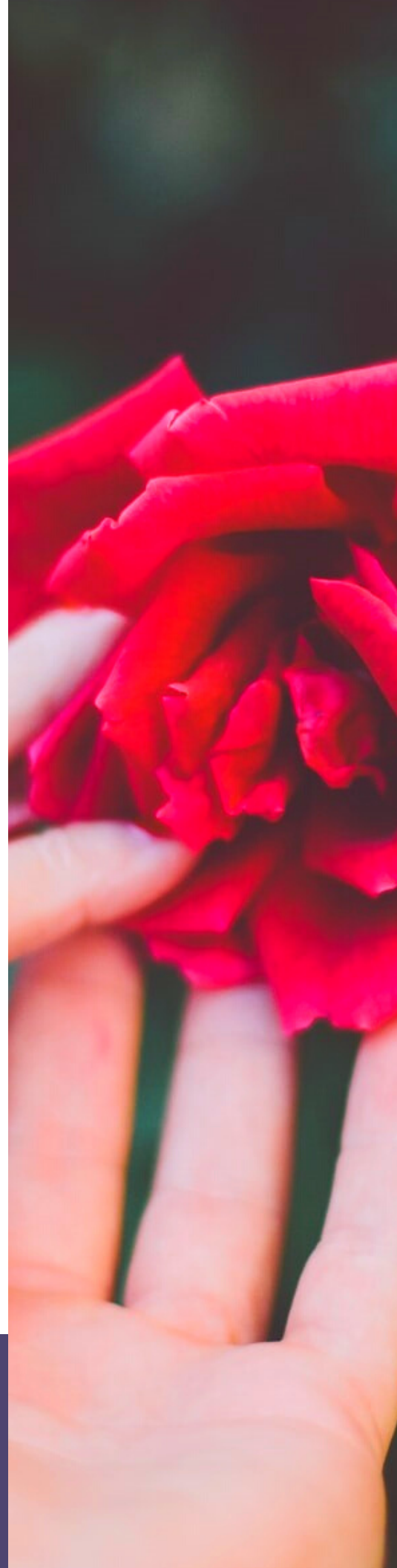
I first met Marilyn in 2007, when I was a newly hired employee for the Coles County Council on Aging. I knew from the moment we met that she was going to be someone who would be a very influential person in my life.

Originally, she was the Director of the RSVP Program and later took a new position as Administrative Assistant Director with the agency. She decided to retire in 2016. It was an exciting time for her and we sent her off with a grand party!

You see, she is the most down to earth person I have ever met. Always truthful and sincere, her answers were always clear. No gray areas with her. I believe that working with her and learning from her in her professional role but also in her personal role as a wife, mother, and grandmother, taught me to always be honest and genuine and to believe in myself and have confidence to take a stand when needed. Her influence has carried me through many challenges in my professional and personal life and when I am in doubt, I ask myself, what would Marilyn do or what would she suggest I do!

She is an amazing woman and I will always be thankful to have had the opportunity to work with her and even to this day she is very important to me. She is a strong woman, with a genuine love for all. She is a great role model for many. She continues to live her life with grace, love, compassion, empathy, and honesty. That is the kind of person I strive to be every day.

Marcia Heinbaugh is the Telecare Program Director at the Coles County Council on Aging. She is also a Senior Information Service Provider, SHIP Counselor, and an AIRS Certified Resource Specialist in Aging/Disability. "The greatest joy in my work is to provide information, education, and assistance for individuals and to advocate on behalf of those that are in need. I have worked at the Coles County Council on Aging for 13 years."



Heartfelt Surprise

BY KAYCIE SANDERS

I am the Administrative Director for the Dial-A-Ride Public Transportation program which serves Coles and Douglas counties. I started my journey with Dial-A-Ride right out of college in 2012 and was hired as a dispatcher. I enjoyed speaking with our riders every day. For some, calling in to schedule a ride is their only outside contact for the day. Most dispatchers learn to know their riders on a personal level and we tend to go out of our way to see that their needs are met. I had a rider that was very special to me. After a few months, I just loved receiving my daily phone call from Mrs. G. She was in her 90's and would tell it like it is. She was sweet, funny, and a pleasure to speak with.

Mrs. G was very special to me for another reason as well. She was a WWII war bride from Germany and had a very distinct accent, the same accent that my Grandmother had as she was a WWII war bride from Austria. Ironically, Mrs. G and my Grandma were friends and would visit with each other in their younger years and speak in German together. My Grandma had recently passed away and Mrs. G and I would talk about my Grandma and it would help a little in my grieving process. A German accent is very distinct and for some reason, when I would talk to Mrs. G, it was almost like talking to my Grandma whom I loved and adored.

One day, Mrs. G called in to let us know that she was ready to be picked up from her appointment at the local cancer center. She sounded so defeated on that call. She was in tears when she told me that she was just diagnosed with cancer and was ready to go home. My heart broke for her. I was the first person she shared her diagnosis with. That call was heavy on my mind for the rest of the day. The next morning before I went to work I made a special trip to the grocery store, purchased a bouquet of flowers, and went to Mrs. G's house. I knocked on the door and she told me to come on in. As I entered the doorway I told her who I was, we had only spoken on the phone before so I wanted to introduce myself in person. She smiled and invited me in. I then handed her the flowers and told her that I was sorry that she was sick and wanted to brighten her day a little. Mrs. G burst into tears and hugged me so tight. The gesture was small but I wanted to be able to help her like she had helped me when I lost my Grandma. Mrs. G joined my Grandma not too long after that. It was a sad day at Dial-A-Ride when we found out. She was one of a kind that's for sure.

Kaycie Sanders is the Administrative Director of Dial-A-Ride Public Transportation.

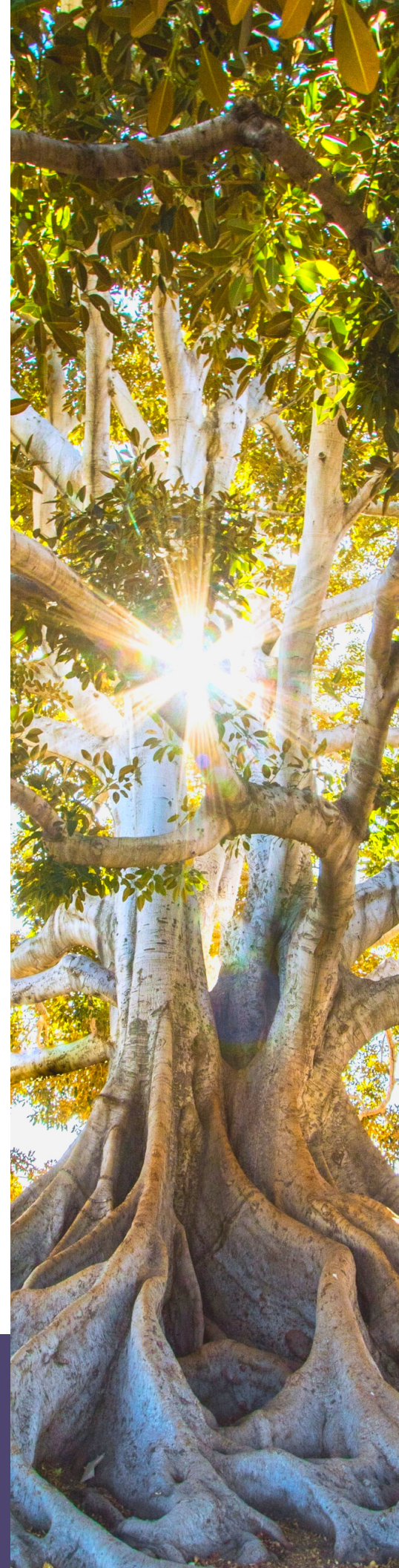
A Life of Learning

ANONYMOUS

When asked to pinpoint a specific person that has been an influence in my life, it is impossible. It is my feeling that every person that comes into my life has an impact. Regardless of age, interactions with others continually help me develop, grow strong and become the essence of who I am. Others influence me in making choices, some teach me, and some are there to simply love me. True, it is said wisdom comes with age. That wisdom is given to each of us gradually every day throughout our life, through changes and challenges, both good and bad. It allows me to observe, listen and share with others and their situations; to learn from them. Ultimately this knowledge and understanding will be shared with those around me. Aging allows me the time to evaluate my own life choices, experiences, suffering and hardships and choose how I will use the knowledge to impact not just my life but the life of each person that I encounter and share my life with, just as others have done for me.

“Some people come into your life for a reason, a season or a lifetime. When you know which one it is, you will know what to do.” -Author unknown

Submitted by the Coles County Council on Aging.



The Teacher

BY JENELLE BRUCKNER

Besides my grandparents, who have been a loving and supportive influence on countless occasions during my upbringing, the older adult who has touched my life and its trajectory the most has been my high school science teacher. He had a love for teaching and returned to it after retirement, when I met him. In high school, I was definitely not a “good kid.” I fought with depression, and the apathy I felt affected my behavior and performance. Most teachers didn’t take too kindly to my lack of enthusiasm. After my science teacher witnessed me allowing another student to copy my homework, he pulled me aside. I was expecting another detention and lecture. Instead, he just told me that I was selling myself short. I was surprised... and touched, really. He affirmed my dignity in a time I really needed it. When I graduated, he sent me off with a card. Written inside was, “There is no limit for you.” I cherish the card to this day as a reminder of the gratitude I hold towards him.

Jenelle Bruckner is a Long-Term Care Ombudsman at the East Central Illinois Area Agency on Aging. "Some of my favorite things about my job are listening to older adults, being of help to a vulnerable population, and gaining personal and professional growth. Being surrounded by others who are rich with life experience I have yet to gain is most rewarding of all."



Seeds of Love

ELIZABETH KOSUTH

My 92 year old father-in-law doesn't live in the same country that I do, but his love and support is with me every day as I raise my daughter. My father-in-law has been in my life for over 30 years. Always loving and kind—and serving as the father I wish I'd had—G welcomed me into my husband's family from the first moment he met me. My husband and I were married for 15 years before we had our only daughter (M). It was G who left his own country and family for nearly a year to help me care for M when I went back to work. Many a time I would come home to find M curled up and sleeping peacefully on G's chest, never mind that her long naps meant he was immobile for hours. Other times he was out for a walk with her, snug in a Baby Bjorn, pointing out the birds and anything else that was in her sight. I have never seen a man exude so much joy and love when caring for his grandchild; his beautiful hazel eyes positively sparkle when he looks at her. The years that he and my mother-in-law lived in Bloomington to be here with us created some of my best memories, from the many joyful moments of experiencing M's milestones together, to the steadfast support they gave me as I struggled to understand and meet the needs of my highly sensitive child.

Even though G is from a culture and a generation that struggles with women's equality, he has never once said or done anything that would cause our M to think that she wasn't as capable, smart, and valuable as any boy. She is very creative, no doubt encouraged by G's enthusiastic, thoughtful responses to her drawings and paintings and his belief that art has intrinsic value to society. He has helped nurture a passion that sustains her through boredom, challenging days, and disappointments. G shows his love and appreciation for M as a precious individual with his every action and word, and I know that it is one reason why M has such a strong sense of self. The seeds of her strength and personality was planted by his love for her, and I see her blossom every day because of it. Words are not adequate to express what this gentle, wise man has meant to me and my family.

Elizabeth Kosuth is a Project Manager and project coordinator of a federal grant at the Mennonite College of Nursing at Illinois State University. "In this position, my primary task is to spearhead the development of a Center for Senior Advocacy in McLean County by collaborating with the ISU community and the myriad entities in the county that do the important work of supporting and providing services to the older adults in our midst."

My Gramma

BY BARB WHITEMAN

My Gramma lived life fully until the age of 104! She shared many wise quotes without even realizing it. One of my favorites was when she was around 100 and carrying a laundry basket up the basement steps to hang on the clothesline to dry. Now Gramma didn't have to do this, she had plenty of family that wanted to help and she also had a dryer. But my gramma said, "I keep doing it so I can keep doing it." There were so many things she kept doing! She baked bread and made rolls for church potlucks, sewed quilts and rode her 3 wheel bicycle even when it was difficult for her to see. She blessed me and so many more with her "keep doing it" personality!



This is my Gramma, Edna Manning, at 102 years old, at an exercise class at the Alpena, Michigan Senior Center! She is one of many seniors that has inspired me!

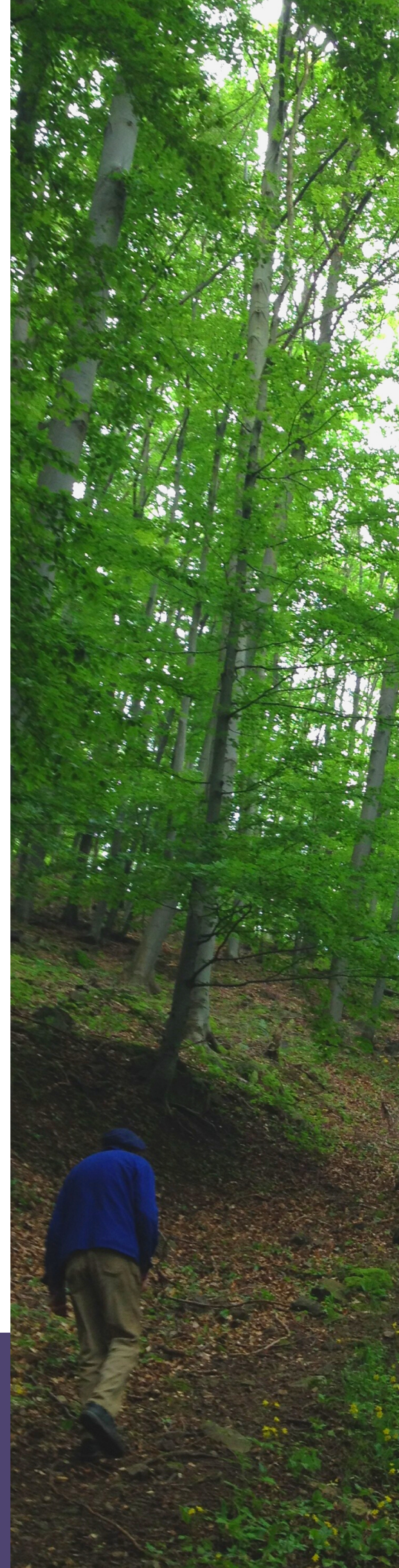
Barb Whiteman is the founder of the non-profit, Living Well United. "I have had the privilege of leading SilverSneakers exercise classes for 6 years. My dream is to have a senior center in our rural area. The dream is coming true as we convert the old LeRoy Casey's Convenience Store into the Living Well Senior Center!"

Nagyapó

BY ORSOLYA FICSOR

There are many words in Hungarian nomenclature for “grandfather,” perhaps the most common one being “Nagypapa,” but in my family, we called my grandfather “Nagyapó.” Pronounced “Nadyapoe,” “nagy” in this context means “grand” and “apó” is used to describe an elderly man who is perceived as wise. Likewise, “anyó” is the feminine term for a wise, elderly woman. Nagyapó was the wise backbone of our family. He passed away in 2017 a few weeks before his 85th birthday, and our family has never been the same since. We were so sure he would live to be a hundred given how energetic and full of life he was, and although my life has not been the same since, who he was and his presence in my life is a big part of who I am today and who I strive to be.

November of 1956 marked the Hungarian Revolution, an attempt to fight back against Soviet control under the Iron Curtain. Nagyapó was one of thousands of Hungarians who left the country during this time. He lived out his next four years in Switzerland, occasionally traveling throughout Europe on a motorcycle. He and my grandmother, Nagyanyó, wrote letters back and forth for four years, until he finally returned to Hungary in 1960 to marry Nagyanyó in 1961. In the age of social media, it is nearly impossible for anyone of my generation to imagine waiting for a significant other for four years!



Despite having left behind a few epic years of travel, Nagypó never lost his zest for life. His main hobby was to build and beautify houses. This is definitely where I inherited my passion for interior design! In the early years of he and Nagyanyó's marriage, they built a lake house in the lake village of Varsány, a forest house in the Mátra mountain range, and their own family home in Budapest with the help of my great-grandparents. When my mom and my uncle were kids, my grandparents took them on countless adventures. I too got to spend much of my early childhood with them, and even when I moved to the US in 2000, I still spent every summer in Hungary, spending my childhood exploring the woods and traveling with Nagypó. As I write this, I can almost hear the leaves crunching under our feet, the creek gently trickling, the croaking of tree frogs, and distant thunder. I can almost smell pastries baking on a warm summer afternoon, and when I wake up each morning, the singing birds remind me of those days when I would arrive in Hungary at the beginning of summer, wake up at 5 AM jetlagged from a 12-hour journey, and join my grandparents for tea. This is one of the many things my grandparents taught me – to appreciate the simplest things.

Nagypó lived his life to the fullest up to the final months of his life. He would always wake me early every morning: "Orsi! Let's go ride bikes!" "Orsi, don't sleep, it's a beautiful day out, let's go play tennis!" Nagypó also went out of his way to take me traveling throughout Hungary. I could spend hours just flipping through pictures of our travels in Budapest and visiting his brother at lake Balaton. But what I miss the most in spending time with my grandparents is the simplest things, like sitting out in the backyard at dusk under the walnut tree and listening to cicadas, going to the farmer's market, and helping Nagypó tend to his garden. I miss arriving in Hungary and having Nagypó welcome me with home-made wine and waking up to the smell of fresh lilies Nagypó had picked just for me.

Nagypó constantly got me out of the house and encouraged me to get out and enjoy life. He taught me to hold on to that sense of adventure, to appreciate nature, and to always look for the next thing in life. My family always turned to him for advice on everything, from how to plant a garden to how to build a house or fix a car. Up to the very last moments of his life, he put his all into touching the lives of those around him with beauty and adventure. It is such a privilege to have had him in my life for 22 years. Our family feels an indescribable sense of emptiness at his absence, but he frequents our dreams, and sometimes, when we catch ourselves feeling that we need him most, myself, my mom, and Nagyanyó feel an overwhelming sense of peace and clarity that we somehow know is coming from him watching over us.

Orsolya Ficsor is the 2019-2020 Illinois State University Stevenson Fellow at the East Central Illinois Area Agency on Aging. She enjoys fostering relationships between community leaders.

Older Adults Who Made Me Who I Am Today

BY SUSAN C. REAL

Grandma Bernice Shearer

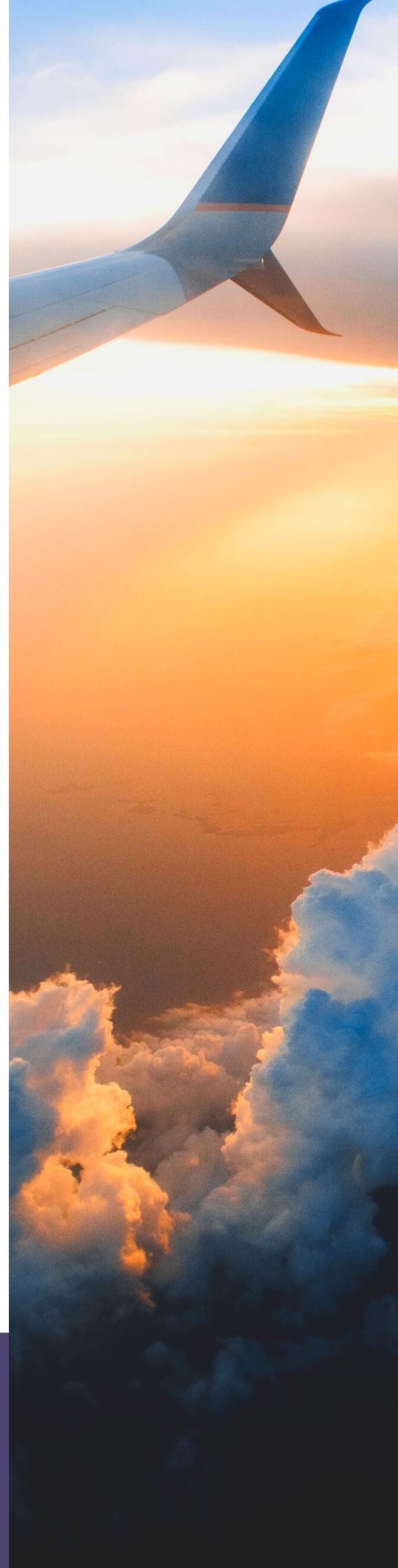
was my second mother. Mom and I moved in with Grandma when I was 10 after my parents' divorce. Grandma taught me how to bake my first pie. Grandma was patient and she was always forgiving. Grandma was not only strong in faith, but a saint on earth. Grandma would chuckle and say to my mother, "Now Anita, let Susan practice the piano while we do the dishes."

Anita Real, My Mom,

was the bravest woman I knew. She taught me what a single mom could do. She taught me the love of laughter, and set the example of making new friends while honoring the old. She taught me to enjoy people of all ages, especially our youngsters! She instilled in me a love for travel.

Thomas J. Real, My Dad,

was the epitome of the Marine Corps code. He taught me to value honesty and hard work. He always engaged in current events and political debate. He would scold me if I became 'too full of myself.' I have so many wonderful memories of us playing golf and watching the Chicago Cubs!



Aunt Rosemary Holland

taught me to crochet and knit.

She welcomed me as one of the family after my parents divorced.

She was a cherished sister to my Dad.

To this day, her daughters Kathy, Carole, and Patricia, are like sisters to me.

Mary Anne Child

sets a daily example of how volunteering is a gift to the community.

To this day, she inspires me to become a better cook, a better crafter, and a better pianist.

Fran Adolphson

According to Fran, family always comes first.

Fran worked every day even into her 90's!

Fran created the most beautiful quilts that are treasures to all who received one.

Fran serves as an inspiration on how to "Age" the right way!

