

LIFE CARE

# LEADER

2013 Edition



## Writing His Own Playbook

*Kenneth Honea*

The Sky Is  
Not the Limit

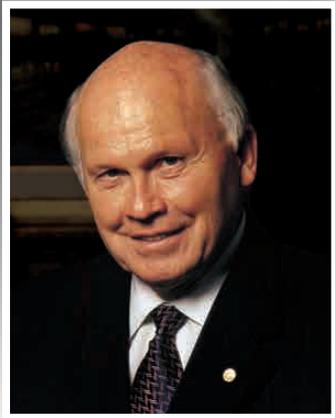
*Vera Rest*

Dancing in  
Quicksand

*Jeanne Gorce*



## A SWEET SERENADE



A mother, wishing to encourage her young son's progress at the piano, bought tickets for a performance by Ignacy Jan Paderewski, a Polish pianist and composer and a favorite of concert audiences around the world.

When the night arrived, they found their seats near the front of the concert hall and eyed the majestic Steinway waiting on stage. Soon the mother found a friend to talk to, and the boy slipped away. When 8 o'clock arrived, the spotlights came on,

the audience quieted, and only then did they notice the boy up on the bench, innocently picking out *Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star*.

His mother gasped, but before she could run to the stage to retrieve her son, the master appeared on the stage and quickly moved to the keyboard. He whispered to the boy, "Don't quit. Keep playing."

Leaning over, Paderewski reached down with his left hand and began filling in a bass part. Soon his right arm reached around the other side, encircling the child, to add a running obbligato. Together, the old master and the young novice held the crowd mesmerized.

For 43 years, since the first nursing center opened in Cleveland, Tenn., associates dedicated to serving others, unpolished though we may be, have been surrounded by the Master who whispers in our ears, time and time again – no matter how hard the job or what the circumstances facing us, personally or professionally – "Don't quit. Keep playing."

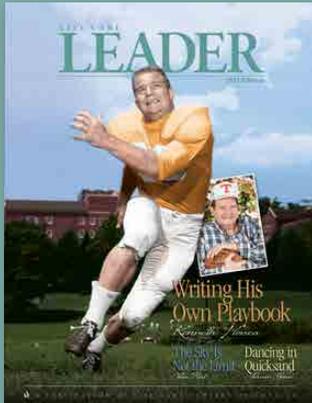
And as we do, He augments and supplements as a work of amazing beauty is created. It is a serenade of love and service, sweet to the Master's ear. 🎹

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Forrest L. Preston".

FORREST L. PRESTON  
Chairman

LIFE CARE  
**LEADER**  2013 Edition

A P U B L I C A T I O N O F L I F E C A R E C E N T E R S O F A M E R I C A



Life Care Leader is published annually by Life Care Centers of America for our residents, the corporate family and friends of Life Care.

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Lasting Resolve  
*Edgar Beauth*..... 2



Dancing in Quicksand  
*Jeanne Gorce*..... 6



Writing His Own Playbook  
*Kenneth Honca*..... 10



Redefining Family  
*Jeann Baker*..... 14



The Personal Touch  
*Knox Taussig*..... 18



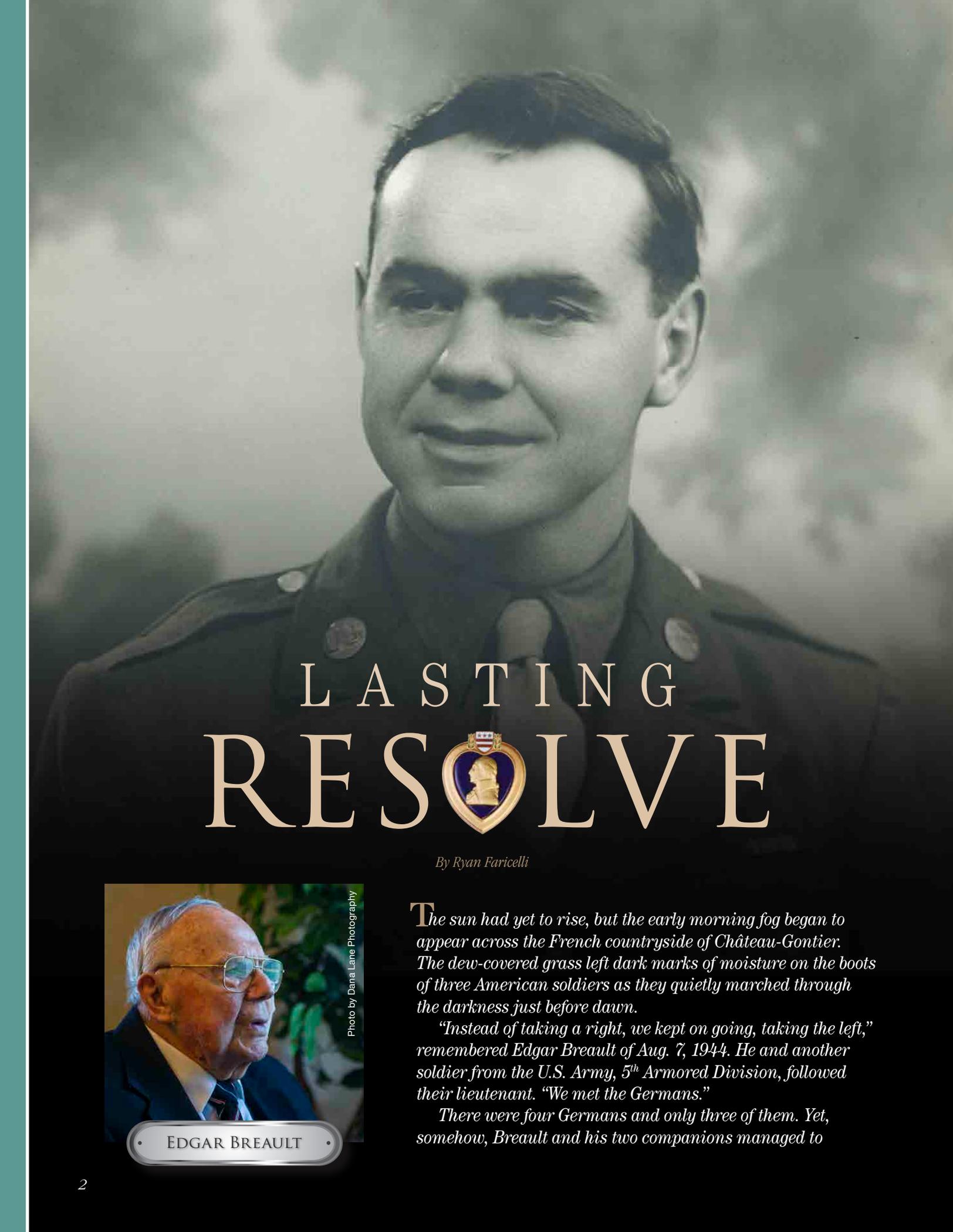
A Friend of Fame  
*Deloris Driskel*..... 24



The City Life  
*Percival Everhard Ashley*..... 28



The Sky Is Not the Limit  
*Vera Rest*..... 32



# LASTING RESOLVE

*By Ryan Faricelli*

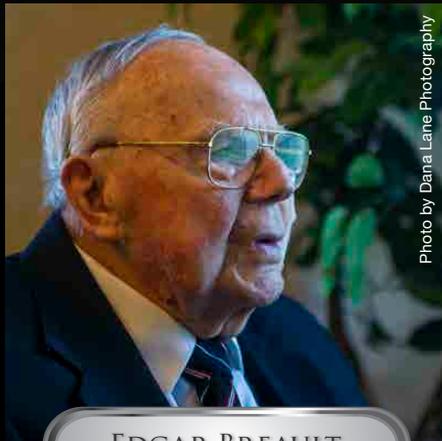


Photo by Dana Lane Photography

• EDGAR BREault •

*The sun had yet to rise, but the early morning fog began to appear across the French countryside of Château-Gontier. The dew-covered grass left dark marks of moisture on the boots of three American soldiers as they quietly marched through the darkness just before dawn.*

*“Instead of taking a right, we kept on going, taking the left,” remembered Edgar Breault of Aug. 7, 1944. He and another soldier from the U.S. Army, 5<sup>th</sup> Armored Division, followed their lieutenant. “We met the Germans.”*

*There were four Germans and only three of them. Yet, somehow, Breault and his two companions managed to*

capture two of the Nazi soldiers. In the fight, the other two Nazis managed to run into the forest.

"If you don't come out, we're gonna shoot these two," Breault recalled shouting to the Germans hiding in the woods.

After a few tense minutes, the other two German soldiers emerged, surrendering to the three Americans.

Taking their prisoners, Breault and his fellow soldiers went back the way they should have originally gone. They made it about a mile before coming across an area with a hedgerow standing roughly 20 feet high. The lieutenant signaled them to stop. As the lieutenant quietly conveyed to the others that he thought he heard something on the other side of the hedge, Breault turned his head to look at his superior officer.

"I turned my face," Breault recollected clearly, "and the bullets went flying."

Breault was born April 12, 1913, in Fitchburg, Mass. The second of 11 children, he quit school at a young age so he could work construction to earn extra money to help his parents care for his brothers and sisters.

When he was in his late 20s, Breault met Erminia Palumbo, or Min, as she was called, at a dance at City Hall.

"I liked her," said Breault. "Then I loved her. She was my everything."

Courting her wasn't so simple.

"He was very devoted to my mother," said Breault's oldest son, David. "But she wouldn't marry him because she came from a very strict Italian family – escorts on dates and stuff like that. But they knew how to duck out of that. Don't tell anybody!"

Min's parents had issues with Breault. Her parents were born in Italy and were unhappy that Breault was not an Italian boy. They also didn't like that Breault was seven years older than Min. David explained: "He was 30 when they married, and my mother was only 23."

While still stationed locally, having volunteered to serve his country in 1941, Breault married Min on May 22, 1943. He married her while proudly wearing his Army uniform. Shortly thereafter, while Min was pregnant with David, Breault was shipped to Europe to join the 5<sup>th</sup> Armored Division.

The first bullet ripped across the right side of Breault's face, tearing his cheek from chin to ear. An instant later, a second bullet struck his back. A third struck a toe on his right foot, severing the tip, as a fourth hit the ground beside him. That bullet broke in two, and both pieces were flung into his groin.

The fifth and final shot, however, was the most serious.

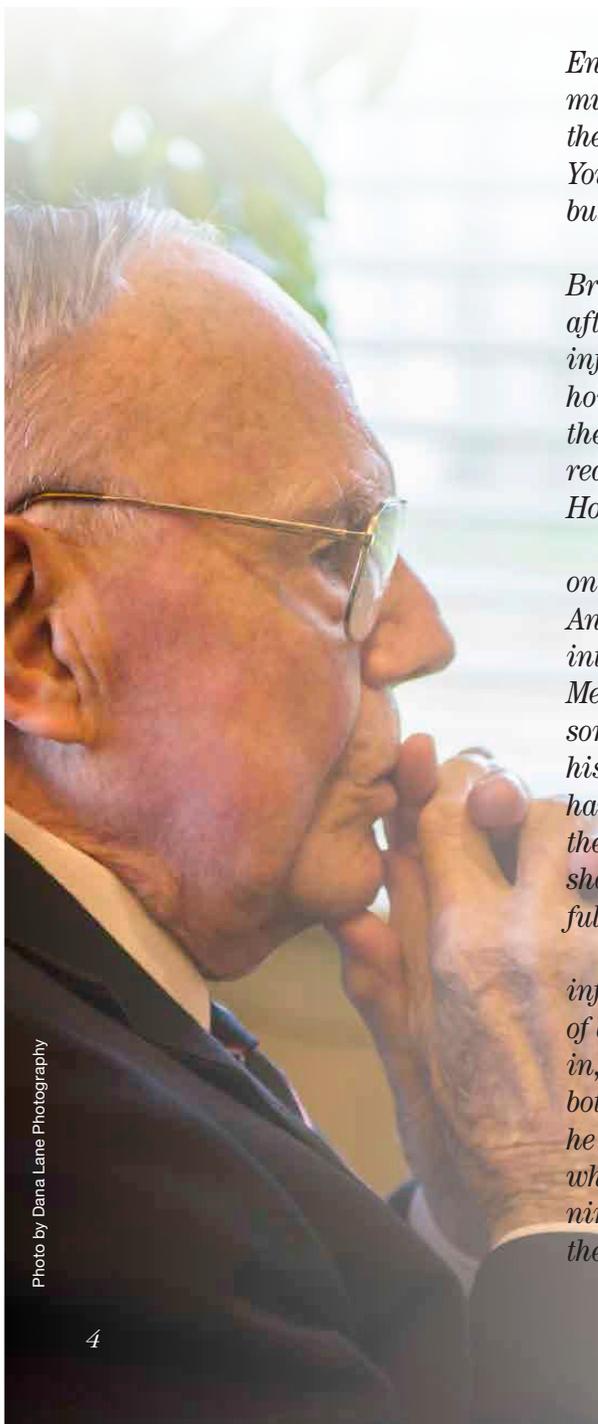
Striking his left arm, a huge chunk of flesh was blown away, almost completely severing the appendage.

"I was disgusted," noted Breault of what was going through his mind the moment he realized he was shot. His perseverance and patriotism brought tears to his eyes as he finished, "I got shot, and knew I wouldn't last through the war."

In the moments before Breault was rushed back to base, the decision was made to leave his arm behind – it was too mangled to be saved. Breault refused to let them, and he held his arm to keep it attached the entire trip back to base.



DISCUSSING A CASE—Major-General Norison T. Kirk, being the first user to qualify, the second to give with the Orthopaedic Officers in a world of Cushing General Hospital. Staff General Kirk is Major William T. Tobey, MC, Chief of the Orthopaedic Service. In the center is Capt. Richard Dodge, MC, Ward Officer; on the right is Colonel Isherwood, Commanding Officer of the hospital. (Edna Herwick, 1946)



*“I got shot and they flew me to England,” explained Breault. “Not much fun. I waited there until they flew me to the United States. You could say I did some traveling, but it did not feel too good.”*

*Min waited anxiously to see Breault for nearly six weeks after receiving a telegraph informing her of her husband’s horrific injuries. In September, the severely wounded Breault reached Cushing Veterans Hospital in Framingham, Mass.*

*Breault received 33 stitches on the right side of his face. Another 23 stitches were sewn into his back, near his spine. Medics had, at his insistence, somehow managed to salvage his arm, though it would always have a malformed cavity from the wound and be significantly shorter than his other arm when fully healed.*

*Osteomyelitis, a type of inflammation and infection of bones and bone marrow, set in, requiring skin grafts from both of Breault’s legs. Finally, he was placed in a body cast, which he remained in for nearly nine months. Countless hours of therapy lay ahead of him.*

*In January 1945, Breault was allowed a brief visit to his home. Min had never been allowed to bring David to visit his father in the hospital. It was the first time Breault met his 7-month-old child.*

*Later that year, on Aug. 2, 1945, Breault received an honorable medical discharge from the Army. Two days later, just three days short of a full year from that fateful morning in Château-Gontier, Breault was released from the hospital. He was awarded the European/African/Middle Eastern Ribbon with one service star, the Combat Infantryman Badge, the American Defense Service Ribbon, a Good Conduct Ribbon and a Purple Heart.*

*Left with lingering pains and a weakened left arm that was now noticeably shorter than his right, Breault didn’t let his injuries affect his life. With some adjustments, he continued to work, play and would even have two more children, Jeffrey in 1948, and Sylvia in 1949.*

*“As a youngster, I couldn’t wrestle with him because of his*

arm,” said David. “We couldn’t touch him on his left arm.”

“It didn’t bother me one way or the other,” said Breault. “I found jobs with just one hand, since my other hand was no good. I worked construction work, and I used to like to do that. But I was very limited in what I could do.”

Eventually, Breault settled into a job at Banner Mold in Leominster, Mass. He worked as a die finisher, putting the final touches on die molds used to cut plastics.

“I remember Dad as being a really busy guy, but he supported us in our sports as much as he could,” said David. “He just felt part of his life was helping us do more than he did.”

Breault spent what free time he did have constantly working on his house. In fact, a neighbor living across the street revealed Breault was climbing up on the roof to do repairs even when he was in his 70s.

An avid walker, Breault would walk five or six miles a day, rain or shine. Usually, his stroll would end with a trip to his local hangout, Tim’s Diner, followed by daily Mass at St. Cecilia’s Catholic Church. He attended Mass every day he was able.

“They were both very involved in their church,” said David about his parents. “Their faith played an important role in all facets of their life together.”

Breault and Min also became excellent golfers, playing nearly every day. Breault was even named Club Champion on multiple occasions. They never used a cart,

however, another result of his fondness of walking.

Retiring at the age of 62, Breault spent his later years exploring the hobbies he loved with Min. They were fans of bowling and square dancing, and also enjoyed traveling. Breault and Min spent three months each winter in Brookfield, Fla., spending all of their time together.

Breault was incredibly proud of his service to his country, but carried great disappointment at being unable to fulfill his duty

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*“I liked her,” said Breault.  
“Then I loved her. She was  
my everything.”*

---

to serve through the entire war. Ironically, these emotions kept the source of his injuries and his service record secret for nearly five decades.

“I decided to start walking with him,” David said of how he first learned of his father’s service in the mid 1990s. “Until then, I hardly knew much of anything [about his service]. My father was very private. He was not one who wanted anyone to pay much attention to that. He did his service and that was that.”

Breault couldn’t escape recognition forever.

On April 12, 2013, Breault celebrated his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday at Life Care Center of Leominster, where he now resides. Family members from all over the United

States flew in to attend the event. Old neighbors, local veterans and town officials shared in the celebration of Breault’s life – and his military history.

Leominster Mayor Dean Mazzarella presented Breault with an official city certificate wishing him a happy 100<sup>th</sup> birthday. Breault also received a certificate from the city recognizing him as a centenarian. Another congratulatory award was



presented on behalf of Richard Voutour, the city of Leominster’s director of veterans’ services, by Robert Grudziecki, the post commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

“I’ve been through a lot of things, but I’ve still lasted,” said Breault with a heartfelt smile. “Life’s not easy. You can’t plan anything to go the way you want. You can try to change it if you want, but if you plan one thing it’ll do just the opposite. You just got to go with it.” 🍷

# Dancing

## IN QUICKSAND

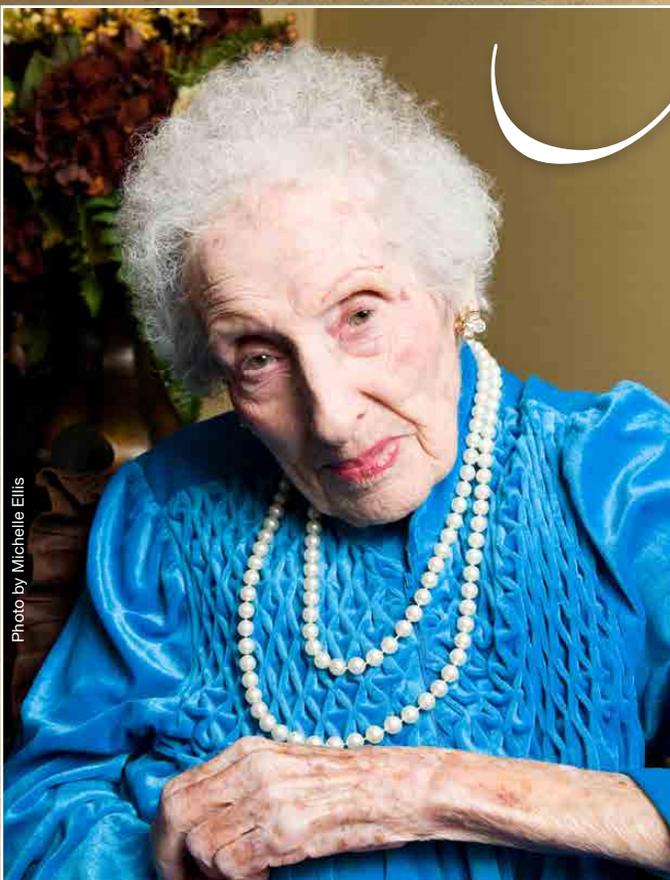


Photo by Michelle Ellis

### • JEANNE GORCE •

*By Dana Williams*

**T**he human body – mind, nervous system and emotions – offers an amazing show of strength and endurance, but there is a limit to what many people can handle. For most, hiding in bomb shelters, waking to the end of a gun barrel, raising

children amidst imminent danger, enduring wrongful interrogation and suffering the tragic death of loved ones would be too much to bear.

Yet for Jeanne Gorce, 103, a resident of Life Care Center of Richland, Wash., this is a

snapshot of her life story, a glimpse into her reality.

Born and raised in Lyon, France, Gorce dreamed of dancing. She took gymnastics throughout grade school and wanted nothing more than to become a ballerina. Gorce couldn't have known the

struggles, threats and tragedies her journey would present nor all the ways in which she would need to move gracefully to navigate her way safely through. From a young age, songs played in her mind – a collection of nearly 100 tunes which she absorbed on her walks to school as a child. Holding the hand of her nanny, she would stand on the street corner and listen to artists beginning their careers with street performances, earning what pay they could from the morning passersby.

As the daughter of store owners, Gorce spent her days after high school graduation shining the silver, arranging the glassware and selling numerous household items. Perhaps those childhood tunes helped her pass the time, or maybe she thought about her dreams of becoming a ballerina.

Although her parents didn't support her passion for ballet, they tried to make up for it by chaperoning her to dances throughout her teenage years. At one such dance, a young Vietnamese man, Nguyen Van Dan, who was living in France to study pharmacy, asked her to dance. Gorce often recounted the story to her daughter, including the impressive details of his dancing skills. The two soon wed and had their first child, Alfred. Once Nguyen completed school, he transplanted their young family to his home in Vietnam – to the city of Saigon. They opened a pharmacy and soon had their second child, Ann.

Living in Saigon, raising two children and helping her husband run a pharmacy came with challenges, but no one could

foresee the darkness and turmoil that would soon threaten their status-quo suburban life. Gorce and her family were living in one of the world's most unsettled nations at the time – just after World War II and amidst opposing political interests, killings and bombings – on the brink of the First Indochina War, later known as the Quicksand War, the precursor to the Vietnam War.

For a time, Gorce was forced to move to the city as the Japanese occupying Vietnam required all Europeans to be quarantined. During this time, Gorce lived at the house of Madam Daede, who was a woman with a forthright manner. For a brief time, Gorce's daughter stayed in Madam Daede's home with her mother, and she remembers the sight of blood all over the floor after a young



Viet Minh boy cut the throat of Madam Daede, who had confronted him, inquiring the reason for his presence in her attic.

For Gorce's family, the actions of the Viet Minh – Vietnamese nationals who wanted self-governance and independence from France – meant complete uncertainty. There was no way to know day by day whether your gardener was in fact part of the Viet Minh.

“When I was riding a bicycle once, I almost ran over the decomposing hand of a corpse,” Ann shares of a childhood memory. “Underneath, it was very tragic, but on the surface, everything seemed to be OK. I never felt that there was something terrible going on, but when you run over the hand of a corpse, you realize reality. There were two plains of people living”

Indeed, suburban life went on as normally as possible, but just below the surface, violence and fear were running rampant – and the situation seemed to be sinking in on itself.

During Gorce's time in the city, she and the others living with Madam Daede retreated to the bomb shelter daily while American B-29 planes flew overhead, bombing the city, seeking to demolish Japanese war installations. During one of the Japanese house raids, Gorce was arrested by the

Japanese and wrongfully accused of being a spy. While she was incarcerated, Nguyen found a way to get his wife out of jail.

Nguyen and Gorce did their best to protect their children from the scary realities they were facing. The children were told their mother was away visiting friends, and through the years, her time in prison was never a topic of conversation. However, she shared with her daughter that after spending a length of time in the same cell as several other women, they all began to periodically burst into fits of laughter from the stress, fear and uncertainty of it all.

Once French troops liberated Vietnam from the Japanese, Gorce was able to return home. Ann remembers of her mother's return home that she seemed very much the same as before she had left. Despite the trauma of such an experience, Gorce maintained her poise, her grace and her ability to hold her family together.

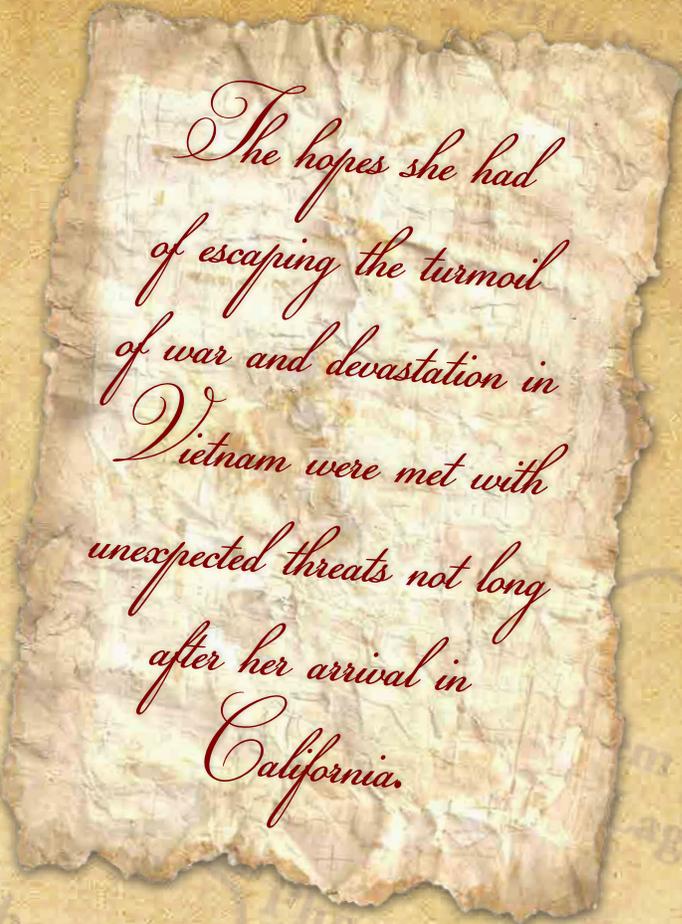
By 1955, the conflict and overt violence had subsided temporarily, allowing Nyugen a window of opportunity to provide safety for his wife and daughter. He sent them to live in Paris. Alfred had previously joined the U.S. military and was already in France. The plan was for Nyugen to tie up some loose ends with the business and join his family in Paris. However, he became ill

and was never reunited with his family. He died of colon cancer in the early '60s.

While in Paris, Gorce and Ann learned that Alfred would be continuing his education at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. Gorce had money in savings to send Ann to the university for one year along with Alfred. Realizing both of her children would be in the United States, Gorce decided she'd like to try living in San Francisco. She had heard glamorous stories of California but had no knowledge of the English language or any idea how she would support herself once she arrived.

Nevertheless, a conversation with a kind Frenchman on the airplane ride she took solo marked the beginning of her adventure in the United States. He gave her the address of a hotel in San Francisco, but she was unable to communicate once she arrived. She only ate hamburgers for the first several weeks until she began learning the names of other entrée options. Eventually, Gorce got a job as a stock girl and started to acquire some command of English.

The hopes she had of escaping the turmoil of war and devastation in Vietnam were met with unexpected threats not long after her arrival in California. One day, while taking a walk in the park, a man pointed a knife between her eyes



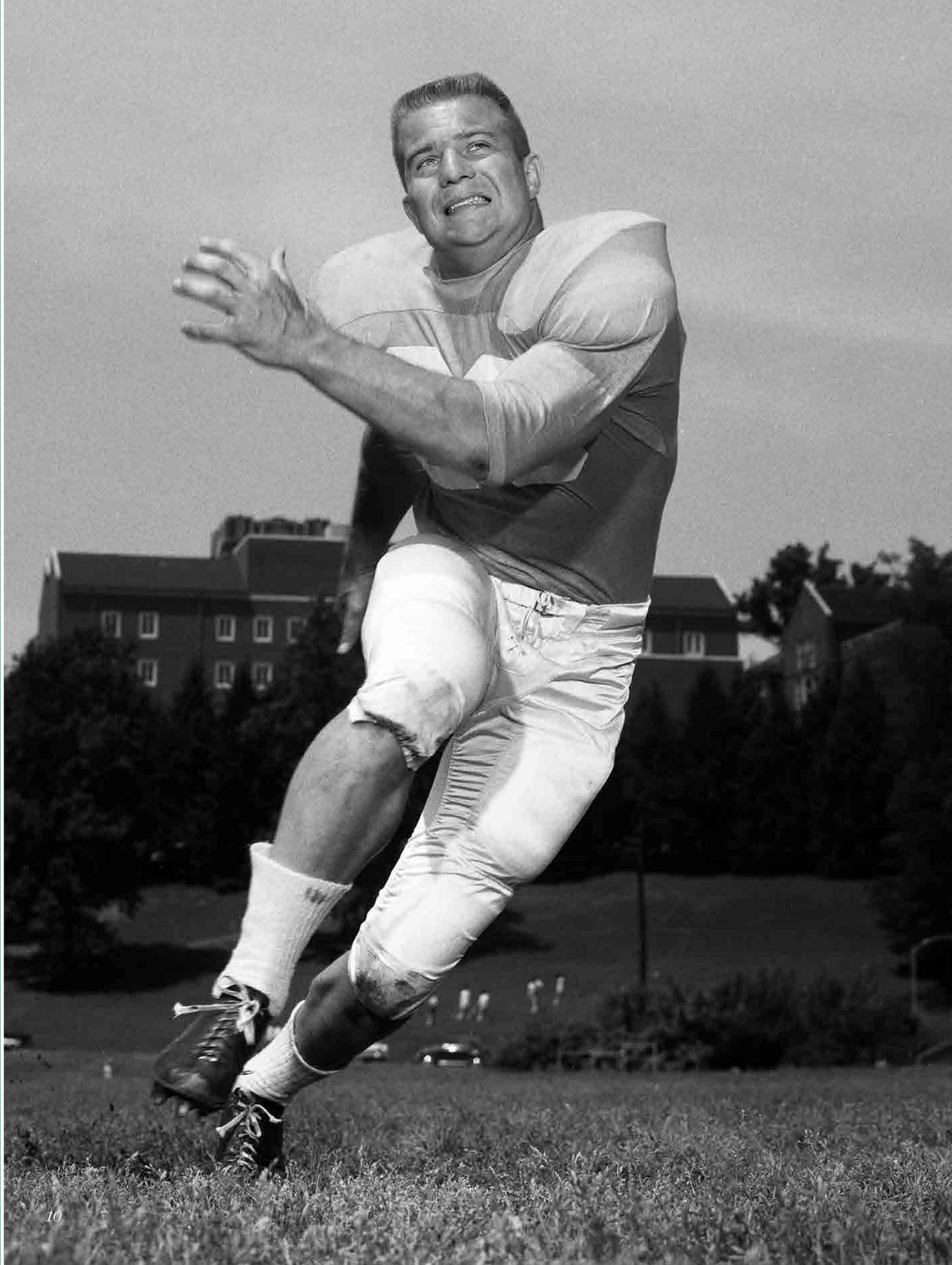
*The hopes she had  
of escaping the turmoil  
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California.*

and began to tear apart her dress. Fortunately, the noise of an approaching vehicle scared the attacker away, and the driver came to Gorce's aid. That same year, a 6.5-magnitude earthquake struck. During the earthquake, Gorce and some friends decided to make the most of a perilous moment by enjoying a drink at Top of the Mark, a rooftop bar.

Through the years, Gorce and Ann followed Alfred wherever his work took him. After San Francisco, Gorce relocated to San Diego, then on to New York, Miami and, finally, Richland, Wash., where Alfred began to fulfill his dream – establishing his own vineyard. Sadly, he died of a heart attack in 1987, just 10 years after moving to Richland.

Gorce found work in department stores wherever she lived until she retired in the late '70s. Upon retirement, she enjoyed her three dogs, collecting flower pots, planting her favorite flowers and traveling with friends to see the sites. Ann speaks highly of her mother's ability to seek solutions despite unspeakable obstacles and continues to be an active part of her mother's life and care.

An occasional song will come to Gorce's mind from those days nearly a century ago when she walked the streets of Lyon, holding her nanny's hand. Having endured a life of challenge with poise and grace, Gorce attributes her longevity to dancing and sweet vermouth. 🍷



# WRITING HIS OWN PLAYBOOK

• KENNETH HONEA •

By Tim Moore



As a young man, Kenneth Honea had no idea where life would take him. He didn't aim for goals that were in the distant future. He didn't want to limit himself to just one option.

He lived life one day at a time, with excitement and energy. He would scope out what was right in front of him, taking the opportunities that seemed best at the time.

It's only fitting that much of Honea's life was spent on the football field, where every play is different. With each snap, you must be prepared and ready to take whatever comes your way. If anyone was born with a mind to play football, Honea was. He lived and played in very much the same way.

Honea was born in Ider, Ala., in 1942. Ider was a small town, centered around its farming community. Honea describes it as one of those towns that has only one of everything: one gas station, one grocery store, maybe even just one stoplight. It is to Ider that Honea can trace back his earliest memories, which are full of cows, wood and hard work.



Photo by Vick Laney

Honea was the only child born to Paul and Precious Honea. The family tried farming in Ider but couldn't make a decent living. While Honea was still young, they moved north to Chattanooga, Tenn., where his father started a career in combustion engineering, and his mother worked as a secretary at a law firm.

Growing up, Honea spent more time playing outside than he did inside. In junior high, he began playing sports.

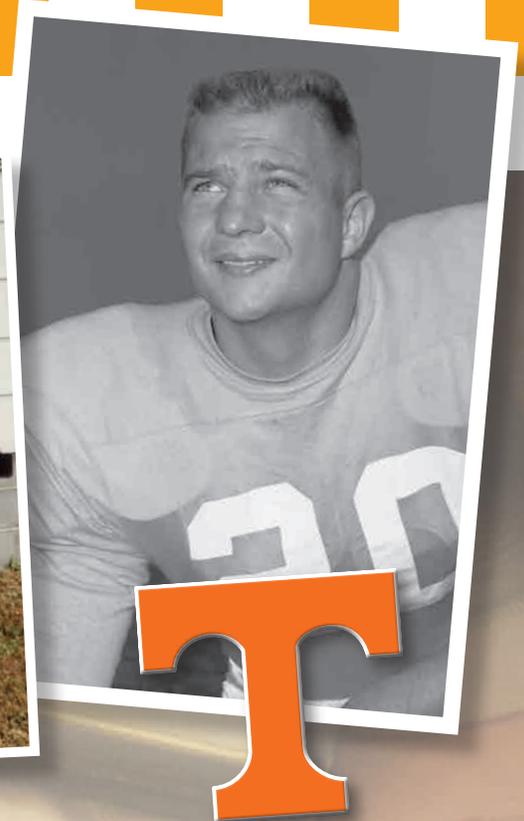
"It seemed like I was involved in every sport that was going on," said Honea. "I would go from basketball to football to track to baseball."

Honea attended City High School in Chattanooga, where he played running back on the football team.

During his senior year, he would often come home to find college football coaches waiting in his living room with his parents. Coaches at universities such as Alabama, Auburn, Ole Miss and Tennessee had noticed his abilities on the field and were offering him full scholarships.

Of all the options given to him, Honea chose the University of Tennessee, and he arrived on campus in the fall of 1960. He briefly played as a running back for the Volunteers, but then played the rest of his college football career as a blocking back, or fullback.

Even today, Honea remembers some of the most intense games of his college career. In 1962, the Volunteers faced off against the Ole Miss Rebels, who were in the midst of a perfect season. Tennessee, stuck in a losing season, managed to bring on the biggest fight Ole Miss had seen in its conference that year. Although Tennessee lost the game 19-6,



Honea still smiles at how great a battle it was.

Honea also vividly remembers playing Kentucky the day after John F. Kennedy was assassinated. The Volunteers won the game, but it is the historical significance that Honea will never forget.

In 1964, Honea graduated from UTK with a bachelor's degree in physical education.

Not long after graduation, Honea joined the New York Jets. During his time with the Jets, he was fortunate enough to play alongside football legends like Joe Namath.

"He had the biggest mouth I ever saw," said Honea. "But he also had the quickest throwing release I ever saw. He zipped passes right in to you."

After one year with the Jets, Honea moved to Virginia to play for the Richmond Rebels of the American Football League. He played for the Rebels at night, and he taught physical education and coached football for Richmond High School during the day.

Soon, another opportunity arose. After just two years in Virginia, Honea moved to Clinton, Tenn.

Honea spent five years teaching and coaching at Clinton High School. He was one of the most successful coaches in the school's history, and one year, he won the Coach of the Year award. To this day, he enjoys reflecting on his coaching experience in Clinton.

"Oak Ridge, at the time, was the best in the state. In my first

year at Clinton, we beat 'em," said Honea with a big smile.

The next destination for Honea was Cookeville, Tenn., where he continued his career as a physical education teacher and a football coach. Soon, however, Honea discovered that Cookeville had even bigger opportunities waiting for him.

One day, Honea became curious as to what other teaching positions were available. He scanned ads in the newspaper and saw available positions in mathematics and history. They didn't interest him. But then he came across an ad for a special education position, and Honea recognized an exciting window of opportunity.

With Tennessee Technological University just across town,



**“I GUESS MY MOM AND MY DAD INSPIRED ME THE MOST [IN LIFE],” HONEA SAID. “THEY WERE ALWAYS HARDWORKING, RELIGIOUS AND TRYING TO HELP PEOPLE.”**



Honea decided to pursue a master’s degree in special education. Impressively, he did this while teaching and coaching simultaneously.

After completing his master’s degree, Honea got a position in special education in Cookeville. Quickly, a simple pursuit of a new job became a lifelong passion.

“These kids were always ‘left behind’ kids,” said Honea, “and to see them start succeeding, doing good, that thrilled me.”

After several more years in Cookeville – including another Coach of the Year award – Honea left to teach and coach at other schools in both Georgia and Tennessee.

In 1996, with his parents’ health declining, Honea retired,

sold his house and moved in with them. He retired from Sparta High School in Sparta, Tenn.

“I guess my mom and my dad inspired me the most [in life],” Honea said. “They were always hardworking, religious and trying to help people.”

Like most coaches, Honea loves to brag about his players. He can remember dozens of names, as well as the years and positions that they played.

One player that he specifically remembers is Bart Walker, who is now the senior vice president of operations for Life Care Centers of America. Walker played on the defensive line for Honea while attending White County High School in Sparta, Tenn.

“Coach Honea was a really knowledgeable and hardcore guy,” said Walker. “He was highly disciplined, and I think for me today, that means a lot.”

Even while Honea was achieving great things on the football field and in the classroom, he always made time for his children: Kirk, Annette and Mike.

“I’m most proud of my kids. They never ran into any kind of trouble, always good kids, always working hard,” said Honea.

Now living at Life Care Center of East Ridge, Tenn., Honea has a lot of past experiences to look back on and smile about. His longing for adventure and new opportunities helped him achieve greatness not only on the field, but in his life overall. 🌱



Photo by Evelyn Images Boston

# Redefining family

• JOANN BAKER •

*By Tanya Bumgardner*

A young Joann Baker was seeking child-rearing advice from the leader of a conference. He answered her question, and then added, “You know, you can’t save every child in the world.”

At 81, she reflected on that moment with a chuckle. “I have never forgotten that,” she said. “But I would like to save every one.”

Baker has directly impacted the

more than blood. It was choosing to care for and be cared for by anyone who was around and in need. Our ‘family’ was a constantly growing and evolving life force, adapting to whatever was needed at any specific time.”

Baker isn’t sure exactly what influenced her inviting, caring spirit. Perhaps growing up in Haverhill, Mass., near five families of relatives had something to do with it. Her extended family was supportive when her parents lost their home during the Great Depression. And maybe it has been her faith in God, which has been the foundation for most of her adult life.

Regardless, she shrugs it all off in a humble, yet matter-of-fact manner. “It’s just what you do. That’s about it.”

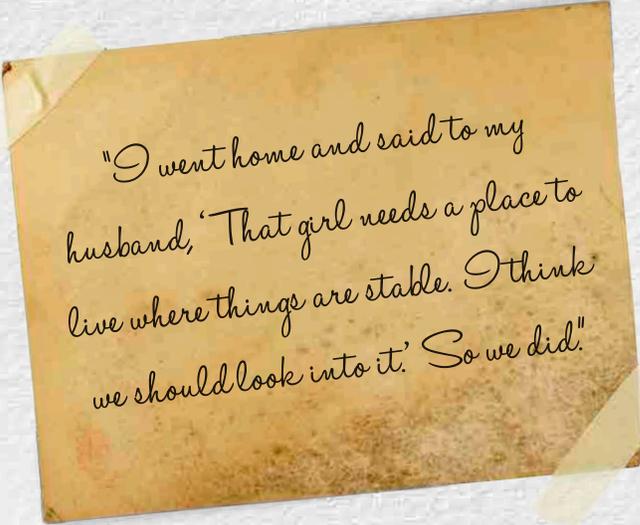
Faith has no doubt been a factor in Baker’s generosity, magnifying her already charitable nature. Prior to 1968, Baker had reached out to children primarily through teaching. But a turning point in her personal life and a few Billy Graham events led Baker to open her heart even further.

“In 1968, a friend visited me, and she had been at the same Billy Graham convention,” Baker said. “She actually introduced me to Jesus as a personal savior rather than just a person you

adored. ... We got really involved in counseling and witnessing. There was a man in Boston named John DeBrine, and he was running a teenage meeting at a temple once a month. We started taking our girls. We started counseling, and then our girls started counseling. It just mushroomed. We learned more and more and more. It’s been a major part of our lives.”

Two years later, at a local showing of a Billy Graham movie in Medford, Mass., Baker counseled two middle-school-aged girls. One of them was Michelle, who had a troubled childhood and a record of running away from home. She would become a foster child to Baker and her husband, Irving.

“I went home and said to my husband, ‘That girl needs a place to live where things are stable. I think we should look into it.’ So we did. And her social worker was very happy to have a place to put her where she would stay put, she hoped. And she did not run away while she was with us.”



*"I went home and said to my husband, 'That girl needs a place to live where things are stable. I think we should look into it.' So we did."*

lives of 15 children – including her three biological daughters – and has influenced countless more through her time as a foster parent, day care provider, home economics teacher, Girl Scouts troop leader, 4-H volunteer and spiritual counselor. To Baker, the definition of “family” goes beyond traditional expectations.

“I learned early on that ‘family’ was all-inclusive,” said Jennifer Jones, Baker’s youngest daughter. “This wasn’t something that was told to me. It was taught by example. There were always ‘aunts and uncles’ around that I never realized had no blood relationship; that didn’t matter. Family was





When Michelle arrived at their home, Baker and Irving had been married for nearly 14 years. Their oldest daughter, Betsy, was a freshman in high school while Jennifer and middle daughter Lee were in middle school. Michelle had to adjust to the Bakers' structured home, and the Bakers had to learn how to cope with an expanded family.

"Adding new members to our family wasn't always

easy," Jennifer said. "There were lots of challenges that the Cleavers and Brady Bunch never imagined, but our parents guided us through, teaching us the value of working together because you will always be family. When there is a need, we work together to support each other and fill the need because that is what families do."

After Michelle's nine-month stay, many other children passed through the Bakers'

home – there were always extra plates at the dinner table. And with Baker's in-home day care, their house was certainly a lively one.

However, it wasn't long before they heard from Michelle again. "Michelle went home in June and ran away from her mother shortly after that and disappeared," explained Baker. "The police found her in Cambridge, which is maybe 20 miles from her home. And she was pregnant, walking the streets at 1 o'clock in the morning."

Michelle gave birth to a girl that she named Rene. She decided she wanted the Bakers to raise her daughter because she knew they would give Rene the same love and guidance they gave her. Rene lived with the Bakers for most of her

childhood and still considers them family.

"When I think back to my childhood and what influenced me in my life to become who I am today, I would have to say that my biggest inspiration would be my mother," Rene says of Baker. "Not the mother that brought me into this world, but the mother who gave me life. ... I feel [Baker] truly saved my life, and I feel that she is living proof that making extraordinary

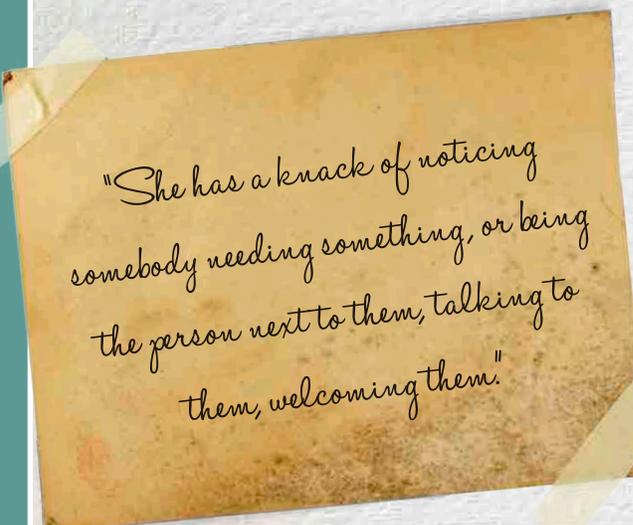
choices can lead to an extraordinary life."

Other members of Baker's "family," like Joy and Corrie, started out in her day care, eventually moving in full time. Joy wanted to finish out her senior year of high school in the States until her parents, missionaries in Papua New Guinea, returned on furlough. Corrie's mother was a single parent working for the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, trying to juggle raising a child and a demanding job. Baker offered to help out, and Corrie lived with them until she started school.

To survive with such a full household, everyone helped out, especially the teenagers when it came to caring for toddlers Rene and Corrie. As a result, long-lasting bonds formed.

"It was like they grew up in two families – the three teenagers and the two toddlers," Baker said. "But now, they are like sisters. Rene is extremely close to my middle daughter. They're constantly getting together. ... The fact that they are still family makes me feel real good because I'd hate to see them off by themselves with no family to lean on."

Baker offered her home to any child who needed one. Fifteen children were cared for under her roof. But as Jennifer recalls, these children



"She has a knack of noticing somebody needing something, or being the person next to them, talking to them, welcoming them."





weren't the only ones who claimed the Bakers as surrogate parents.

"When we moved from Maynard to Bedford and lived next door to our church, our house actually became an annex of sorts for all of the kids in our youth group. And our youth group included about 80 kids. A vast majority of them referred to my parents as Mom and Dad."

Eventually, Irving's health declined, leading the Bakers to stop their child-caring efforts. But that didn't put an end to Baker's desire to help others. Even now, Baker, as a resident of Life Care Center of Acton, Mass., mothers those around her, often showing love by crocheting baby blankets and sweater sets for the

babies of expecting associates or by just being a friend.

"She has a knack of noticing somebody needing something, or being the person next to them, talking to them, welcoming them," said Jane Brigham, chaplain at Life Care Center of Acton. "It seems to be an innate quality of perception."

Baker's example has become a legacy. Jennifer is proof of that. Jennifer adopted her godson as an infant, knowing her future would change overnight and she might have to raise him as a single parent. Thankfully, she met and married a man named Eric who has helped raise her son as his own.

Of course, Baker, with her easygoing nature, doesn't think what she's done for so many is

monumental. For her, caring for others is second nature – just a part of life, part of who she is and part of what God has called her to do. But the fact that she was surrounded by both biological and adopted children and grandchildren at the facility's recent Mother's Day celebration is a testament to her legacy.

"She's got a big heart and wants to help," Jennifer pointed out. "She'd take in the whole world if she could." 🌱



Photo by Evelyn Images Boston



Photo by Clark Woolsey Photography

# The Personal Touch

KNOX TAUSSIG

By Dara Carroll

**B**abe Ruth. Lou Gehrig. Grover Cleveland Alexander. Rogers Hornsby. These are just a few of the Cardinals and Yankees who took the field during the 1926 World Series. The team rosters for that Series are scattered with hall of famers, players whose legendary careers found immortality in record books and inked the annals of baseball history. The Cardinals won the Series 4 games to 3 – clinching their first ever World Series pennant.

For most, the details of that Series are etched in baseball lore. But for a 94-year-old resident at Life Care Center of Bridgeton, Mo., the Series is more than legend. It is a memory.

Knox Taussig clearly remembers attending the Series with his father back in October 1926. Young Taussig was only 7 at the time, but the St. Louis native proudly tagged along to Sportsman's Park with his father to cheer on the hometown team.

"I remember the players," said Taussig. "Babe Ruth. That's the last time I saw Babe Ruth

play. And Lou Gehrig. I remember watching him, too."

The Series was exciting, but it wasn't Taussig's first trip to the ballpark.



"I went to ball games almost all of my young life because my dad was a baseball nut," said Taussig. "He used to take the afternoon off, and he'd come pick me up, and we'd go to a ball game."

Baseball hasn't changed much in the last century. But watching the game has.

"Going to games was a lot different then," said Taussig. "We didn't have the beautiful stadiums we've got now or all of the extras. We sat in wooden chairs that were very uncomfortable, and we just watched the game. The game would start at 2 o'clock and be over by 4:30."

Through his adolescent years, Taussig's love for the game became as passionate as his father's. He eventually took to the field himself and made it all the way to playing first base in a semi-professional league.

It's easy to guess who the southpaw's all-time favorite Cardinal is: Stan "the Man" Musial.

"Because he was a left-handed first baseman too!" exclaimed Taussig. "I copied Stan's style of play."

Taussig found inspiration in Musial's example on and off the field. Musial played his entire career with the Cardinals – 22 years with one team. It's a loyalty that's rare in sports and in life, but Taussig's commitment to his family and career mirrors Musial's devotion to responsibility.

A focus on responsibility was first instilled in Taussig by



*“Face-to-face,” said Taussig. “That’s how I got to know people. I had a good gift of the gab, I guess. I was a people person. I loved other people, and I let them know it.”*

his parents, both from well-established St. Louis families. His father was a Harvard-educated insurance broker who worked hard to provide for Taussig and his two younger sisters.



After graduating from the University of Missouri with a degree in journalism, Taussig had a chance to model his own devotion when he enlisted in the Army in December 1940. He served for five years, spending most of his time on the frigid outer banks of Alaska, protecting the Western edge of the United States from the constant threat of Japanese invasion.

After the war, transitioning out of the Army included stints in Seattle, Wash., Fort

Ord, Calif., and Washington, D.C. At each base, Taussig mingled with troops and civilians from around the U.S., but at heart, he longed to return to the Midwest. It only made sense that he would fall



in love with a Missouri girl.

Taussig met Peggy Herold Landis through a friend from back home who shared a large, five-bedroom house with Peggy and several other girls in the nation’s capital.

“She was a St. Louis girl,” said Taussig. “Her home in St. Louis was about four or five blocks from where my family lived, but we didn’t know each other.”

Peggy was a recent widow. Her husband, a Navy pilot, was lost at sea in July

1943. Peggy originally went to D.C. to be near her husband. When she learned he wasn’t coming home, she stayed in the city to commiserate with girlfriends and continue working.



“She was working for the Navy, and I was in the Army,” laughed Taussig. “We had a few fights about that!”

The hometown connection was a perfect fit for Taussig and Peggy, and they married in July 1946, settling back into St. Louis and reestablishing their roots.

Along with marriage, ’46 brought Taussig his first newspaper job, with the *St. Louis Star-Times*.

“I was entertainment editor. I did stories about

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people who had big parties and women, the hoi polloi.”

Taussig soon transferred to another local paper, the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, where he spent the rest of his career, more than 25 years promoting local businesses and the fledgling St. Louis entertainment industry.

“Sometimes I sold advertising; sometimes I did storytelling,” recalled Taussig. “It depended on what the editor wanted.”

Most of Taussig’s days were spent selling advertising for the entertainment section of the *Post-Dispatch*, and he excelled at it.

“I remember him coming home on Friday nights and saying, ‘Well, I was the top seller for the month. Nobody came close to me!’” said oldest daughter, Judy Alles. “I think it happened quite often. He sold more ads in the paper than the other [eight] advertising salesmen at the *Post*.”

Most of Taussig’s ad sales came from nightclubs, theaters and other local entertainment spots. He was in competition with ad salesmen from the

*St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, another local paper, so he worked hard to build relationships with his potential clients and regular advertisers.



“Face-to-face,” said Taussig. “That’s how I got to know people. I had a good gift of the gab, I guess. I was a people person. I loved other people, and I let them know it.”

Taussig personally visited his customers to discuss their ads and do rough sketches for them.

“I drew up an ad for them based on what size they wanted and what they could afford,” said

Taussig. “I’d ask them how they wanted the ad to look and what they wanted to advertise, and I would do a little artwork right there at the table with them. Then, I would give my idea to the artists at the newspaper, and they would draw it up and publish it.”

Taussig repeated this creative process over and over again, sometimes driving more than 100 miles a day as he crisscrossed the city.

It wasn’t unusual for Taussig’s work to keep him out until 10 o’clock at night,

sometimes later. It made family time a premium, but his wife and three daughters understood the pressures of maintaining a comfortable lifestyle.



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“My dad knew the responsibility of bringing home a paycheck every week,” said Alles. “And that was his responsibility – to do a good job.”

Life was not all work and no play, though. Even as an adult, Taussig was an enthusiastic Cardinals fan and athlete, and he and his wife stayed active with a broad circle of friends. While their girls enjoyed weekends with relatives, Taussig and Peggy found plenty of ways to relax and have fun.

“On Friday night, they would play golf,” said Alles. “It was called the Twi-Niters. They would play nine holes and then come back for dinner and bridge. Then, they played 18 holes on Saturday and 18 holes again on Sunday.”

“We had to be good, or we weren’t allowed on the course!” added Taussig.

In 1965, Taussig and Peggy were selected to be marshals for the 11<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> holes of the U.S. Open at the Bellerive Country Club, which Gary Player won in a playoff.

The couple was comfortable on the links, but they knew how to glide around a dance floor, too. They even won a few ballroom dancing competitions.

“They were very, very smooth,” remembered Alles.

Taussig’s youngest daughter, Jill Templeton, thinks dancing is what actually drew her parents together so many years ago in D.C.

“Dad used to teach dancing at an Arthur Murray studio,”

said Templeton. “Mom was born to dance. Mom used to tell me they would be up until the wee hours of the morning, dancing the night away.”

The three Taussig girls – Alles, Martha Taussig and Templeton – were encouraged to

pitch to him overhand, and he would catch with his first baseman’s mitt.”

Like many driven by an innate sense of responsibility, Taussig finds it difficult to find pride in any one particular accomplishment. He sees every endeavor equally – all had to be completed with excellence.

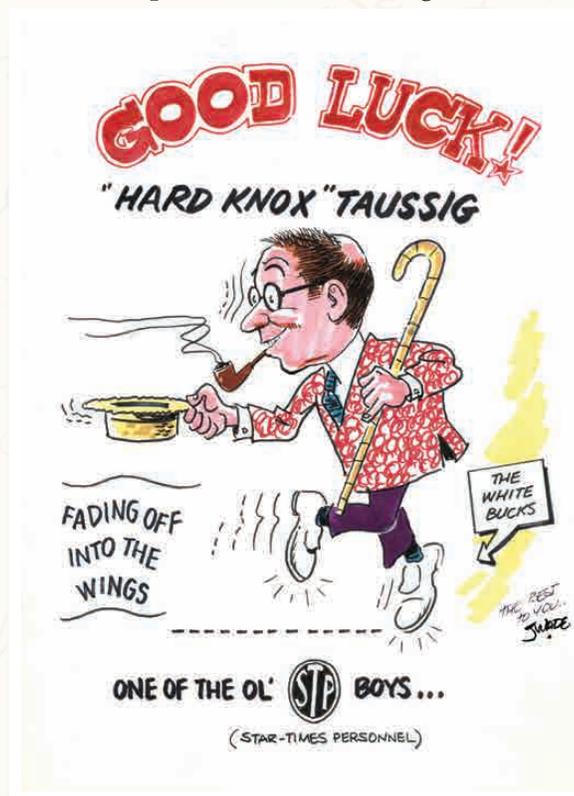
“I’m not prouder of one thing than I am of another,” explained Taussig, “because they were so equal in importance. They were all a job for me to do, and I did my job as well as I knew how. In the end, they were all connected in some way.”

Whether he was on the diamond, walking the golf course or pounding the pavement for the *Post-Dispatch*, Taussig’s commitment to his responsibilities never wavered. And, he never

lost sight of what was most important: people.

“What made me sign with the Cardinals?” Stan Musial once asked. “Because they used salesmanship, the personal touch. Where others wrote, they talked. Where others waited, they acted.”

Sounds a lot like Knox Taussig. Where others wrote, he talked. Where others waited, he acted. He used salesmanship. He had the personal touch. 🙌



stay as active as their parents. Alles fondly remembers ice skating in the winter months and swimming, golfing and playing softball in the summer months. And when he had time, Taussig was eager to share his love of the game with her.

“When [Dad] would come home at a decent hour in the summer,” said Alles, “he would have me out in the backyard. I was probably 8 to 10 years old, and I would have to strike out three imaginary batters before we could go in to dinner. Mom would get so mad! I would

# A FRIEND OF Fame



• DOLORIS DRISKEL •



Photo by Charles Summerhill Photography

By Julia Wilhelm

**I**f you're ever in a jam, here I am." This has become one of the classic sayings of Doloris "Tootie" Driskel, and it is known by the associates of Life Care Center of Vista, Calif., where she currently resides. While dementia may take memories of the past, innate characteristics such as a love for people can overcome any obstacle. A desire to be a friend to others is nothing new to "Tootie," and her life story reflects her spunky personality.

Driskel was adopted at infancy by a family living in the same apartment building as Driskel's biological mother in Kansas City, Mo. Her adopted mother,

father and three older sisters immediately accepted Driskel as a cherished member of their family. To this day, the children of her adopted sisters consider Driskel to be the matriarch of the family.

*One of her many duties included stocking wealthy filmmaker and avid aviator Howard Hughes' personal plane before taking off.*



"Family is the most important thing to my mother," said Dona Mara, daughter of Driskel.

The value of hard work was instilled in Driskel at a young age. She worked many jobs during her teenage years, when she was not at cheerleading practice. Driskel

quickly found the balance between working hard and having fun, but little did she know the greatest fun was yet to be had.

Driskel's athletic ability went beyond cheerleading. Soon after completing high school, she played shortstop for the Kansas City Quartermasters softball team. She describes her team uniforms as exactly like the costumes from the 1992 film *A League of Their Own*.

With her teenage years coming to a close, the excitement was just beginning for Driskel. She, along with her adopted family, moved to Los Angeles. The move began a new chapter of life filled with fun and friends for Driskel.



It was there in Los Angeles where she began a nine-year career as a flight attendant for Trans World Airlines domestic flights. Before merging with American Airlines in 2001, TWA was considered one of the “big four” airlines in the United States, with hubs in Los Angeles and Kansas City.

Driskel saw firsthand why TWA was nicknamed “airline to the stars” in the 1950s. One of her many duties included stocking wealthy filmmaker and avid aviator Howard Hughes’ personal plane before taking off. Driskel went beyond her required duties and was always careful to pack extra oranges on Hughes’ plane because she knew they were his favorite snack.

Driskel was never in short supply of friends, and TWA extended her circle of friends even further. She shared an apartment for a time with a TWA instructor named Barbara. It was common for groups of airplane servicemen and flight attendants to watch movies together and enjoy each other’s company. The servicemen were easily enticed by the opportunity to eat a homecooked meal from a

flight attendant’s kitchen. Driskel recalls spending nights with stewardesses and servicemen eating popcorn while listening and dancing to records.

After working as a flight attendant, Driskel transitioned to sales of airplane parts. Her career change was fortunate, as it led to the meeting of her late husband, Don Driskel. Don was a design engineer with his own firm, Haskell Engineering, which is still in business today. The two were married for 40 years and were said by Mara to be the perfect example of the phrase “opposites attract.” Driskel and Don had three daughters: Diane, Mara and Doreen.

Mara recalls her mother and father dressing up as Santa Claus and Mrs. Claus and driving a golf cart at a local event. “She got him to do the most ridiculous things,” Mara said, including dressing up as Nelson Eddie, a Canadian mountie, for her bridal shower.

The couple was married in 1952. They relocated to Palm Desert, Calif., in 1960. The Palm Desert area in the 1960s was full of chance encounters. Since Palm

Desert is in close proximity to Los Angeles, many celebrities had vacation homes or permanent homes in the area, so having famous neighbors was quite common. Mara recalls babysitting children of celebrities who lived down the street.

The move to the desert also meant career changes for the couple. The Driskels transitioned from the air travel industry to real estate. The couple began selling homes and managing properties for various real estate agencies.

“My mother was always volunteering at school and was on fun committees,” said Mara. “She was a very active member of the desert community.”

Driskel’s love for sports resurfaced once again in a love of golf. She had a 12 handicap and won many golf tournaments over the years. Golf not only provided Driskel with enjoyment, but also many opportunities to meet amazing people.

While working at the Bob Hope Classic Golf Tournament one year, Driskel was able to meet former president Gerald Ford. Ford spoke



*"If you're ever up a tree,  
count on me."*

at the event and later mingled with the crowd, allowing Driskel an opportunity of a lifetime: shaking hands with a former United States president.

Meeting Ford was just one of many such encounters with iconic individuals. George Gobel, a famous actor, was a close family friend of the Driskels and would often golf with them. Gobel was known for his comedy show *The George Gobel Show*, appearing as a regular on *Hollywood Squares* and for a memorable appearance on *The Tonight Show with Johnny Carson*.

Driskel's skill on the golf course was obvious in her choice

of partner: "Mousie" Powell. Better known as actress Diane Lewis, Mousie and Driskel were an unstoppable duo.

Mousie was the wife of Hollywood actor William Powell, who starred in *The Thin Man*. The Ladies Professional Golf Association currently gives an annual award in the couple's honor, the William and Mousie Powell Award. The award is given to exemplary LPGA players.

Other close friends of the Driskels were their neighbors Walter and Anne Burkemo. Walter was the 1953 PGA Champion.

It was through her relationship with the Burkemos that Driskel had an experience that grew into one of her most amusing stories.

Just a few years ago, Driskel was honored at a banquet in Palm

Desert for memorable senior citizens. Former actor Howard Keel hosted the event. Driskel approached the microphone on stage after Keel welcomed her.

"You know Mr. Keel, we've met before," she said as Keel looked on perplexed. "Yes, through Walter and Anne Burkemo. My husband and I were invited to go to a party with you guys one night, and we decided not to. The next thing I know, I hear a voice singing outside my window that night."

The crowd listened intently.

"I have a confession to make," Driskel continued. "I know that was you singing, and it was me that threw the shoe at you to get you to shut up."

The crowd erupted with laughter, including Keel.

Other famous friends of the Driskels included New York



Yankees manager Casey Stengel and his wife, Edna. Stengel did business with Don, and since Edna had no children of her own, she enjoyed spending time with Driskel's daughters. While Driskel was always glad to have many friends, the Stengels' friendship was especially exciting because Driskel and her husband were able to attend several World Series.

In addition to traveling with friends, the Driskels loved to travel across the United States with their children. Mara recalls many trips to Michigan to see her paternal grandmother. These trips often involved picking up a new car from a family friend's car dealership in Detroit. Other memorable family vacation destinations were Yellowstone National Park and Catalina Island.

"My mother was all about making things fun for people," said Mara. "She always wanted people to have fun and be happy."

"If you're ever up a tree, count on me." Another classic saying of Driskel, these words display her love for people – especially her family and friends. Combine her love of people and her spunky personality, and a lifetime of friendship and happiness is the result. 🍷



• PERCIVAL EVERHARD ASHBY •

The  
*City Life*

*By Leigh Atherton*

A dancer with many memories to share lives at Life Care Center of New Port Richey, Fla. While Percival Everhard Ashby's dancing shoes may be a bit dusty, his imagination is not. To listen to him speak, it feels as though he is back in those dance halls, reliving the glory days of one of his loves: Latin dancing.

Ashby was not born with a love for dance. But life took many twists and turns to introduce him to the passionate pastime.

Born right in the middle of the Great Depression, Ashby's parents decided to send him to Jamaica when he was 1 to stay with his wealthy aunt and uncle. His uncle was a governor general of the British West Indies.

Ashby's memories of Jamaica are vague since he was so young, but one memory does stand out: "I remember having to get up, put on all my white clothes and go out on the veranda. Somebody would blow a little bugle, and they would run up the Union Jack."

At the age of 6, he returned to his parents in New York City.

In 1940, Ashby and his parents moved out of the city to the Bronx. At this time, the Bronx was more of a suburb of Manhattan and still maintained a country atmosphere with vendors selling their wares in the street.

The neighborhood was mainly Irish-Catholic, which varied greatly from the Episcopalian background of the Ashby family, and the neighbors were a bit rough around the edges. Ashby quickly began trying to make friends.



"My name was Percival – not a good name to have in a tough neighborhood," said Ashby. "They asked me what my name was, and from the movies and the comic books, the tough guys were always named Lefty. So I told them my name was Lefty."

Ashby is not left-handed, but he did go by Lefty for the next 25 years.

"I remember having to get up, put on all my white clothes and go out on the veranda. Somebody would blow a little bugle, and they would run up the Union Jack."

With a love for the Bronx, specifically his neighborhood, Ashby graduated from Samuel Gompers High School, an electrical trade school, and chose to stay in the area but work in the city.

The work he found was in New York City's garment industry as a delivery boy for a company that made graduation caps and gowns as well as various religious robes. One interesting delivery was to the Dean of Canterbury, who was visiting the city and had requested a custom robe, formally called a cassock.

"They made me deliver it to the Dean, who was living in the Waldorf Astoria," explained Ashby. "When I went to the Waldorf Astoria, I was all dressed up. They saw I had a package, so they told me to take the service elevator – which I paid no attention to whatsoever. I went on the passenger elevator. I went to his floor, and one of his managers or whatever said to give him the box. I'd been told to make sure it fit, so I told him, 'No, I have to see the Dean in person.' He tried on the cassock, and it fit. I was given a thank you, and that was that."

While Ashby was working as a delivery boy, his boss noticed his interest in the sewing machines and taught him to sew.

Ashby was drafted into the Army to serve in the Korean War when he was 21. Leaving his job in the garment industry, he served in Korea for 11 months before he was honorably discharged. Ashby describes his time serving in the war as the low point of his life.

Returning to his beloved Bronx after the war was refreshing, and Ashby also returned to his job. Except, this time he was working as a tailor and making good money.

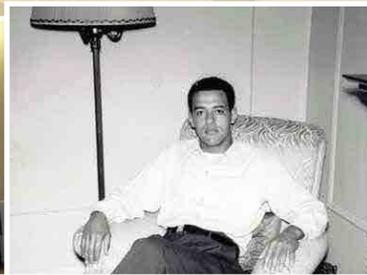
A career change occurred a short time later, when Ashby

transitioned to a job as an electrician with the New York City Transit Authority, the company that oversaw all subways and busses within the city.

Soon after, Ashby's path finally led him toward dancing.



Mambo and Latin music as a whole were taking over the dance clubs in most major cities. Until this time, Cuban and American jazz had never been melded. But when they were combined, a sassy and intricate Latin dance emerged. Many dances gained



nights. With expensive dance shoes and friends who loved to dance, Ashby lived for dancing into the wee hours of the morning.

Popular and up-and-coming Hollywood stars were also part of the craze. Ashby encountered many famous



A man named Daniel Acosta was the first Latin to move into Ashby's apartment building, and he and Ashby became quick friends. Acosta frequently invited Ashby to go dancing. Eventually, he convinced Ashby to give it a try.

"I had to pay to go in," said Ashby. "As I approached, the music was going, and I thought, 'Oh boy, I like this music.' Then when we went in, I saw people dancing, and that became my marijuana."

Ashby had found his new hobby, and as he explained, he worked his day job so he could fund his weekend dancing adventures.

Ashby's love for dance began in the 1950s during the height of Mambo Mania.



popularity during this time, including the mambo, the merengue and the cha cha.

The mambo maintained extreme popularity, and it was Ashby's dance of choice. The mambo danced in the 1950s is not the mambo Americans are familiar with today. The kind Ashby learned involved "feeling the music" and large amounts of improvisation and intricate steps.

Latin dance halls were popping up all over New York City, and Ashby could be found in one of the popular ones on Friday, Saturday and Sunday

people, including Marlon Brando, Eva Gardner, Wally Cox and Robert Duvall.

One such encounter involved a beautiful young

actress: "I didn't know who she was," explained Ashby. "She asked me to dance, and I wasn't very interested. But I danced, and she fumbled her way through. And, I behaved myself - very well. I didn't want to show her up."

It wasn't until two weeks later that Ashby learned he'd danced with Mitzi Gaynor, one of the stars of the movie *South Pacific*.

Ashby lost all interest in beautiful young actresses and other dancers when he met a woman named Maria Torres.

"I met her in a dance hall, and she was sitting with some woman I knew," Ashby shared. "She was gorgeous. And, I used to have this trick: when I liked someone, I gave them my number."

Much to Ashby's chagrin, Torres never called.

"I saw her a few times after the initial meeting and finally asked her out," shared Ashby. "She said yes. Later on she said I was too much of a playboy; she thought I was married. That's why she wouldn't go out in the beginning."

That first date was all it took for Ashby to call Torres "his lady."

Ashby and Torres enjoyed dancing and visiting the local museums and theaters together. They never married but were committed to each other until Torres' death. Ashby jokingly shared that they became engaged after they'd been together for 18 years. Maria had one daughter from a previous relationship, Liz Torres Skelly, that Ashby proudly calls his daughter, too.

"It was a matter of 40 years of laughing and loving – like the things you see in the movies," said Ashby. "When I look back, I can't really believe it. We never had a fight."

In addition to enjoying all the entertainment New York City had

to offer, Ashby and Torres liked to give back. On one such occasion, they took in a young woman and her newborn baby. They tracked down her family and encouraged her to return home. While they did coax the girl into going home, the bond among the four of them was already formed. Ashby and Torres treated the baby, Daniel, as their grandson and enjoyed spending weekends with him, watching him grow up.

"It was a matter of 40 years of laughing and loving – like the things you see in the movies."

Ashby worked for the New York City Transit Authority for 39 years and 16 days. He only retired then because he had so much retirement built up that it was actually costing him money to work. Ashby did not complain; it was his excuse to spend more time with Torres. She retired from the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, where she had held a job for many years.

Ashby also enjoyed visiting casinos. In fact, he spent so much time at Harrah's Casino in Atlantic City that the casino would send a car to pick him up. He was known to be lucky and won quite a lot.

During their retirement years, both Ashby and Torres encountered various health problems and decided it was time to move closer to family.

Liz and her husband, Ken, lived in Florida, so Ashby and Torres relocated. The Skellys were helping a young family friend raise her daughter, and Torres and Ashby quickly joined, creating more "members" of their family.

Sadly, Ashby's lady passed away on May 6, 2006.

Ashby's humor and spunk are still evident in conversation. He loves spending time with his family, engaging in intellectual conversations and showing compassion toward fellow residents and associates.

"I want to go to Harrah's again," Ashby shared as he laughed about his memories.

It is those memories and imagination that inspire Ashby most days. Memories of the moments of joy. He relives again and again his love for the mambo, but especially, his love for his lady.

"I have a great imagination," he explained. "I go back to Harrah's in the morning in my mind. And I might go dancing in my head in the afternoon." 🕺



# THE SKY IS NOT THE LIMIT

By Heidi Tompkins

Photo by Dustin Kunze Photography

## • VERA ROST •

A little girl pumped diligently on the treadle sewing machine, taking her original clothing designs from paper to her family's wardrobes.

There was delight in creating. There was delight in having an outlet to express her love to the ones closest to her.

And that was just the beginning of a passion that has continued Vera Rost's entire life.

Born in a small Texas town in 1919, Rost was drawn to math and design as early as elementary school. She loved learning and expanding her horizons, thirsty for more.

At age 17, Rost graduated from high school and started working for a local school system to make money for college. There, she met, fell in love with and married Earl Arthur Rost.

These were the years of the Great Depression. After a short time in Texas, the couple moved to California, the land of opportunity, so that Earl could work while Rost studied math and engineering at the University of California in Los Angeles.





As war raged overseas, the United States began preparing, and Earl got a job building ships for the Long Beach Naval Shipyard at Terminal Island.

After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Douglas Aircraft Company in Long Beach put out a call for draftsmen, and Rost jumped at the opportunity, taking a day job there while continuing her classes at UCLA at night.

Those were long days for Rost, who didn't have a car due to rationing. She rode with a friend to work, then took the bus to school and home from there.

"When I got off the bus, I walked six blocks in total blackout to our apartment," Rost remembered. "It was midnight when I got home, and I had to leave for work at 6:30 the next morning."

Even sleep was often interrupted by air raid sirens and the sounds of planes overhead.

"You always prayed it was our planes you heard," Rost said.

Rost loved her job at Douglas, putting her learning to practice in a time when doors were often closed to female engineers. Indeed, throughout her career Rost would

be paid much less than her male counterparts despite her experience and the leadership roles she took on different projects. Still, there was something exciting about being a pioneer for women in her field.

The other satisfaction Rost found in her job was knowing she was contributing to her country's security.

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*...there was something exciting about being a pioneer for women in her field.*

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"One morning I went into the factory to check on some parts," Rost remembered, "and as I was walking through there, I was stopped by some Secret Service men. There, riding in his convertible, was President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Donald Douglas, president of the company, checking on production of aircraft. I could have reached out and touched him, he was so close."

After the war, Rost and her husband returned to Texas and



settled down on a ranch near Giddings, where they owned

a drugstore. Soon, they had a daughter, Sylvia. Then, in 1951, they relocated to Fort Worth so Rost could work for aircraft manufacturer Convair.

"The U.S. Air Force had awarded Convair a contract to design an aircraft able to deliver a nuclear weapon at supersonic speeds," Rost explained. "I was selected to be one of the engineers to work on the B-58 Hustler for the next nine years, working on all phases of its development."

Sylvia Petersen remembers her mother working long hours. However, on the weekends, Rost always made time for church and family.

"When my mom was home, she was strictly family, family, family," said Petersen. "She was cooking and having people over. We'd always have my relatives come up from South Texas, and we'd have barbecues in the backyard. She gave 110 percent, no matter what she was doing, whether it was work or with us."



On Nov. 11, 1956, the B-58 aircraft took off for the first time, the culmination of Rost's and her team's dedication.

"I shall never forget the day it took the maiden flight," Rost said. "It is an experience you cannot describe, only feel."

The B-58 Hustler changed history, breaking records for speed and altitude and becoming a forerunner of bombers for years to come. It was a powerful, fast (able to break the sound barrier) and complex machine, and the U.S. Air Force called on the most experienced and elite crews to fly it. The Strategic Air Command ordered 86 of the aircraft between 1960 and 1970.

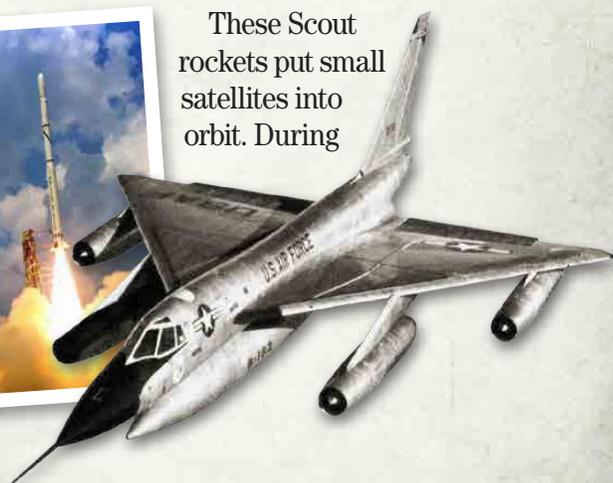
Actor and bomber pilot Jimmy Stewart starred in and narrated a film about the Hustler, *Champion of Champions*.

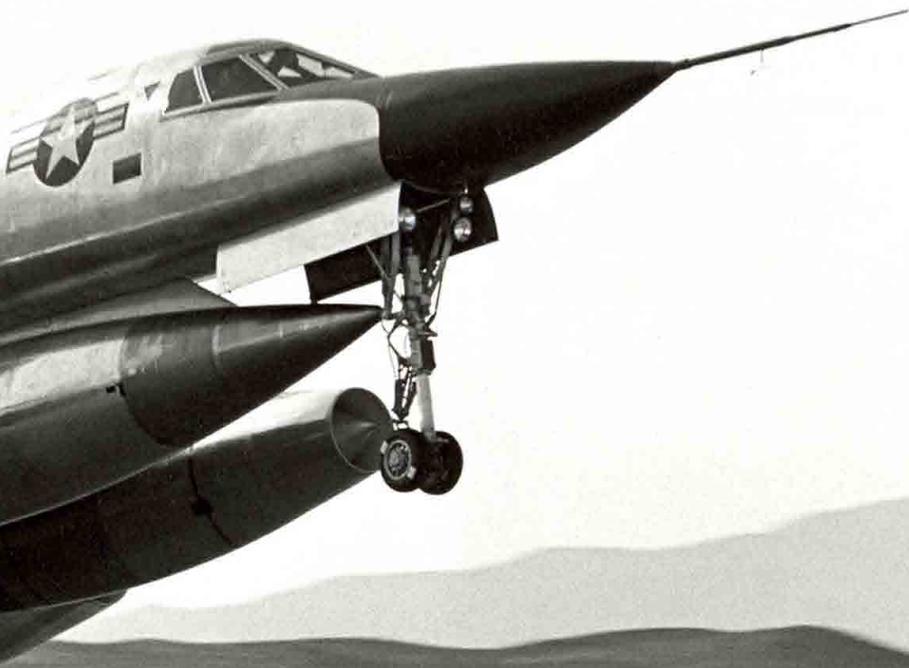
"Believe me, that's quite an airplane," he said to introduce the aircraft.

When the nine years of work on the B-58 were over, Rost's insatiable hunger to learn more led her to the next project. Going to work for Ling-Temco-Vought in the missile division, she took her engineering beyond the clouds and into the space age.

"I worked on the nose cones for the Scout missile, which was being launched from Cape Canaveral," Rost said. "The Scout missile used solid propellant rockets with different payloads in the nose cones. We were also researching different materials as heat shields for the nose cones."

These Scout rockets put small satellites into orbit. During





the Space Race, the Department of Defense used the satellites for scientific research and for national security.

Petersen remembers her mother's work at this time being highly secret. She worked behind high-security fencing and was given top clearance for the project.

Rost found the work satisfying, but the office was near Dallas, keeping her away from her family more than she wanted. In 1963, Convair, then renamed General Dynamics, was hiring again, and Rost jumped at the opportunity to work closer to home.

"[At General Dynamics,] we designed a severance system using pyrotechnics to remove the side panels and nose cone for the Atlas Centaur missile, which was still used in the 1990s," Rost explained.

Rost also worked on installing weapons on the F-111 Aardvark. Interestingly, the F-111 bomber replaced the B-58 Hustler.

During this time, Earl developed cancer. Even while he was in the hospital, Rost stayed by his side, caring for him during the night and then going in to work after staying up late with him. He passed away in 1967.

In 1970, the contract for the F-111 was canceled, and General Dynamics had to lay off employees, including Rost.

Her aircraft engineering career continued with Bell Helicopters in Fort Worth, where Rost started as a senior engineer. Helicopters were a new and exciting challenge for her.

"The most fun was designing the wing, tail boom and empennage (tail assembly) of the new light twin turbine helicopter with retractable tricycle landing gear," Rost said. "This was the 222 Helicopter, which was used in the TV series *Airwolf*."



In the 1980s, Rost was one of the first engineers to begin using computers for the aircraft designs. She approached the transition as another opportunity for growth while her team designed an all-composite helicopter for the U.S. Army, the ACAP aircraft.

In 1990, Rost decided to retire and dedicate her time to her family, especially her grandchildren: Derek, Dustin and Stefanie. While their mother was at work, “Granny” was the one looking out for the kids, whether she was picking them up from school or taking them to various practices. She created wonderful memories by taking the entire family to South Padre Island every summer.

It wasn’t until Derek and Dustin were in high school and writing a paper about their grandmother that all of Rost’s

accomplishments came to light within the family.

“My mom never bragged much about what she did,” said Petersen. “She was more concerned about being with the family and helping everybody get their education. She always said that education was something that nobody could take away from you.”

Stefanie recalls that Granny was “the glue that kept our family together.”

It was always Rost’s house where the family gathered for holidays. Rost loved to read and would share passages from her personal devotions that she thought could inspire her family.

At age 89, Rost was still babysitting her great-granddaughter Avery. Until recently, she was able to enjoy traveling to Galveston to visit her youngest great-grandson, Easton.

Today, Rost is a resident at Life Care Center of Haltom in Fort Worth. Her family now returns her dedication and love, remaining active in her life and visiting frequently.

Dustin comes to see her every day.

Petersen shared that her mother’s biggest sources of pride are her family, her ability to change with the times and her role in proving that women can excel in engineering careers.

“Many women would come up and tell her how she opened the doors in the engineering field to women,” Petersen said. “Because of her work ethic, because of her ability to do everything, employers gave more women the opportunity to fit in to some of these jobs.”

For Rost, life has always been about following her passions and expanding them to the next stage. From sewing her family’s clothes to sending rockets into space, she has proven that the sky is definitely not the limit.

It is only the beginning. 🌱

*Editor’s note: Vera Rost passed away as this publication was being finalized for print. This article is printed in her memory, with the permission of her family.*

## WORTH MORE THAN KNIVES AND FORKS



A medical student went to see a counselor about whether she should complete medical school or drop out to raise a family. The counselor suggested that she could do both with a little outside help.

The student explained that she had vowed never to entrust her children to a housekeeper. The counselor asked why, and the young woman explained that when she was a little child, her wealthy parents would

vacation in Europe each summer and leave her with a nanny.

One year, when the girl was 11, the housekeeper suddenly quit shortly before the parents were to leave for Europe. The parents were upset that their vacation was jeopardized, but a few days before departure, they found a replacement.

When the daughter noticed her mother wrapping up all the family silverware and jewels, she asked why, since it had never been done before. Her mother responded that she could not trust the new maid with the family valuables.

That insensitive remark stabbed the daughter in the heart. Was she not a “family

valuable” of more worth than knives and forks?

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*Beecher Hunter*  
BEECHER HUNTER  
President





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