

Surrounded by Stories

A Collection of Communities



Interviews & Writing by Students at
the Anschutz Medical Campus

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A Collection of Communities

Senior Storybook Project

University of Colorado School of Medicine

Stories edited by:

Ellie Golding

Julia Schaffer

Tien To

Ekshika Patel

Nicole Case

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Stories were shared following an informed consent process and approved by patients and families.

Cover design by Keiko Fox

DEDICATION

We dedicate this book to the community of patients and families who generously allowed us to learn about their lives. Your stories serve as reminders to us of all the importance of surrounding oneself with good company and becoming the best company we can be. You inspire us all with your determination, grit, kindness, vulnerability, and strength.

- Ellie, Julie, and Tien. Co-presidents of the Senior Storybook Project, University of Colorado School of Medicine

In memory of Jalal Nabavinejad, Julie Patterson, and John Valenta. May your love and light inspire those who read this book. It was an honor to be a small part of your stories.

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments

Foreword

Start With the End in Mind	1
A Dream to be Pursued	4
Navy Man	7
The Social Self	14
Accepting Love, Sharing Love	20
The Heart of a Marine	27
No Brag, Just Fact	31
The Ever Green	38
Create a World to Forget a World	44
A Storyteller's Tale	48
Where the Mountains Glow Orange	55

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FOREWORD

Written by: Ellie Golding

“Alone, we can do so little; together, we can do so much.”

- Helen Keller

In this anthology, you will find eleven heartfelt stories of love, loss, bravery, resilience, joy and forgiveness — woven together by a common thread: the transformative power of community.

Over the past 6 years, the Senior Storybook Project has collected dozens of stories from our patients with the hope of inspiring empathy and compassion in student doctors and creating an intergenerational community within our healthcare systems. This community we have spent the last 6 years building has inspired this year’s theme.

By reading this book, you are joining a community of people who believe in the power of storytelling to bring people together.

Thank you for being a part of the Senior Storybook community.

START WITH AN END IN MIND

Written by: Madeline Olson

John Valenta understood community in a way few did. When he and his neighbors moved into their homes on Del Norte Street, it was little more than a collection of houses, a place where people lived but rarely connected. That didn't sit right with John. He saw potential where others saw walls, and he set out to change that.

John was a fire-starter—someone who knew how to spark a connection and keep it burning. He didn't force it; he simply



gave people permission to open their doors, to step outside, to meet at the mailbox instead of retreating inside. Over time, six or seven homes in the cul-de-sac formed something rare and beautiful—a true support system.

It wasn't just about knowing each other's names, it was about knowing each other's lives. When he found out he had cancer, that community became even more meaningful. It wasn't about pity or obligation. It was about love. He never asked for anything, yet he found himself surrounded by kindness.

John believed that many people fear community because they fear seeing their own vulnerabilities reflected in others. Especially as people age, the thought of opening up becomes daunting. He saw how connection could change that, and he lived by that belief until the end. Dennis, another neighbor, was bestowed the honor of “carrying the torch” after he was gone, ensuring the flame of connection never died out. Del Norte wasn't John's only community. He had built others throughout his life, each one unique yet shaped by the same guiding principles. In his leadership roles, he fostered a community based on the “7 Habits of Highly Effective People.” He believed in sharpening the saw, beginning with the end in mind, and never confusing effort with results. These weren't just slogans to him; they were a way of life, a philosophy he instilled in his employees, his friends, and most importantly, his daughters.

When John led in the restaurant industry, he didn't just manage—he built a culture. Over time, 1,600 employees came to embrace his vision, but it wasn't easy. People resist change, especially when it challenges them to grow. He knew that character and culture weren't dictated from the top down; they

had to be nurtured from within. His greatest success wasn't in profits or efficiency, but in watching his community of employees truly live the values he believed in.

Community, for John, wasn't just about a place or a group of people. It was about the connections that held them together, the values they shared, and the love they extended to one another. Whether it was on Del Norte Street, in a boardroom, or around a dinner table, John left behind more than just memories—he left behind communities that would continue to thrive long after he was gone.



A DREAM TO BE PURSUED

Written by: Ariyani Challapalli

If you ask him, Gary Rose will say he has never worked a day in his life. He makes this proclamation despite his illustrious, decades-long career in aviation and mechanics. According to Gary, if you truly love something, it feels like a hobby. It is easy to see the passion that Gary has for life as we sit in his home surrounded by handmade crafts, several loving pets, and abundant pictures of his family. As Gary reflects on his adventures in the air, he can picture his journey with a clarity that only comes with time. He can hear the people who told him he was not going to be successful and is proud of the ways he challenged their expectations anyway. More than anything, this lesson of overcoming is the one he wishes to share as we begin our conversation on a snowy day in Colorado, just one of the many places Gary has held close through the years.

Gary was born in Oklahoma and has lived from coast to coast. He grew up in Monterey, California; spent time in Iowa; enjoyed the food in Cary, North Carolina; and explored Galveston, Texas. He'd always known that he wanted to be a pilot thanks to a toy plane that his father gave him. However,

as a child, Gary often felt like he was the “dumb kid in class.” He was judged and placed in the back of the room by teachers. When he received the diagnosis of dyslexia, everything started to make sense. As he worked through the challenges that came with it, he realized that his brain actually served as a strength in many areas. For example, many parts of aviation came naturally to him due to a photographic mechanical memory. Gary joined the Air Force and graduated at the top of his class. He then became a commercial pilot and studied to get his airframe and powerplant license. Few people become pilots; even fewer have the privilege of flying a plane that they can also repair.

Gary wants young people to know that if you have a dream, you should pursue it. Despite negative comments from others, he did not allow his dyslexia to define his story. Instead, he followed his own inner path and now feels immensely proud of his work on several operations in the Air Force.

During our conversation, Gary reveals a pen he fashioned out of a deer antler. It is a beautiful ivory color, the twist cap gliding against my fingers. He shares that he has a workspace outside of his house where he enjoys making various crafts. He is looking forward to when it warms up so he can go outside and start new projects. When I ask him if his ingenuity with mechanics helps him with these crafts, he says that his mind is wired a little differently. As I admire the pen, it is evident that this wiring has made him talented in several domains. Gary later steps out of the room and returns with a black box. Upon opening it, there are over a dozen pens, some made with antlers, others with wood. He invites me to take one home, and I choose a pen that is checkered with beige and

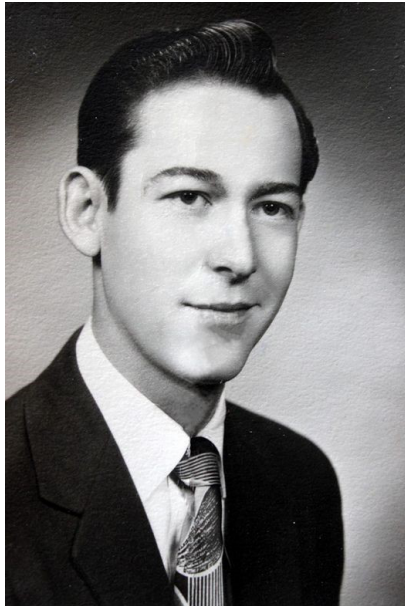
white tones. It is an honor to have a piece of this work that is made with such care and skilled artisanship.

Gary's life has been full of adventures. In his current adventure, he lives with his loving family, constructing crafts and experimenting with cooking, an activity he tells me he likes to do every day. In the adventure of his career, he conquered the strife that came with being told he was not enough and turned a disheartening diagnosis into one of his greatest strengths. Aviation and mechanics grew to be one of the great passions of his life, a feat that would not have been possible without his unwavering belief that dreams should be pursued. Gary accomplished his lifelong goal because he recognized that each person has the power to defy assumptions and stereotypes. He is an exemplar for what happens when we do.

NAVY MAN

Written by: Taylor Barg

Frank Wren Sr., 93 years young, has a lifetime of memories etched into his soul. A few months ago, one of his grandsons visited and asked about the early days—his childhood, his time in the Navy, and the life that shaped him into the man he is today. Here's what Frank had to say.



Early Days in Iowa

Frank was born in a small Iowa town called Moravia, named after a religious sect from the 1800s. It was a close-knit community of around 650 to 700 people, situated approximately 115 miles from the Missouri border. Life in Moravia was simple but rich. Frank lived there with his parents, two older brothers, and younger sister until 1943. Frank reminisced about starting eighth grade in Moravia, only to move after the first six weeks to finish school 15 miles away in Albia. When he started school in Albia, his brother Max was in the 11th and brother Dale was in the 10th. Frank was in 8th grade, which was in a different building. It had steam radiators and the floors creaked. Frank was there for the 8 and 9th grades. Max graduated in 1945 and went into the Navy in the fall, Dale graduated in 1946 and enlisted in 1946. Frank graduated in 1948. Frank, his brother Dale, who had just come home from the navy, and a classmate Sammy all went to Des Moines, Iowa and got a job at New Monarch where they stamped washing machine parts plus other things for .60c an hour. Frank worked there for about 3 months. When his brother said he was going back to California, Frank decided he would enlist in the Navy as he didn't want to be drafted.

Navy Life

Frank's Navy journey began with an eight-week boot camp at Great Lakes Naval Training Station in Illinois. Afterward, he enjoyed a brief leave during Thanksgiving before boarding a troop train bound for Norfolk, Virginia. There, he was

assigned to the destroyer USS James C. Owens (DD-776), affectionately nicknamed "The fighting Jimmy C" and later "The spirit of 776".

While serving as a lookout on the bridge one night, an officer noticed Frank's exemplary record and suggested he attend sonar school in Key West, Florida. Frank vividly remembered the long train ride south, a journey that underscored the stark realities of segregation. Buses were divided by a "white line," with white passengers seated in front and Black passengers confined to the rear. If the front filled up, the line was simply moved back, further restricting Black passengers' ability to board the bus.

In Key West, Frank spent a few months training and enjoying the Florida sunshine. After completing sonar school, he returned to the USS James C. Owens as a sonarman and was soon put on mess cooking overseeing fresh vegetables as the "spud coxswain." Frank chuckles as he describes the potato-peeling machine that peeled the entire potato but left eyes to be removed by hand. He mentioned they had to hand cut french fries and the cooks always wanted a big pan of CPO (celery peppers and onions) to put it in soups and various other dishes.

By the late 1940s, the Navy had entered peacetime, and in 1950, the USS James C. Owens was decommissioned in Charleston, South Carolina. When asked where he'd like to go next, Frank requested California to be with his brother. Unfortunately, he was told he couldn't change oceans and had to remain in the Atlantic Fleet. Instead of going to California, he joined the USS Hugh Purvis (DD-709), serving in locations like New Orleans, Louisiana and Newport, Rhode Island. In 1951, Frank embarked on a seven-month Mediterranean tour,

visiting several ports including France, Italy, Turkey, and Greece. Returning to Newport, Rhode Island, Frank faced an entirely different challenge—a cold-weather cruise that pushed the ship across the Arctic Circle. “We were having exercises with other NATO countries and heavy seas that was like being in hurricane,” Frank recalls, speaking of how treacherous it was on deck. To ensure safety, the crew installed additional lifelines a couple of feet inside the standard ones, preventing sailors from being swept overboard by rogue waves or high winds.

By late 1952, Frank had left active service, transitioning to civilian life but never forgetting his time aboard the ships. He maintained strong ties to his naval community, attending reunions—three for the James C. Owens and four for the Hugh Purvis. These gatherings offered a chance to reminisce, reconnect, and honor the bonds forged during years of service. He also mentions a good friend, Ted, with whom he recently caught up over a phone call and laughed about their times together in the Navy, proving no amount of time or distance apart from a friend will change the bond you create.

A Life of Love and Work

In 1953, Frank met Davonna, the love of his life. Coincidentally, she had graduated from the school he’d attended in Moravia, while he graduated from the school she’d attended in Albia. Frank jokes that he graduated with her first cousin, and she with his. He even got her phone number from his cousin to ask her on their first date, which was roller skating and movies. During our interview, I hear Frank’s joy through the phone when talking about his wife.

They married on August 15, 1954, and shared 62 wonderful years together with 4 children. Steve in 1956, David in 1960, Karen in 1962 and Carol in 1963, until Davonna's passing in 2016. Frank attributes their long-lasting marriage to mutual respect, good communication, and the practice of never going to bed angry.



For the first eight and a half years of their marriage, Frank and Davonna traveled across Iowa, living in a 40-foot trailer as Frank worked on telephone equipment installations. When asked about their marriage, Frank recalls one memorable Fourth of July in 1955 where they pulled a trailer with a 1949 Dodge through Iowa into Nebraska mostly at night navigating steep hills in blistering heat. While passing through a small town, he was told they had no more hills to encounter. Little did he know there was one last hill to conquer. “They had a friend following us so he could see that I wasn't going to make the hill, so he unhitched his trailer and hooked on with my safety chain and helped me up the hill”. Frank laughs as he reminisces, “We were the entertainment of the town that night trying to get up that hill.”

“In 1962, when Karen was born, we figured it was time to get out of our trailer and into a house. We looked at quite a few places and finally picked one in Oskaloosa, Iowa. We lived there for about eight and a half years”.



When Frank had completed his military service in 1952, he had begun work with Western Electric, installing central office telephone equipment and supporting advancements like microwave radio television transmission. In 1971, Frank’s work with Western Electric took the family to Colorado. In 1989, when the company moved to the tech center, Frank retired after a long, fulfilling career.

A Legacy of Strength and Resilience

Today, Frank lives in an independent living facility, surrounded by memories and stories. When asked what he’s most proud of, he mentions his family. With at least 15 grandchildren and more than 15 great-grandchildren, his legacy is rich. He beams when talking about his family.

As we were ending the conversation, Frank had some last comments to impart. “Time drags when you’re a kid. My dad used to say. The older you get the faster it goes; kind of like toilet paper.”



At 93 years old, this glimpse into Frank’s years reveals a life full of wisdom, perseverance, and warmth. Frank has a fond memory of his time in the Navy and his wonderful family whom he cherishes deeply, leaving a legacy of courage, love, and resilience that will inspire generations to come. Frank isn't sure if this was the story I was hoping for, but I assured him that it perfectly captured the essence of an extraordinary life. It is truly an honor to hear and share Frank's story, one that will continue to resonate for generations to come.

THE SOCIAL SELF

Narrative of: Nina Azari

Adapted by: Hannah Anderson

Hannah

When we talk about ourselves or ask about others, we tend to ask, “What do you do?”. For Nina, this is a question with an impressive answer. She is quiet, unassuming, and humble yet her resume is extensive. She holds multiple degrees, has been a researcher and professor around the world for decades, and has founded formidable international projects in her domains of work. She is an artist, a writer, and a musician.



Despite all of this, Nina is most impressive not for what she does, but rather how she does it. The longer we talked, it became clear that community is the thread that runs through every interaction of her day, and that community for her is defined by the integrity and trust built between people and the grounding it brings to oneself.

Nina

In some ways, it's been a blessing to be gifted with so many different talents. I've gotten to negotiate a path that has carried me around the world, from leading research projects to authoring books to teaching students. At the same time, it's been very confusing to have so many paths open to me. I've struggled with who I am and how I should define myself, a struggle made more challenging by mental illness. The lies my mind tells me often keep the path from seeming clear. Despite this, I can look back on my life and be content with the decisions I've made. In part, this is because I've allowed myself to trust others and to let my day-to-day interactions become a defining element of my sense of self.

I was a researcher for over 25 years in the realms of neuroscience, theology, philosophy, psychology and religion, and now I teach in these same areas. This work took me to universities around the world. Gradually, I transitioned from researcher to professor as my love of teaching, and the connections it brings, grew. Now, I teach a few courses each semester for free because of the community it brings. Through my professional roles, the people I've met have become friends. These friendships became part of who I am rather than what I do. I know them, they know me, and we trust each

other. We discuss meaningful issues. When hard decisions have to be made, we support each other even if it means we have to close the door to opportunities of a lifetime. We look beyond the “doing” and towards what really matters to us – integrity, trust, and connections to one another.



I’ve always lived alone, so I’ve had to be intentional about making connections. I don’t know if I would have been so embedded in my community if I had other people to live with. I find the more I slow down with my interactions, the richer my life is. For example, I know most of the staff at Parks & Rec and the library. I deliberately haven’t gotten a scan card because it allows for the chance to start a conversation. They know me and I know them. We talk about our lives, our days, what we are looking forward to. They know that I’m working on my books, research and lecture materials. But more than knowing me, they trust me. Once, I thought I had returned a book, but their records showed that I had not. I know how careful I am with books, and because they know me, because they trust me, they removed the charge from my account. It was much to my surprise when I found the book a few weeks

later! But because of our relationship, it was no trouble to bring it back. With their trust in me, I've been able to build more trust in myself.

I've also learned that there are so many services available in our community that people don't avail themselves of. They won't come to you, but if you put in the effort to cultivate those relationships, it's well worth it. For example, I know many of the people at the Housing Authority and also at the Tax Services for Low-Income Seniors. It's very comforting to work with the same people year after year rather than managing the discomfort of big bureaucracies. They have been so helpful, and I like to think that I've made a positive impact on them too.



As another example, I also do my best to shop in smaller, local shops. I get to know the retailers, and it's a more comfortable interaction than shopping in the big stores. Before I was on Medicaid and food stamps, I was one of the

first people who used the food pantry at the clinic. The food pantry was a lifesaver, both to help me get food and to avoid the intense anxiety of shopping at big stores. Through the clinic, I've also built my healthcare team. They talk with one another, and through their close communication they surround me with the support I need for my health, both mental and physical. I know I can trust them to be there for me just as they trust me to do my best and do what needs to be done.

The connections I've made and the communities I've built make me who I am today. I am part of many communities. Each one is like a node in my life, nodes for no-charge interactions that fill my life with meaning and support. These communities form a part of my self, a part of my being. I think that's what we mean when we say 'social self'. We are built up by these different nodes of input. Nodes that may be made up of neighbors, friends, coworkers, healthcare providers, or accountants. Nodes made up of those that know and accept us for who we are. That means when we go looking for our self-identities it can't be just navel gazing. We are made of the communities that surround us, and the effort we put into those connections makes a difference not only for those around us but also for ourselves. We are just that; we are social selves.

Hannah

I haven't met many people who extract grace and meaning from each interaction like Nina does. She is a person built not on her accomplishments, of which there are many, but on the genuine interactions she has with others. She is a reminder to take one's time, acknowledge the little things, and get to know

those around you. She accepts the value of community at all levels – from friendships to professional life to day-to-day amenities. She is unafraid to use the resources provided by our community, to embrace them without judgement, and to give back with each interaction. She consciously navigates the challenges of life by surrounding herself with different “nodes” of interaction, founded in trust and integrity. Nina is, as she says, “a social self.” She is a person embedded in, and defining, the essence of community.

ACCEPTING LOVE, SHARING LOVE

Written by: Brendan King

“I didn’t feel judged. Well, there’s an interesting word.”

Phyllis King was born in 1935 in Radburn, New Jersey, Radburn was a unique place to grow up. Designed in the late 1920s based on the garden city movement, Radburn was ahead of its time in urban planning. As cars became more common in American households, the town was designed to accommodate increasing traffic while keeping pedestrian spaces separate. Houses were lined along cul-de-sacs and turning loops, with backyards facing the road and front doors facing each other, opening onto shared common yards. Parks were connected through a system of sidewalks and walkways that traversed the town via underpasses, ensuring that pedestrians never had to cross a road.

“Radburn was almost like a gated community without gates,” Phyllis recalled. “So—people there got along, and it was its own kind of community—but there was always some ‘eastern reserve,’ I think. People kept to themselves.”

Phyllis was the youngest of three girls. As the youngest daughter, she remembers struggling to find her unique role in the family. The Howlin sisters followed a typical birth order dynamic: the eldest was responsible, some might even say bossy, setting an example for her younger sisters. The middle sister was a sparkplug, self-reliant, and filled the roles her older sister did not. When Phyllis came along, it was unclear where she fit. She didn't quite know her place.



It wasn't until she attended the local high school that Phyllis began to find her niche. She loved high school. If there was a group, she was part of it—student council, newspaper, Girls Athletic Association. She was involved anyway she could. Through these activities, she formed a close group of five friends.

As graduation approached, Phyllis applied to a variety of universities. However, she was soon told by her parents that they would not be able to afford to send her away for school. Thus, she ended up following a group of friends to the local Fairleigh Dickinson University, where she studied journalism.

She commuted for about a year, while a desire for change grew stronger. She couldn't wait to move somewhere new. One of her close friend's fathers, a former professor at the University of Colorado in Boulder, sensed her desire to leave. He reached out to the admissions department, and before she knew it, she was off to Colorado. She didn't know a single person there, but the excitement of something new was enough for her to take the leap of faith.

While at CU, Phyllis earned her degree in journalism and met her husband, Ralph. The couple had two boys and later moved south to Belmont, a suburb of Pueblo, Colorado. "I didn't know anybody when we moved to Pueblo," she recalled. "Newly married, two little boys. Ralph off to work every day." In Belmont, Phyllis unexpectedly discovered a different way of life. Colorado lacked the "eastern reserve" she remembered from New Jersey. People were easygoing, unpretentious, and welcoming. For the first time, she felt a kind of ease she hadn't experienced back east.

"I don't know if I can put a name to it. It's like I could relax and just be me. In Belmont, I didn't feel judged."

Phyllis and Ralph built a good life in Belmont. Over the years, their family grew to six with the birth of two daughters. "We were happy," she said. They didn't need a bigger or better house. Ralph was content as a laboratory director, and Phyllis only wanted what was best for their children.

Yet, the simplicity of life in Belmont came with its challenges. Alcohol was ever-present. "We have the alcoholism gene," she said.

Soon after she and Ralph became empty nesters, a challenging incident occurred that drove Phyllis to seek change in her life. Alcohol had been involved. Reflecting on her life,

Phyllis realized, “We set this up. We don’t do anything without having a drink.”

Desperate for answers, she found Al-Anon, a support group for people affected by a loved one’s alcoholism. She attended meetings for six months, listening but rarely speaking. One day, a counselor challenged her. “Why haven’t you talked about anyone else’s drinking?” the counselor asked. “Because it’s mine,” she admitted.

“I said it,” Phyllis remembers. “And I felt it in my body. I’m the one who has the problem. And that changed the whole world.”

She began attending Alcoholics Anonymous meetings for herself, where she found vulnerability and acceptance like never before. That year, she became “famous” for crying through every meeting, releasing a lifetime of bottled-up emotion. “We weren’t allowed to cry at home,” she explained. “But there, I could. And it was okay.”

Her journey through sobriety became her anchor. Over 37 years, AA has remained a constant, a place where she knew she was never alone. After moving to Denver in 2021 to be closer to her children, grandchildren, and now great-grandchildren, she joined a local women’s AA group. “They have only known me for two years, and it’s just like they’ve known me all my life.”

Faith had always been part of Phyllis’s life. When her children were young, church attendance was automatic. But her relationship with the Catholic Church deepened when a parish priest called her, just as she was searching for a job after her boys left for boarding school.

"Phyllis, I remember you have a degree in journalism," he said. "The Diocese needs help with their newspaper. Get over there and tell them I sent you."

While working for the newspaper, she became deeply involved in parish life, eventually helping develop a leadership program to train lay people as spiritual leaders. However, opposition from priests who felt women shouldn't hold leadership roles in the church, led to the program's downfall. Disheartened, Phyllis lost her place in the church.

In the years that followed, Phyllis lost her mother, separated from Ralph, and continued her work with AA. "It was an interesting period. I was growing up. I was learning about life in a real, open world. I didn't just do things automatically. I had to question."

She spent the next decade exploring other faiths, attending Protestant services, and sharing in study groups. Eventually, Phyllis rediscovered her spirituality in a small church in Pueblo. Led by a former bishop, it was entirely volunteer-run—a community of equals. Here, she formed a bible study group. They read about women like Hildegard of Bingen and Teresa of Avila, discovering voices that resonated deeply.

Phyllis remained engaged in church communities for over 30 years. Once she moved to Denver, she found herself searching for a church community once again. As she settled into an independent living community, a new friend invited her to a nearby parish called Saint Dominic's.

"After two visits there, that's where I wanted to be. You can just feel it. You could go there and be comfortable, and I am accepted as I am."

That openness was exactly what she needed. Now, Phyllis is deeply involved in Saint Dominic's, participating as a Eucharistic minister and lector.

Phyllis's life has been a continuous journey of finding belonging in spaces where she could truly be herself. From the unique neighborhood of Radburn to the welcoming community in Belmont, she sought places where she wouldn't feel judged. Her time in AA reinforced this appreciation for openness and acceptance, giving her the strength to heal. Through her faith, she built connections that have persevered for many years. Now, in her later years, she continues to find solace in Saint Dominic's, a place where she can be herself, embraced by a community that understands and accepts her.

About a month after I met with Phyllis, I received a letter from her in the mail. It read, "This is probably a strange question, but I felt the need to ask it. Did I use the word 'Love' in our discussion? It actually sums up everything I shared. Accepting love. Sharing love. To everyone and everywhere. Love is the core of my belief."



It is amazing, I think, how “Love” did not come up in our discussion. Because I agree with Phyllis wholeheartedly. The communities she built and experienced in her life were characterized by love. It is love that gave her the courage to seek out new beginnings, the strength to heal from past wounds, and the foundation upon which she built lasting connections. Love was present in the way she embraced others, in the way she was accepted without judgment, and in the spaces where she finally felt at home. In the end, it has been love that has defined her journey.

THE HEART OF A MARINE

Major Al Gomez's Enduring Legacy

Written by: Sophia Goldin

Alphonso (Al) Gomez joined the Marines in 1961 shortly after obtaining his college degree. He applied for and was accepted to the Marine Officer Candidate Course (OCC). Upon completion in December 1961, he was commissioned a Second Lieutenant, marking the beginning of a distinguished career as a U.S. Marine. When the Vietnam War began, he rose to company commander where he completed two tours, overseeing countless marines. He learned to speak Vietnamese in a difficult and fast-paced Defense Language Institute course. He eventually finished his career with the rank of Major. Al's career took him from Hawaii to Vietnam to California to a battalion along the Mediterranean Sea. His leadership was defined not just by his rank, but by the deep sense of responsibility he felt toward those under his command. He even received two Purple Hearts. Al continues to emulate the same dedication and integrity that had shaped his military career. Through all his successes, Al has remained humble, steadfast, and unwavering in his commitment to his

fellow marines and to his country.

When asked about the most meaningful aspect of his time in the military, one theme emerged above all others: community. Al Gomez redefined what it meant to him to be a leader. In this role he was also a caretaker, a mentor, and a steadfast advocate for the well-being of his marines. He viewed their lives, both the joys and hardships, as his own responsibility from the moment they came under his command. This devotion extended beyond active service. When one of his men passed in the line of duty, Al wrote personalized letters to their families, offering his personal contact information and a heartfelt message of sympathy and gratitude. He never expected a response; he simply felt it was his duty to honor their memories. Decades later, one grieving family member reached out, expressing how much his words had helped them navigate their immense loss. The way his command came together not just as a unit but as a true community was a testament to the lasting impact of his kindness and dedication.

Al was committed to his unit beyond solely formal duties. He encouraged open communication and camaraderie, ensuring that the bonds among his company were formed not just because of the time spent together, but also from a sense of friendship and loyalty. He cultivated an environment where marines supported one another, forging friendships that would endure the test of time.

Years after retiring from the service and finishing his career as a special agent for the federal government, the relationships he built remained a defining part of his life. Military reunions became cherished traditions, filled with late-night storytelling, laughter, and the unspoken understanding that only those with

their shared experience can have. He and his wife, Bette, speak fondly of the families they have come to know over the years—friendships that have spanned generations. Their bond with fellow military families has endured through all phases of life and loss. They have watched the children and grandchildren of their fellow service members grow and have formed connections that transcend time and distance.

Al Gomez is also a devoted husband to his wonderful wife, Bette, and a proud father to their three children, Michael, Kristina, and Kevin. When Al speaks of his children and grandchildren, there is a profound sense of admiration and genuine wonder at the unique individuals they have become. Each of them has carved their own path, achieving great success while embracing life with confidence and passion. Even in our brief conversation, it was clear why Al and Bette speak of them with such pride.

Beyond their role as parents, Al and Bette share a love that feels as fresh and enduring as the day they met. Their conversation flows effortlessly, full of warmth, laughter, and the kind of banter that only the closest of friends can share. Bette laughs to herself while telling me of their time visiting Al's closest friend from the Marines on his farm, George. "My Al has no sense of direction," she announces, as if it's breaking news. Al chuckles in sync with her "Everything looks the same! It's all land and more land," he protested at the time. They finish each other's thoughts, joking in a way that speaks to a lifetime of companionship. Their bond is not just one of love but of deep friendship—one that has carried them through decades of life's greatest moments together. They celebrated their 50th anniversary February 1st, 2025.

Al Gomez's commitment to community is evident whether he is in or out of uniform. Just as he dedicated himself to the well-being of his marines, he poured that same devotion into his family. He holds a deep sense of love, pride, and connection that is evident to anyone lucky enough to spend time with him. His role as a husband, father, and grandfather is an extension of the same values that defined his leadership in the military—compassion, integrity, and an unwavering commitment to those around him.

What truly holds this community together? Is it the shared experience of service, the complexities of navigating military life, or even the bonds of family? Or is it something simpler—the kindness, the selflessness, and the enduring sense of duty that men like Al Gomez embody? Perhaps it is both. The lessons learned in the service do not go away when one retires; they live in the relationships, the memories, and the unwavering support of those who once stood together in trying times. In that sense, Al Gomez's legacy is one of compassion, leadership, and the cumulation of his many years spent cultivating his community.



NO BRAG, JUST FACT

Written by: Victoria Gonzales Adrien

David “Dave” Calvano is a 72-year-old husband, high school math teacher, and service dog trainer. He embodies determination and a commitment to living life to the fullest. Living to 100 years old is not just a dream for him—it's an expectation. "I have 28 years left to go," he says.



For Dave, community is not simply being there for one another. To him, community means never letting people down; it embodies the kind of person and world he wished had existed for him as a child. Back then, he did not have much of a community. He spent most of his time trying to stay out of the way, hopping from one friend's house to another, avoiding home whenever he could. At school, he was the introverted new kid, often keeping to himself. It's almost hard to imagine now, given the outspoken man he's become.

Dave was born December 19th, 1952, and was adopted and raised by his single stepdad in southern California. His dad was a 'job hopper,' which led to many moves; Dave attended 10 different elementary schools.

Now a high school math teacher of 32 years, Dave reflects on his time as a student. As a teenager, Dave's last priority was being a student. He skipped his fair share of classes, often to go surfing, but never allowed himself to be late when he did attend. To him, tardiness was the ultimate sign of disrespect. Though he wasn't the best student, respect was always a deeply ingrained virtue – one that now shapes the expectations he sets in his own classroom.

While pursuing a bachelor's degree, old habits returned. Whenever the surf was up, he was out on the water, leading him to drop classes repeatedly. Along the way, he met his wife, Susan. He worked nights in restaurants throughout college and recalls first meeting Susan while waiting on her and her family. Eventually, he found out that the busser was her roommate and had him introduce the two of them. Both older and in their 30s, they hit it off quickly. They had been together for four years when he asked her about their plans for marriage. She replied, 'When you graduate... so you better get with the

program. After 15 years, he finally graduated with his bachelor's degree. He now has three degrees, including a master's degree, which he earned right on time and considers one of his proudest achievements.

Dave's career in education was inspired by his own high school creative writing teacher, who encouraged him to stay true to himself and his writing style. Dave, an admittedly impressive writer, recounts an interaction with one of his high school English teachers who always tried to correct his style. At the end of the year, he had a B- and apologized to her for not writing in the style she wanted. It was not well received, and he ended up with an F on his transcript. He did not allow this encounter to have lasting turmoil on his life, but he distinctly noted, "That won't happen when I'm a teacher."

Today, Dave gravitates toward students who are struggling, aiming to instill old-school discipline while remaining flexible enough to meet each child where they are. When describing his classroom's traditional feel and his non-negotiables (i.e., a strict no-phone or tardiness policy), he chuckles, noting that the room looks just like the ones he sat in as a high school student. Though he can be firm, he strives not to be too rigid, instead building connections with his students through honesty.

Dave shares that becoming part of the educational community gave him a real sense of self-worth. For him, he values "taking care of the whole kid." He knows how it felt to be misunderstood, recalling how some teachers, unaware of the details of his home life, dismissed him as, "just a loser surfer dude who isn't interested in school." But Dave knows his worth now, adding, "Well, I'd like to go back in time so they could see what I've done."

Recently, Dave's world has been disrupted by health issues. Years ago, Dave's doctor noted his enlarged prostate, but Dave dismissed it due to his intense workouts and commonality among men. Later, his PSA number was elevated, necessitating a biopsy. Dave then realized the seriousness of the situation, thinking, "They're not going to take the time to do all that if everything's fine." He then got a call from his urologist confirming the diagnosis of treatable prostate cancer. Dave would later learn that treatable and curable were two vastly different outcomes. He followed up with his oncologist, and left in a state of shock and denial after being told his prognosis was worse than expected – two to six years. "No, not me. And it will not be... I was supposed to live until 100... I did everything right," he states. This diagnosis brought fear, denial, and uncertainty about the future, challenging his sense of stability and purpose.

While his students do not know all the details, he has shared that some days he'll have less energy than others, but will continue to show up for them. "...I let them know I could take the rest of the year off, but who knows who you're going to get – you could get a different person every day and then you're not going to get what you need, so I'm going to be here, even if I am not always 100%." To create consistency, he has introduced a new routine – each day, he writes a number from 1 to 10 on the board to let his students know how he is feeling.

He plans to share the details with his students after 'ringing the bell' – a symbolic ritual marking the completion of cancer treatment.

The steadfast strength upheld by Dave cracks – only for a moment. Tearfully, he recalls believing that ringing the bell signified a cure, only to later learn that was not the case. He is

reminded that while his treatment can reduce growth and manage symptoms, he will never be completely cancer-free. In this moment of vulnerability, he shares a confession, a nagging thought he needed to express. Without the hope of a cure, would he want to proceed with treatment? What would the financial implications be for his wife? He quickly returned to his usual commanding presence. His eyes illuminated with determination and his commitment to life returned. “I’ve beaten too many things down to give up that easily,” he says. He told his trainer, “Once [chemo is] done, I want to get back to what it’s supposed to be like around here – who I really am.” It is apparent that his love for life is also coupled by a determination not to let anyone down, including himself. He says, “...letting people down gets easier once you start doing it.”

As Dave navigated the transitions brought on by his diagnosis, he had to reintegrate into his community in a new way. While he may feel physically weaker than he once was, I believe he is stronger than ever. True strength cannot be measured through one’s endurance or muscle mass – it is about falling and getting back up, even when the future is uncertain.

Athletics have always played an important role in Dave’s life. That drive—to push himself, to stay engaged, to always have a challenge – has never faded. To this day, staying physically and mentally active is everything.

Though he is not back to the racquetball courts just yet, he has found a new way to stay active and connected. He joined LIVESTRONG at the YMCA, a program for adult cancer survivors that utilizes exercise and support to reclaim their health and well-being. It may not be the path he expected, but

he is walking it with the same determination that has always defined him.

In the wake of his diagnosis, he was overwhelmed by the outpouring of support from his various communities. Those he confided in stepped up in ways he never expected – bringing meals, walking the dogs, helping cover a house cleaning service, and calling to check in after chemo sessions. There was one gesture that stood out: a box from a colleague, carefully filled with items she had researched and found to be helpful for patients with cancer. These simple yet thoughtful acts, offered during such a vulnerable time, reflected the care he had spent years investing in others.

To those struggling to find their community, Dave offers this advice: “Surround yourself with supportive people and stay around them... Know who you can talk to and praise them when they show up for you. Make sure they know they are welcome.” He emphasizes that while family is important, people outside your immediate circle matter too. “It means more when someone outside your family gives you encouragement or asks how you are doing. It is so important for other people to be involved in your journey [and to] let others celebrate your [successes with you].”

The advice Dave hopes to impart on future physicians is simply: be authentic. Talk to your patients like you would a family member. Take the time to explain things and try to answer as many questions as you can. He emphasizes that not every patient will be easy, but by listening and not interrupting, you can make them feel like you truly have time for them. With a touch of humor, he adds, “sometimes sarcasm is nice too,” but it is about meeting the patient where they are. “You can’t judge people by what’s going on in their life; [rather,] you have

to [try to] understand it,” he says. “Everyone’s got a story, and you want to listen to it.”

As our conversation winds down, he thanks me for listening and sharing his story. With a thoughtful pause and smirk, he leaves me with one final truth: “Everyone deserves accolades because everybody is a valued human being. Everyone has a spot on this planet.”

THE EVER GREEN

Written by: Yasaman Baghshomali

*In loving memory of Jalal Nabavinejad: a prolific artist, poet, engineer,
and beloved husband, father, and friend.*

Jalal Nabavinejad was born in Iran in 1945 with four older brothers and three younger sisters. He grew up in Esfahan, a city that once served as the epicenter of the Persian empire and has remained a national jewel reprised for its architectural beauty. Surrounded by beauty, he developed a passion for painting and poetry at a young age and gained national recognition, winning the national junior painting competition while in high school. Jalal also excelled in athletics; He loved basketball and volleyball and played in his high school leagues.



In Iran, men are required to complete a two-year military service. He elected to serve his time as a member of the Education Corp and was placed in a rural village in the north of Iran close to Azerbaijan. In Iran, schools were, and remain, divided by gender; accordingly, he was assigned to teach a classroom of elementary-aged boys. Although Persian is the only recognized national language of Iran, in many parts of the country there are local dialects and languages. Despite it not being required for his role, he realized the importance of being able to communicate with his colleagues and the students in their local languages and saw this as his first task to integrating into this new community. Thus, although he was the teacher, he also saw himself as a student and made this his first assignment.



Soon, he became such a trusted member of the community that when he realized that some of the young girls in the village were not being taught, he approached the school administration and asked to teach a combined classroom of boys and girls – something which had never been done before.

To the surprise of many, his proposal was accepted which was a testament to his character and his genuine investment in his students. He sought to help his community beyond the classroom. Jalal was also nominated and served as a local judge who was consulted for his wisdom in which he delicately and fairly provided guidance for domestic disputes.

After finishing his mandatory military service, he travelled to California to study engineering. Again, the importance of community was paramount. Knowing no one, he quickly befriended several classmates and decided to host and cook dinners for his group of international friends, providing them with a taste of home in this new and foreign land. These dinners became a forum for conversation and a place to collectively share ideas and guidance on how to navigate this new place while also nourishing their souls. He has remained friends with many of his classmates to this day. Despite coming to this country alone, he gained a family in this new community. Through this community, he added to the list of people his children fondly call “Aunt” and “Uncle”.



After several years in California, where he completed his bachelor's and master's degrees, he was hired as an aerospace engineer by NASA and worked on the Voyager program which allowed for groundbreaking exploration of the solar system. He was subsequently hired by Boeing and relocated first to Indonesia and then Taiwan before settling in Washington state. In each of these places he again invested in building new communities. His childhood athleticism and love of sports served as the basis of this new community as he took on the role of commissioner for Boeing's recreational volleyball league that included 7 teams that competed weekly during the summer season. His own team, simply named "Green", carried a much deeper meaning than just the bright color. It represented his love for his country and was aptly named in support of the "Green Movement" in Iran. The Green Movement aimed to bring unity and hope for the Iranian people and their collective future.

These recreational matches became something that everyone in the league looked forward to. Beyond coordinating the games and setting up the volleyball nets, Jalal encouraged the league members to stay after the games to share a meal together, play music, and engage in conversation. He fondly described the simple joy of biting into a cool piece of watermelon after sliding around in the sand and enjoying those summer days with his friends. As an aside, while he describes his team as "average"; he humbly noted that they won the championship several times. While the "Green Movement" is no more, these championships feel like a victory for the essence the movement represented: this group spent their afternoons to playing volleyball as a way of bringing unity to their own community.

Even after his retirement from Boeing, he continued to engage with his community. His group of friends would get together monthly at each other's homes and take turns playing music, singing songs, and sharing stories. Importantly, he notes, that through these stories his group aimed to impart wisdom, and they collectively walked away with lessons of how to navigate life and, ultimately, how to be better people. Through these monthly gatherings, they were able to remain engaged in each other's lives. They knew when their friends were on vacation, when someone was experiencing illness, and, without being asked, they knew when their friendship was most needed.



When asked what community means to him, Jalal responds “Being a member of a community comes with responsibility – responsibility to be open and honest, to be faithful, and trustworthy, and ultimately to help”. The beauty and importance of community was something Jalal realized early and actively sought out in each chapter of his life. He encourages the new generation of youth to always embrace a

positive outlook on life. “Every young kid should have a goal, and they shouldn’t be disappointed along the way. If you focus you will achieve it.”

Jalal lived to the age of 79. I was able to attend his celebration of life and hear the stories of the communities which he described so fondly. What stood out most to me was the impact he had on others. He was described as a trusted advisor and an admirable man who encouraged all of those around him. Just as his love for his community was palpable during my conversations with him, the lasting impact that his determination to bring people together had on those fortunate enough to know him was universal. That commitment he started life with, the commitment to helping those around him, was his very essence and something that will live on through his family, friends, those that sat at his table, and those that smiled at him from across the net.

CREATE A WORLD TO FORGET A WORLD

A Veteran's Tale of Resilience, Creativity and Community

Written by: Kendall Hawkes Ferrara

Dan Thompson's story begins with a childhood marked by both creativity and hardship. From an early age, he found solace in putting pencil to paper. Drawing became more than just a hobby; it was a way to create his own world. By grade school, he was already selling his artwork to classmates and teachers, using whatever materials he could find. He never had formal lessons, nor did he seek them out. "You are your own boss and teacher. No one can teach you like you," he often says. He viewed traditional art classes as restrictive, believing they stifled creativity rather than nurtured it. In his eyes, true artists forged their own paths, unburdened by the rules and expectations of institutions. Being self-taught was a philosophy to him, a badge of honor that allowed him to develop his own style without outside influence.

I asked Dan where he found community in his early years, and he told me that he never got the chance to find one. He married right after high school and got drafted to Vietnam 2 short weeks after the wedding. It was in Vietnam, amidst so

much pain and suffering, that he found his first taste of true community. He and his fellow soldiers, just teens at that point, did what they could to make it through each brutal day. As a truck driver, bullets whizzed past his vehicle daily. Each evening, body counts were announced, reducing human lives to mere numbers. "It was terrible to see people die like that for no reason," he recalls. With an ache in his voice, Dan retells the stories of lost friends both to the tragedies of war in Vietnam, and in the following years to suicide and Agent Orange.

After returning home, he found himself met with hostility rather than gratitude. "People were spitting on me," he says, the pain still evident in his voice. And to make matters worse, war had taken more than just his friends—it had taken his family. His father passed away just before his tour ended, and his marriage crumbled under the weight of his trauma. He had seen too much, lost too many, and come home to a country that wanted to forget him. So, he took off on the road, living on his motorcycle, and working long hours at a meat packing plant, trying desperately to exhaust himself enough that he could sleep through the night terrors. Despite the grueling hours, he always found time to draw in the evenings, finding solace in his art when nothing else made sense. "You create a world to forget a world," he says.

Then, fate intervened. A woman he was seeing encouraged him to visit a Renaissance festival, and everything changed. He fell in love with the festival's sense of community and creative energy. The people there weren't just customers—they were kindred spirits and wandering souls who found joy in craftsmanship and camaraderie. Over time, he became a fixture in the Renaissance circuit, setting up shops in five

different states. His intricate and fantastical drawings captivated audiences, earning him invitations to festivals across the country. At these gatherings, people lived in colors, in craft, and in laughter. It was the first place he had seen in years that felt like home.

For 41 years, he went to the festivals and built friendships, mentored young artists, and created a world that finally felt like his own. But life had more challenges in store. In May of 2024, diabetes took his mobility, confining him to a wheelchair—his “prison,” as he calls it. No longer able to work at the festivals, he lost his home, his car, and even his beloved cat, Buddy. The man who had spent his life travelling the country, creating and escaping through art was now trapped, unable to connect with the community he called home.



But still, he has his art. His hands continue to bring dragons to life on paper, even as we speak together. "Once you create something like that, you don't forget it—you just get better at it," he says. His artwork, now compiled into coloring books, is testament to his resilience.

The Renaissance Festival still calls to him. He tells me about a new prosthetic leg that may allow him to return to Booth 7 at the festival in Larkspur, CO in June. He holds on to the hope of returning one day, to once again be among his people, his community.

Meanwhile, at the VA nursing home, he found a new kind of community. “Some of the nicest people you could meet,” he says of his fellow veterans. He dreams of fishing again, of feeling the quiet pull of a line in the water. But at this moment, he finds solace in small joys—cheeseburgers, apple juice, and ice cream sandwiches shared with a neighbor.

Through it all, he believes. In God. In art. In the simple truth that if you keep going, things change. “You make a world to live in, and you gotta fight for it,” he tells me.

And so he does, one drawing at a time.

A STORYTELLER'S TALE

Creating a Journalism Community

Written by: Tien To

Anyone who meets Mr. Robert Steele, or Bob as he introduces himself, can immediately see his passion and pride for storytelling within the first few minutes of talking to him. His work in journalism has enlightened him about the world and taught him a lot about himself and those around him. Through journalism, he has traveled around the country and across the ocean. Throughout his lifetime, Bob has read and written many stories, and with his mentorship and role in education, he has passed on his passion and skills to the next generation of journalists.

Bob grew up in the 1950s in a small town in Indiana where the population was no more than 16,000 people. At that time, newspapers were still a strong force in the country. He was exposed to news and journalism early in his life as he recalls having four different newspapers in his home – the town's local newspaper, one from the next bigger town over, one from Indianapolis, and another from Chicago.

His town also had a radio station, housed in an old beautiful hotel with a mezzanine. Bob's father often took him along when he visited the hotel. There, Bob sat at the base of the stairs leading up to the radio station, reading the news that came in on the United Press International teletype machine. He learned about the stories going on around the world and thus became enchanted with journalism early on. His fascination with journalism led him to cover news and sports on his high school's radio program.

Although there was no journalism major at DePauw University, a liberal arts college in Indiana that Bob attended, he continued his interest in journalism by working on the student newspaper and the radio station. After graduation, he wanted to go to graduate school for journalism at the University of Missouri. However, by the time he graduated in 1969, it was the height of the Vietnam War, and a dark cloud that hung over Bob's plans.

Knowing the Vietnam War was raging across the ocean and that many men were being drafted, Bob decided to divert his journalism dream and enlist in the army. Originally, he hoped that the army would be interested in having him be a military journalist or help with military intelligence. Instead, Bob was put in infantry officer candidate school for 6 months. In October of 1970, he was commissioned as an officer in the Army's Signal Corps.

After rotating through several bases around the United States, Bob was deployed to Vietnam in September 1971. Ultimately, he felt lucky to be stationed at a 1st Signal Brigade base outside of Saigon in Phu Lam where he stayed for ten months until early July 1972. His unit provided tactical communications support for the U.S. military in Vietnam.

During that time, the war was starting to wind down, and the United States was cutting back the number of troops in Vietnam and sending many men back to the States. Bob moved from his role as a company commander to become the adjutant and administrative officer (S1) for the 60th Signal Battalion at Phu Lam. This meant that he would help carry out orders from LTC Yukio Asuka, who Bob described as a serious military man who was firm of voice, but very nice and interesting.

No place was safe in Vietnam during that time; they were always in danger. There were only places that were relatively safer than others. Bob was fortunate that the base where he was stationed was sometimes harassed, but there were never any fatalities on the base.

Despite the difficult times in Vietnam, Bob still found the value of human connection and used his journalism skills and his curiosity to learn about the culture that surrounded him. Whether it was with the men in his company or the Vietnamese who worked alongside them, Bob sought to foster a sense of community where he could. There were Vietnamese engineers who worked on the high-level security crypto systems as well as Vietnamese men and women who worked in the mess halls and in other roles. As the battalion administrative officer, Bob oversaw some of these Vietnamese employees. He got to know two of these people very well, and they even invited him to their homes and to mark the Lunar New Year holiday, which they call Tet. This was an especially special time for Bob as he got to meet their families and learn about Vietnamese culture. He describes it as “one of the most profound, meaningful experiences in [my] life by happenstance” since he was in the right place and time to get

to know the Vietnamese people and their culture. He took these experiences with him, and they would further influence his journalism and work in the future.

His time in Vietnam impacted Bob to personally see a different slice of the world and of people's lives beyond anything he had experienced before. All his life, he had gone from growing up in a small town of almost all white people, never seeing a person of color, to going to DePauw University in Indiana where there were maybe five African Americans and two or three Asian Americans. The military experience allowed him to meet new people who were different from himself.

Bob returned to the United States in early July 1972 with the colors of the unit, a flag representing the 60th battalion of the 1st Signal Brigade. Although his commanding officer urged him to become a career officer, he didn't have any interest in doing so. He left the army and turned back to his passion for journalism.

After returning to the States, Bob decided to go to graduate school at Syracuse University for their broadcast journalism program. At Syracuse, Bob met another graduate student and they married in the Fall of 1973. They moved to Bangor, Maine where Bob was hired at the NBC television station. It was there that he started his professional career and began identifying as a storyteller, reporting the news about politics, government, environment and many other issues around Maine.

After working as a reporter and newsroom manager for television stations in Maine, Wisconsin and Iowa for a decade, Bob still felt like something was missing from his life. He had always been interested in ethics, specifically professional ethics

in journalism. The University of Iowa offered a doctorate program in journalism that offered a qualitative research approach. Bob wrote one of the first PhD dissertations on journalism ethics with a focus on ethical decision-making in journalism.

After receiving his doctorate, he went on to teach journalism ethics as well as media law and reporting at the University of Maine for six years. Serendipitously, Bob heard of a fellowship program for professors who taught journalism ethics, which he attended in 1987 at The Poynter Institute for Media Studies in St. Petersburg, Florida. The workshops were very enlightening, and eventually, things snowballed until the Poynter Institute offered him a full-time teaching position which he eventually accepted and would stay on as faculty for 19 years. Throughout that time, Bob connected with many very bright, talented journalists and storytellers around the world and was even on call for journalists across the country and around the world if they had an ethical dilemma.

Life had a funny way of circling back for Bob, and one day, he received a call from DePauw University, his undergraduate institution, asking him to come back and be an Endowed Professor. Bob asked for time to consider the offer since he did not want to move suddenly or be apart from his wife Carol. He encouraged the university to also offer her a position. Once they saw her resume with a Bachelor's, three master's degrees, and a PhD. DePauw University offered Carol a position as an Associate Dean of Academic Affairs, and for Bob, they had a new ethics institute at the university that they hoped he would help develop as well as teaching on the DePauw faculty. Bob and Carol spent six years at DePauw and greatly enjoyed their

connections with many very bright and talented students, some of whom they stay in touch with to this day.

Bob and Carol retired in 2014, choosing to settle down in Denver, CO since two of their three daughters live there (the third is a physician in Portland, Maine). They are still very active in their community, including teaching classes and being involved in various volunteer organizations. Bob continues to coach and guide journalists and media leaders in journalism ethics, recognizing that good journalism is an important cornerstone of democracy. Bob has truly made a positive impact on the lives of many, building an incredible, beautiful community of journalists and storytellers.



Furthermore, from a single conversation, you can see the pride that Bob has in his work with the journalism community. Bob has a special spark in his eyes when he talks about Carol and his family that includes five grandchildren. He joyfully recounted that Carol served on the board for Laboratory to Combat Human Trafficking (LCHT) for almost ten years, and eagerly described where each of his daughters are in life and their many accomplishments. Bob takes pride in his work, his family, and the community around him. As much as he has made a lasting impact in the world and through journalism, he has also been impacted by those around him.

WHERE THE MOUNTAINS GLOW ORANGE

A Life Remembered

Written by: Luana Gnatenco

“It couldn’t have been any better”, Julie smiled as she recounts the countless beautiful, memories that have shaped her life. Julie Patterson was born in 1942.



Her father was a medic through World War II, and after his service he moved to South Dakota. Although by definition he was Julie’s stepfather, in every way that truly mattered, he was

her father. They were bound not by blood, but by love. He was the type of dad every girl wanted. He was also an expert at pranks, putting rubber peanuts in the snack dish for all the kids to find while eating. And her mother, well she was sophisticated. She was head of the PTA, always very involved in the church, someone who had a true talent for bringing people together. And while she was somewhat of a socialite, she had this incredible sense of humor that you just couldn't get enough of.

Julie's childhood home was filled with love, humor, and an abundance of energy. She grew up with not one, not two, but five siblings. Paul, Nini, and Julie, well, they were the three musketeers; they did absolutely everything together. Julie was also extremely close to Diane, Janelle, and David, the babies of the family. Julie and her siblings went on so many grand adventures together. In fact, with the help of her siblings, she became an entrepreneur at quite a young age. Julie and her siblings used to go up into the mountains growing up, and they saw this bright, magical orange stream flowing through the valleys. Julie and her siblings ended up bottling the water from the mountains and made quite a successful business selling orange juice to their neighbors. Her parents were shocked first that Julie was selling mountain water, turned orange in color from the mines, to the neighborhood, and even more shocked that she was quite successful at doing so and had made some good profits!

Some might call it chance, but I like to think it was fate that led Julie to Colorado. Julie's father was walking down the streets of Aurora when he ran into an old friend and colleague on the street, they got to talking. They would go on to open the first medical clinic in Aurora together. In 1953, their family

all moved to Aurora, CO and her father bought a brand-new house. “This is a house filled with love and magic”, Julie tells me. There’s a peaceful air to it, and anyone who comes to visit has the easiest time relaxing and falling asleep. Julie still lives there to this very day, she and her father are the only people to own it.



Julie absolutely loves Colorado. She gave birth to two beautiful girls here, Debra and Clare. It’s amazing how quickly Julie’s face completely lit up when talking about her daughters, “all three of us were so close, it was us three against the world.” She laughs as she recalls their love of horror movies. One of their favorite family shows was dark shadows, even though Debra and Clare were only 4 or 5 years old, they just couldn’t get enough!

One of Julie’s fondest memories looking back is when she took her two daughters to the mountains for a picnic up in Evergreen. She recalls how different it was back then, the mountains were an open landscape with barely any civilization climbing through. As they were driving, Julie couldn’t find a good picnic spot, so they decided to stop in the middle of the

road and set up their extravagant spread of delicious treats on the side of the road. It didn't matter where they were, they were together, and that was more than enough to create the most perfect day.

While Julie's life was filled with so much love and warmth, it wasn't always easy. When Julie and her ex-husband divorced, she was taking care of the house and staying home with her girls. However, she always had a love for cooking and caring for others, which is what inspired her to start working at the Aurora Public Schools as a cook. She then also took a job cooking at a ranch called Geneva Glen Summer Camp, where she recalls helping throw a beautiful renaissance themed dinner, perfected with a large moat and castle cake, roast pig, fabulous dress, and no cutlery of course.

After working at the schools, Julie started working at the Buckley Airforce base as a cook. It was a wonderful experience. Julie explains her daughters were essentially adopted by the security, police, fire fighters, and crash crews. They spend many days in the crash tower and security rooms and soon, the brand-new Airforce equipment became their favorite toys.

One day, a firefighter at Buckley who was very fond of Julie asked her if she would like to learn CPR. Julie responded, "Sure, I'd love to! What is that?!" The rest is history. Julie not only learned CPR, but soon after, she became the third female paramedic in Colorado. She was not only one of the first women paramedics at that time, but she was also incredibly good at her job, and one of the only paramedics to perform a cricothyroidotomy on scene. She even got to help one of the Oakland Raiders players when they were playing the Broncos, and he ruptured his spleen. She laughs as she recalls him

begging her not to take off his lucky shoes, but due to his unfortunate injury, she remembers telling him he'll probably need a new pair of shoes as they aren't as lucky as he thought.

When looking back at her many successful careers, I asked Julie which was her favorite. She reports that all of them were, she loved what she did, and she seized every opportunity given. She never stopped wanting to care for others and to continue bettering herself. As she kept pondering my question though, she laughed before replying "But if I really think about it, it was working with the firefighters... I really liked the firefighters."

Although Julie always kept herself busy with work and taking care of the girls, she also had a huge love for horses. Her father was able to get Julie's great uncle a doctor to help him get hip surgery. As a thank you, her great uncle granted them a horse: E-Day. Although the horse was for the whole family, everyone knew that it was Julie's horse. She loved riding with E-day throughout Colorado. He was more than a pet to Julie; he was one of her best friends. One day, she even brought Nini with her to ride E-day, and E-day shot out from their grip like a shot out of a cannon. They laughed while chasing E-day, and that was the last time she ever lost him, as E-day and Julie stayed attached at the hip. While E-day was arguably her favorite, Julie loved animals her whole life and had 9 dogs she raised. When she wasn't taking care of the animals, she was gardening, laughing with her girls, or making her famous fruit cake (that was more of a nut cake) that was an absolute family favorite.

No matter the hardship, Julie would always say that her faith and her family were what carried her through. She meets every moment with an open heart and every person with a warm, genuine smile. There's a quiet strength in the way she moves through life—finding joy not in grand gestures, but in the simplest of things: a well-played prank, a roadside picnic shared with loved ones, or the pure happiness she describes watching her friends and family savor her famous fruit (but mostly nut) cake. Julie has a way of making the ordinary feel extraordinary—and of reminding us all what truly matters.



ABOUT THE SENIOR STORYBOOK

This book is a compilation of stories shared by seniors from the Veterans Affairs Hospital and various UCHHealth clinics. Stories were written by medical students at the Anschutz Medical Campus in Aurora, CO.

Project led by:

Ellie Golding

Julia Schaffer

Tien To

Brendan King

Hannah Schara, MD

Steven Lowenstein, MD

Stories edited by:

Ellie Golding

Julia Schaffer

Tien To

Ekshika Patel

Nicole Case