



THE INCREDIBLE LIFE OF CHICKI DOWNS

By Marian L. (“Chicki”) “The Bra Lady” Downs

As Told To Dona Bakker

“THE INCREDIBLE LIFE OF CHICKI DOWNS”

Copyright © 2016 Pastime Publications

*All rights reserved. The publisher gives permission for this book to be reproduced and/or transmitted electronically .
However, no changes are allowed to be made to the text. All other requests or inquiries should be addressed to:*

Pastime Publications

1370 Trancas Street, #372

Napa, CA 94558

(707) 252-4062

www.napavalleypastime.com

Authors:

Marian L. Downs and Dona Bakker

FOREWORD

Chicki's garment fittings were more than just laying bricks. She was building a cathedral as she loved and cared for the whole person. She was an outspoken, self-confident woman who never hesitated to say things as she saw them. She had the good in each person at heart. All the people who she has blessed over the years, while building her cathedral, are the fruits of her labors, her legacy. Only God knows all the good she did for her clients, all the people she lovingly trained, those of us who loved her and worked with her, and the companies which have manufactured our garments over the years.

A verse in the book of Wisdom reads, "They that trust in Him shall understand the truth; and they that are faithful in love shall rest in Him, for grace and peace is to His elect."

We miss the grand, old lady, but we know she's not really missing us. She is enjoying her well-deserved reward with the Lord she loved so much. I am sure she was welcomed into Heaven with the words, "Come, blessed of my Father."

Love and prayers,

Jean Vistica

INTRODUCTION

It was an absolute joy working with Chicki Downs on her life story. I had known this amazing woman for several years before coming to love and respect her while interviewing her for her book. As the details of her incredible life unfolded, the sense of urgency grew in me to see this project to completion so that her wisdom and life lessons would not be forever lost. After all, she was 90 years old when we began our journey together down Memory Lane.

There was so much more to Chicki Downs than selling custom-fitted bras and teaching proper breast health. Her desire to serve began at a young age in Sunday school. In her 35 years as a Girl Scout leader, 109 of her girls, including her own daughter, became Curve Bar Scouts under her leadership. Recognition as a Curve Bar Scouts was equal to that of an Eagle Scout for the boys. The positive influence Chicki had on these young, impressionable souls will live on for generations.

I can honestly say I have never met a more positive and inspiring woman. A few years ago when Chicki broke her arm, instead of complaining about the pain or the fact that she would have to hire someone to temporarily run her business, she said to me, "This is wonderful! Now I have time to work on my book." She always found the good in every situation, because she was convinced that God had everything under His control.

We moved slowly on the book, but not because of health issues or lapses in memory. No, it was because Chicki was much too busy living her life to spend time writing about it. She was still working, attending conventions, traveling the country, giving motivational speeches, attending Sunday church and mid-week Bible studies, as well as competing in a Wii bowling league. Every time we talked, she had a new story to tell of how God had providentially orchestrated some event or situation, always bringing her new people to bless.

Chicki's entire life was a miracle. She escaped death many times, beginning on that cold, January morning when she was born. From an early age she was assured by her grandfather that Jesus would always have His hand on her life. This wise and insightful counsel continued to motivate Chicki to make the best of every situation. She vowed to finish well by doing whatever God asked of her until he called her Home. And that she did!

Dona Bakker

Chapter 1

For over 40 years I told everyone “These bras are the best thing since popcorn.” And then I would prove it to them. “Watch,” I would say, as I jumped up and down; “I don’t bounce!”

I was 49 ½ years old when I began my new career as The Bra Lady. There was nothing special about that, except that I continued working until I was 94 years old, fitting and selling quality bras to an ever expanding clientele (no pun intended). And, by the way, I may not jump as high, but I still don’t bounce.

I have had an extraordinary life. Through the bra business, I have traveled to the four corners of the world and made a good living. But nothing compares to the lifelong friendships I have developed and the opportunities I have been given to help women feel good about themselves.

My life was far from boring before I became The Bra Lady. As I reflect on the past, I realize every experience, every miracle, and every blessing led me to who I am today.

It’s been said if we look back, find out where we came from, and the kind of people who lived before us, that is what makes us who we are because we’re all part of what came before.

My mother’s family, the De Temples, were Huguenots and were driven out of Alsace Lorraine in northern France. When they landed in the United States, they took a horse and dragged their possessions behind them across New York and settled 30 miles outside Buffalo in a little town called Darien.

My grandfather Peter De Temple moved to North Tonawanda, New York where my mother and her two brothers, Charlie and Bill, and sister, Laura, were born. Grandfather De Temple carved merry-go-round animals for a living all of his life. These animals were shipped all over the country. There is a museum in North Tonawanda where some of the animals he created are on display. I understand some of the animals are currently part of the merry-go-round in Golden Gate Park in San Francisco.

Uncle Bill and Uncle Charlie were both world famous bicycle racers. They won many valuable prizes including diamonds. The Haviland china I used during my married life was one of their prizes. I have since handed it down to my daughter.

Mother was referred to by her family as “nature’s last attempt,” having been born long after her two brothers had left home and when her sister was 15. Growing up alone, Mother’s best friends were the Sunday funnies and comic books.

After six months of piano lessons at the age of 10, my mother’s musical talents became apparent. She was not distracted by siblings or neighborhood friends, so music became her life. Her two brothers were both skilled musicians, but my mother was a natural. She could play anything and could change the key with ease in the middle of a song. Starting in the fifth grade, my mother accompanied the first, second, and third grade classes in her school on the piano.

Mother and the piano became the centerpiece of our home, where everyone came to listen and sing along. Music was the only thing that could draw my mother out of herself.

Throughout her life, Mother played the piano at church and at women’s organizations such as the Eastern Star. She even accompanied well-known opera singers. As a teenager living in North Tonawanda, she played the piano at the theater during the silent movies. Her sister’s three daughters would sit in the front row watching the screen and yelling out to my mother, “Indians, Aunt Ruth, Indians,” and my mother would play “Indian” music. Then they’d say, “Oh, he’s dying” and she’d play “dying” music. This went on through the entire movie and my mother never missed a beat.

During her early adult years my mother worked as a proofreader for the local newspaper. She was excellent in grammar and spelling. She taught piano lessons until she was well into her 80s, and she only had a high school education.

My father's great-grandfather, Rev. Louis David Emile Wallon, was born in Friedrichsdorf, Prussia to a schoolmaster, Louis Wallon, and Susan Louisa Pivat, the eldest daughter of a prominent family. Rev. Wallon's Christian upbringing took a turn in 1851 towards what was a fulfilling career in the New German Methodist Church beginning in 1851.

Rev. Wallon migrated to the U.S. and settled in New York City. He built a church on Third Avenue and 14th Street and became the first German American Methodist Bishop. He was also a poet and musician who wrote many of the hymns that were well-known to the German Methodist congregations. During the last two years of his life, he devoted his efforts to the Bethany Deaconess Home and Hospital, where he served on the Board of Directors and was their President for many years.

The Wallon family had nine children, one of whom was my grandmother Lydia.

Phillipp Bommer was born in 1827 in Germany, near Munich and was trained as a shoemaker. He migrated to the U.S. It is family lore that Phillip met Elisabetha Zimmermann on the ship coming over to America.

In 1849, Phillip settled in Buffalo, New York and married Elisabetha in 1853. They lived behind the shoe shop on Genesee Street and had 14 children. The ninth child was my grandfather, Ferdinand John Bommer. Phillip created shoes all of his life and everyone in our family has beautiful feet. We always wore good shoes and have no bunions or corns, even into our senior years.

I am most like my father, Ferdinand Jesse Bommer, Jr., who was independent and outgoing with a passion to explore. He was the oldest of three boys. My grandfather had big plans for his sons to follow him in the real estate and insurance business. The middle son, Harold, died from a damaged heart at age 29. He was running for a street car in Toronto, Canada and just fell over and died of a heart attack right there on the street. His heart had been weakened by a near drowning. When he was a little boy, he was caught in the undertow of Lake Erie and his brother Raymond rescued him.

Uncle Raymond joined the family business, but soon found himself unable to get out from under his father's controlling thumb. Raymond, however, stayed in the business until his father's death.

My father Ferd, which is what everyone called him, refused to be dictated to and went his own way. He met my mother in Darien when they were both teenagers. After my Grandfather De Temple died, my mother and grandmother moved to Buffalo so my father came to Buffalo as well. He then married my mother, Ruth Edna DeTemple Bommer, on September 13, 1917.

As my Grandfather Bommer told me from the day I was born, January 21, 1919, Jesus has had His hand on me. We were in the middle of the worst flu pandemic the world had ever seen, or has seen since. Nearly 50,000,000 people lost their lives to the flu between the spring of 1918 and the summer of 1919, 675,000 in the United States alone, which was ten times the number of souls lost in World War I. The flu broke out the same year the war ended and, by the time it had run its course, it had affected nearly 700,000,000 people worldwide.

(https://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/Influenza_pandemic_of_1918)

Infants and the elderly were the most vulnerable to contract the flu. Patients at Lafayette General Hospital in Buffalo, New York where I was born were no exception. Funerals were being held in a makeshift chapel in the room next to where I lay in my mother's arms. The bodies of the deceased could not be released from the hospital for fear of further contamination.

My parents were going to name me Mary Lydia Bommer, but they didn't think Mary flowed well with Lydia, so they changed it to Marian Lydia. I was named after my grandmother Lydia.

Dad nicknamed me Hinky after the French ditty, "Hinky Dinky Parlez Vous," made popular during World War I. Everyone said I looked just like my mother, but that's where the resemblance ended. It was evident early on that I am my father through and through. Unlike me, my mother was very shy and reserved.

On the day I was born, Dad started working for Jewett Refrigerator Corporation, which manufactured refrigerator doors, as well as airplane propellers for war planes. This would be his career for the next 30 years. With only a high school education, he worked his way up from laborer to President of the company. He went to school at night to learn how to design the doors. Being ambidextrous became an asset, as he could work more quickly than most of his coworkers. He could write with his right hand and draw with his left. It was fascinating to watch him write, switching the pencil back and forth between his two hands.

I always felt much closer to my father than my mother, but the bond I had with my Grandfather Bommer was special. He was the only grandparent I can remember, as my mother's father died when she was only 16. My only recollection of my mother's mother was seeing her lifeless body in a coffin in our home at her funeral when I was only 3 or 4 years old. I vaguely remember my Grandmother Bommer as she died when I was 7.

I was Grandfather Bommer's first granddaughter and, after raising three boys, he had reserved a soft spot in his heart just for me. His domineering manner was never exhibited towards me. Grandfather Bommer's religious roots ran deep and he introduced me to Jesus at a very young age. My parents were both Christians, but being around Grandfather Bommer was like reading the Bible. He lived what he believed and everything he taught me has sustained me throughout all of my life's challenges.

Shortly after his wife's death, when I was 7, Grandfather Bommer would take me with him on Saturdays, as he drove all over town collecting premiums on the insurance policies – a quarter here, fifty cents there, a dollar here. Initially he took me along because he loved spending time with me. I soon became an asset to his business. This strong, proud man would never admit to anyone, but he could get lost just going around the block. I had a wonderful sense of direction, especially for a little kid. Once he realized the strength of the radar system in my head, he took me along every week on his entire route. I could tell him what the next street was before even seeing the sign. With my help, he was able to collect from all of his clients in a timely manner, and no one ever knew his weakness.

Chapter 2

I wasn't quite 2 ½ years old when Dorothy Evelyn Bommer came along so, of course, I don't remember not having a sister. After Mother and I dodged the deadly flu, she decided she would never have another baby in a hospital. Ironically, Dorothy was born in the apartment where we lived at the time, but I turned out to be the healthier child. Dorothy's health issues began at 7 months of age when she contracted diphtheria and spent two weeks in the hospital. It was so contagious not even our mother was allowed to visit her. This was very difficult on Mother because Dad was away, installing new refrigerators in all the Statler Hotel rooms.

Dorothy and I both had our tonsils removed when we were very young which, at the time, was a common surgical procedure performed in the doctor's office. We went together to Dr. Deegan's office and were both placed under general anesthesia for the operation. Two hours following the surgery, I was up and ready to go home. Dorothy never took her head off the pillow for two weeks. She was always the sickly one and faced difficult health issues all of her life. I was the active one; nothing could keep me down.

Dorothy and I always got along well for siblings so close in age. I was a little taller because I was older, but as we grew, Dorothy caught up with me. Mother was always a little bit taller than either of us.

When Dorothy was 2 and I was 4, we lived in a flat in North Tonawanda, New York, between the White Steam Laundry and the Post Office. The merry-go-round factory where Grandfather DeTemple worked was across the street.

I was always a handful. One day while playing out in front of our house, two little neighbor girls came along. After some little girl small talk and a few giggles, one of the girls said, "You know, we're having sketti for supper tonight. Would you like to come home to our house and have sketti?"

Well, I loved "sketti," so I went home with them, but I didn't tell anyone. When my mother went outside to call me in for supper, I was gone. Everyone scoured the neighborhood, frantically calling my name, but I was nowhere to be found. The drivers from the White Steam Laundry drove their horse-drawn trucks up and down every street, hoping to see me walking home. The policemen and firemen joined in the hunt.

We lived about six blocks from the Erie Barge Canal which was cause for great concern. It was around 6:30 in the evening and there was talk of dredging the Canal to find the remains of the lost little girl. As everyone in the neighborhood searched and prayed, I suddenly appeared, walking gleefully down the street with the two little girls. We were holding hands and swinging our arms, spaghetti sauce on our faces, oblivious to the drama that had unfolded since my departure from the front yard. When I saw Mother, I exclaimed, "Oh, Mama, they had sketti. It was good sketti. And you know how they ate it? They put their heads way down by the plate and they just shoved it up into their mouths."

My mother's sense of relief quickly turned to anger, but at the same time she was trying not to laugh. Part of her wanted to smack me, I am sure, but one thing she realized that day was that her number one daughter was destined for adventure, and she had no idea how accurate she was.

We moved for a short while to Tonawanda, New York, into a two-story house on Benton Street. The furnace which heated our entire two-story house was in the center of the living room floor. I went to school around the corner. One day when I was in the first grade we were at home and heard the sound of sirens in the distance. As we listened, the piercing noise grew closer. As the sirens became louder and louder, my mother took me upstairs so we could look out the

window and see what was going on. She stood me on the toilet seat in the bathroom so I could watch as my school burned to the ground. I remember the huge flames rising into the sky, a sight that is forever stamped in my memory.

After the school burned down, I went to another school which was near the Erie Barge Canal. From where we lived, I had to walk through a lumber and tar yard. I remember the piles of wood and the strong smell of tar. Though it was tempting to stay in the lumberyard all day and climb the stacks of wood, we were never late for school for fear of the ridicule and embarrassment which tardiness would bring. So I walked through the lumberyard as quickly as I could. One day when I was still in the first grade, I dawdled a bit too long in the lumberyard and was late for class. To prolong the trouble that awaited me, I sat and sobbed on the curb in the coat room until the teacher had to come and coax me to my seat.

The best times in school I can remember were in fourth and fifth grades, because I adored my teachers. My fourth grade teacher, Ms. Bickle, was my favorite because she read to us. I was not a very good reader, but I loved listening to the stories. She read books like "Toby Tyler" and "Heidi." About six weeks into the school year, Ms. Bickle became principal of the school. Doris Eminger, who lived across the street from us and whom we had known for years, became our teacher. Luckily she read to us, too. Several years later I went back to visit and my cousin took me to a retirement home to see Ms. Eminger. She was in her 90s at the time. Amazingly, she remembered me.

Neither Dorothy nor I were as musically talented as our mother, but we did take piano and violin lessons. Mother hoped we would at least learn to appreciate music, which we eventually did. I never liked practicing. I would much rather spend my day outside exploring anything new.

The walk to school was long and boring, but when I went on walks with my dad, we were in no hurry, and the things we saw always sparked interesting conversation. The high speed trolley that went from Buffalo to Niagara Falls ran right by the Erie Barge Canal and was so loud when it passed that we couldn't hear ourselves talking. On one of our walks, we heard a screeching noise on the tracks that told us something was horribly wrong. The trolley had somehow jumped the track. As we approached the scene, we saw bodies strewn everywhere, some with severed limbs. To protect me from the gruesome sight, my dad quickly whisked me away. My memory of the scene is sketchy, but what I did see has remained with me since that awful day.

In the middle of my second grade year, my parents bought a house on Mang Avenue in Kenmore, New York. It was a lovely residential village in Tonawanda Township. I went all through school in Kenmore, beginning at Delaware Avenue Elementary School, which was about a four-block walk from our house. We were convinced that Buffalo, New York had the worst winter weather, with its piercing cold wind and blustering snow storms. Our eyes were the only thing exposed as we bundled up for the long, chilly walk to school.

I can recall going down to the mercantile on Delaware Avenue and looking at all the merchandise they carried. I also visited the florist shop that was owned by my parents' best friends. They had two children close to our age and the four of us would play hide-and-go-seek in their hot house. I remember the fresh smell of the dirt and the fragrant flowers and what fun we had there. Maybe that's why I have always loved gardening, which was something my father and I also enjoyed doing together. I have been blessed with green thumbs. I said that to my firstborn granddaughter once and she took hold of my thumbs and exclaimed, "Grandma, they're not green, they're pink."

Once while gardening with my father, he was standing at the fence in the side yard visiting with the man next door. They were talking about a “crazy man named Lindbergh” who was flying an airplane all the way over the Atlantic Ocean. The two men debated whether or not Mr. Lindbergh would make it across the Atlantic. And, of course, it was on the front page of the newspaper, the “crazy” Mr. Lindbergh did actually fly across the Atlantic, and what a reception he received when he landed in a field in Paris, France on May 21, 1927!

The bank was two blocks from our house in Kenmore and upstairs from the bank was a beauty shop. Dorothy was blessed with “Shirley Temple” curls, but “Buster Brown” was the only hairdo that worked for my straight, stringy locks. So one day my mother took me in for a permanent wave. The beautician took sticks and wrapped my hair around them and then steamed it. The permanent solution smelled so awful it made me nauseous and my eyes burned. On rare occasions my mother would let me have a manicure and I was allowed to choose my color of polish. I chose mauve, purplish-red and to this day that is the only color polish I have ever worn. I love purple. Maybe it’s because my middle name is Lydia. In the Bible, Lydia was known as the seller of exquisite garments with expensive, purple dye. All throughout my life, whenever I hoped for something special to happen, I would wear something purple. Seems every time I did, I was successful. I guess it really is my color.

As young girls living in Kenmore, Dorothy and I had two dogs. Trixie was the first, a brown Daschund that had been run over by a bus and was permanently injured. She had to sit with her rear legs up in the air off to the side. Trixie would let Dorothy and me dress her in doll clothes. We only had her for about a year and a half, but she provided us many incredible memories.

We also had a Boston Bull Terrier we named Cleopatra. “Cleo” slept in the kitchen underneath the stove, which had legs that provided just enough room for her bed. We would be sitting in the living room or the sun room and one of us would say “I think I’ll go to the store” and Cleo would be at the door before we could get there. She loved to go everywhere with us. We had Cleo for about 16 years. In fact, she was still around after I was married.

Even without television we were never bored. We always had our creative minds and the neighborhood was our playground. We played kick the can and hopscotch and I loved doing cartwheels in the yard. We made doll houses out of orange crates, painted each room and built our own miniature furniture. Five doors down from our house lived a dressmaker who had the best garbage. On garbage collection day Dorothy and I dug through her can, collecting the remnants of material swatches she had thrown away. We used them to decorate our doll houses and make doll clothes. The woman had children our age and knew what we were doing. As long as we didn’t make a mess, she was fine with it. All the children in the neighborhood came to our garage with their doll houses and we would play together for hours. I never sat idle, and am still on the move.

There was a field next to our house where all the kids in the neighborhood would gather. We would dig a hole for a charcoal fire and roast potatoes which we called “spuds.” In the summer we picnicked on the field, and in the winter, after it flooded and froze, we skated on it.

At age 9 I began babysitting for money. I remember watching twin girls who lived next to the field. I would watch them at our house. We had a brick fireplace with a mantle and bookcases on each side. Those little girls, still in diapers, would climb up on a chair and walk the length of that book case and back. They were like little wind-up dolls, always running in opposite directions.

Whenever I babysat at someone else’s house, I loved thumbing through their magazines, looking at the fashions of the Roaring Twenties. The models were gorgeous in their flapper style

dresses. My mother had one of those dresses that she wore to the Ziegfeld Follies in New York when she went with my father on one of his business trips. In high-heels my mother was actually taller than my dad.

Before leaving on one of those business trips, Dad told me and my sister if we stopped biting our fingernails, he would bring us each a parasol from New York. That was enough incentive for us and we immediately stopped biting our nails. Dorothy and I couldn't wait to show our friends the beautiful, brightly colored, floral printed parasols our Dad brought us from New York City.

Chapter 3

I can't remember ever not going to church. As a family we attended the Kenmore Methodist Church which was across the street from the junior and senior high schools. We were all very active in the church. My mother played the piano and my father formed the Newsteader Sunday school class for younger, married couples. Sometimes he taught the class and at other times others would teach.

Every Sunday, before the minister gave his sermon, all the children gathered in the front of the church while someone would give them a little sermon. Then I would take the children out of the church and downstairs to the auditorium. Sometimes I had 40 or 50 kids from 2 to 9 years old. I was only 11 or 12 at the time, but I knew how to run children. I had been babysitting for nearly three years and I was a natural.

As I paraded these children down the stairs, my mother felt sorry for me. She thought I was crazy to volunteer to do this, so she would accompany the little 2 and 3 year olds. By the time she arrived in the auditorium with the wee ones, I had all the older kids lined up on the platform and giving them instructions.

"Now this is what we're going to do today. I'm going to read you a story and we're gonna sing some songs and if ya don't behave, I'm gonna tell your folks." And they believed me, so they behaved perfectly. My mother would ask me, "How did you dare do that?" I definitely did not take after her. She never understood me, especially my connection with younger children. I earned their respect and they always responded positively to my redirection. As a teenager I also taught vacation Bible school where I had as many as 30 kids in my class.

When I was 10 years old, I joined the Girl Scouts which met at my church. I stayed in Girl Scouts until I was 17. I attended Girl Scout camp for two weeks every summer and always had a wonderful time. I worked my way up through the ranks and became a Curved Bar Scout which, from 1940 to 1963, was the equivalent of the Eagle Scout for the Boy Scouts. The highest honor was changed in 1963 to First Class Scout. I enjoyed every aspect of scouting, from the badge work to the camping and hiking and camaraderie with the other Scouts. I knew that if I ever had a daughter I would want her to be a Girl Scout and experience the same excitement and adventure.

Chapter 4

When I was about 15 and Dorothy was 13, Dad took us on a two-week vacation to Fern Cottage, a lovely resort in Orillia, Ontario, Canada. It had a lake where we fished and rowed. I think Dad chose this spot because of the golf course. For us city folk, spending time in the great outdoors was a special adventure.

There was an island in the middle of the lake which was an Indian burial site. In the evenings we went across the lake to a large building where they served all our dinners. It was a nice vacation for mother since she didn't have to cook. She wasn't a very good cook, so it was a treat for all of us. After dinner we gathered at a small house which had been turned into a dance hall, complete with juke box and dance floor. My parents loved to dance.

We all had such a grand time, we returned the following year for vacation. I especially remember that second trip when we traveled to the resort after dark. It was a long drive, about 80 miles north of Toronto, Canada, and we needed to find a place along the way to spend the night. We had seen some lovely motels along the way and Father said "No, no, I want to wait until we get above Toronto." Well as it turned out, there weren't any nice motels north of Toronto. We ended up in a room the size of a chicken coop. It was rainy and windy and the boughs of the trees beat on the roof all night long. We slept little that night and Mother was extremely upset with Dad for not stopping when there were nice motels.

We were fortunate our dad had a good job. Here we were, going on vacation during the Great Depression. when most people were struggling just to feed their families.

Once Dorothy and I were old enough to stay home alone, Dad would take Mother out dancing nearly every Saturday night. As soon as they had driven away, Dorothy and I would sneak downstairs and turn on the radio. We didn't have television in those days and we were only allowed to listen to certain programs. The "Lux Radio Theater" was the longest running anthology series on radio, featuring many famous stars. It was one full hour of entertainment, performed in front of a live audience, a wonderful theater program with a good storyline. There were other hour-long series on the radio, just like we have on TV today. Dorothy and I would sit in one chair together with the lights off so we could see the driveway. As soon as we saw the lights of Dad's car, we'd quickly turn off the radio, sneak upstairs, and pretend we were sleeping. Dorothy and I enjoyed the radio shows, but we also liked getting away with being a bit rebellious.

Later I talked my dad into buying me my own radio. My Philco kept me company for hours. I never have liked being alone, and even today I always have the television on.

Our neighbors across the street, the Jameses, ran a dance school. They had two daughters about our age. For many years Dorothy and I attended the James' dance school and became quite proficient in all the dance steps. One night the Jameses held a dance at their school. I was thrilled when a 17 year old boy asked me to dance. I was only 12 or 13.

My father and Mr. James were both German, about the same size physically, around 5' 5" with medium build. Whenever they were together they acted like little kids. They would save up tin cans for months and buy giant firecrackers. Then they would have me and Dorothy, my mother, Mrs. James, and their two girls sit on the curb while these two grown men went into the middle of the street and lit the firecrackers which they placed underneath a row of tin cans. The challenge was to see who could blow their tin can the highest. Everything was a contest with them. I suppose if they were alive today, they'd be watching every sporting event on television and betting against each other.

My father loved people, another trait I shared with him. He was a likeable character and all of our friends adored him. Our house was where everyone in the neighborhood wanted to hang out. My parents made it fun. Dad would play card games and share his wonderful sense of humor with us all. We had an upright piano on the sun porch where my mother would play and we would all stand around her singing all the popular tunes.

Our parents and several of the neighbors would play bridge on the weekends at different houses. One evening when Dorothy and I were in high school, my mother and father had a couple over to play bridge. The woman's name was Ernestine, but I can't recall her husband's name. They had no children, but, nonetheless, Ernestine was an expert in raising children, or so she thought. She never hesitated to tell everyone else how to do it. Dorothy and I were getting ready for a formal dance at school. We came downstairs in our party dresses and our dates were there to pick us up. Ernestine turned and looked at Dorothy and me and asked, "Where are your gloves? You're certainly not going to a dance without your gloves on."

I looked at Dorothy and exclaimed, "Oh, we forgot our gloves." I grabbed Dorothy by the arm and we went back upstairs. We came back downstairs, each wearing a pair of oversized, sheepskin gloves. My mother was mortified. Sometimes my sense of humor was just too much for her. Ernestine was indignant. She remarked, "Well, I never!" My dad and Ernestine's husband were visibly amused, but tried to suppress their laughter to appease the women.

I attended Kenmore Junior High and Kenmore High School. I was never involved in sports in school. I loved geography and history and yearned to travel someday to all the places I had read about.

As I said, Mother was a terrible cook. Her mother was so old when she gave birth for the last time, whatever Mother learned about cooking was by trial and error, mostly error. She did learn to sew and made most of our clothes as we grew up. I was too busy to sit down and let Mother teach me to sew. It was in Miss Cook's seventh and eighth grade home economics class that I learned to cook and quickly developed a love of sewing. I made my own eighth grade graduation dress. It was a pretty, long organdy dress with red dots on it, form fitting with a flared, circular skirt from my knees down, with ruffles across the front all the way around the neckline. I made a lot of other clothes and enjoyed making them. Miss Cook would be really proud of me. Here I am, in my 90s, and I'm still tying the threads at the end of a seam just as she taught me to do.

During my junior year of high school, I can't remember why, but I wasn't happy at school. Grandfather Bommer knew I was not my usual, bubbly self, and that upset him because I was always his favorite and he wanted only the best for me. He suggested I attend Houghton Academy, which is down in the southern part of New York State, south of Rochester and north of Jamestown. It is a combination college and academy.

Since it was Grandfather Bommer's idea, of course my parents felt it was a good decision to change schools. As I said, my dad was one of the lucky ones. He had a job during the Depression and did well financially so he could afford the tuition.

I spent my entire junior year at Houghton Academy and it turned out to be the best thing for me and for my future. It was there that I developed a deep relationship with the Lord. Houghton was a Wesleyan Methodist College. Some referred to them as "holy rollers." And here I was a member of the United Methodist Church, where there was never a mention of the Holy Ghost.

Upon my arrival at Houghton, there was a revival meeting every night for two weeks. I wrote to my mother and said, "They're all crazy. They yell out in the sermon 'Praise the Lord,

Hallelujah.' They talk when the preacher's preaching." I was aghast at their behavior, but before the two weeks were up, I found myself kneeling at the altar and giving my life to God.

I remember that day as if it just happened. There was a full moon and I had to walk up a steep hill back to my dorm. I felt 18 stories tall. My grandfather had been praying for me since the day I was born and it was because of him that I was attending this school.

There were six students residing in our dorm. My roommate, Florence, was from Rahway, New Jersey. She was very different, 18 years old and did not know anything about life. She thought cows lifted their leg on a tree like a dog to relieve themselves. Oh how she made me laugh. If I told her something new, she would say, "No, that's not true, you're kidding me." She wouldn't believe what I told her. I may have been a city girl, but she had never been in the country before in her life. She became so homesick it was pitiful.

Florence eventually settled into the school and before long she met a really nice farm boy. One night she came into the dorm crying hysterically. I asked, "What's wrong?" She said "Roy kissed me and now I'm pregnant." I said, "Did he only kiss you?" She said, "Yes." I said, "Then you're not pregnant." She said "Are you sure?" I replied, "Yes, I'm sure." She was so naive.

The entire experience of my junior year was refreshing for me. It was good for me to get away. I loved being there. The most beautiful, sweetest smelling wild flowers grew in the woods behind the school. I loved hiking those hills, to sit down in the sunshine and see God's beauty all around. I would bring some of the flowers back to brighten my room.

Just before my senior year in high school, I became very ill. It was believed I was on the verge of tuberculosis. I spent the next nine months in bed. I was not allowed to go to school until my fever was normal for seven consecutive days, which took nearly ten months. I resumed my senior year at Kenmore High school and graduated at age 19 with my sister and approximately 400 other students in 1938.

Upon my return to Kenmore High School I was a much happier person than when I had left to attend Houghton Academy. I had a crush on my math teacher when I was a senior. Now that I look back, he probably wasn't that much older than I was. I also had a male friend who gave me rides to school in his convertible. I don't think we were romantically associated since I can't even remember his name. I do remember he wasn't very tall, but he did have the most dashing, wavy, blond hair. It was nice not to have to walk the mile to school in the rain or a freezing cold, 12-foot high tunnel of snow.

I do remember the boy who took me to the senior prom. Dick Biggy. Several years later he was killed getting off a boat in Iwo Jima in the Philippines, leaving behind his wife who was pregnant with their first child. I can still see Dick Biggy walking through the field, coming to my house to take me to the prom, carrying a box with the corsage he bought for me.

When I was 16 I met one of my dearest friends, Carmelita (Carma for short), who was my Aunt Charlotte and Uncle Raymond's housekeeper. Carma also helped take care of their three little children. Carma introduced me to her friends who were all close to her age or older. It didn't matter to any of them that I was nearly three years younger. We all hit it off and became a tightly knit group.

One of the boys in the group, Carl Draper, liked me very much. Even though he was five years my senior, we became very good friends and dated each other off and on for about five years. We would go to movies or out with the crowd. There were usually 8 or 10 of us. I was honored that they accepted me into the group, since I was so much younger. I'm guessing it was because I was so active and enthusiastic that they were drawn to me. Every once in a while Carl dated Carma, but most of the time he went with me.

When I was 20, going on 21, Carl and I decided we wouldn't date for a whole year to see if we really wanted to be married and spend the rest of our lives together. You know the old saying, "Absence makes the heart grow fonder." Well, that's where our romance ended, because that was the year I met, went steady with, became engaged to, and married Barney Downs. Once I met Barney, it was clear to me that Carl and I were not meant to be with each other. Our fun was over and it was time to move on. Interestingly, Barney was the same age as Carl. I guess I can say I always went for older men.

Carma is still alive, living in Dayton, Ohio. Carl passed away several years ago. Three weeks before he died, I went to Buffalo to visit my cousin Shirley and she took me to see him. We had a nice visit, fondly reminiscing about old times. It was a blessing that the Lord allowed us this reunion shortly before he died.

Chapter 5

You've probably heard the term "whirlwind romance." Ours started with a double date, but I was with the other guy. My friend Harriet was with Barney and I was with a boy named John.

We went to a dance at the Statler Hotel where Ted Fio Rito and his orchestra were playing. At one point during the evening we switched partners and Barney and I danced the Strauss Waltz set of six songs. As we flowed across the dance floor, it felt so natural, as if we were meant to be together. John and I gave Harriet and Barney a ride home and Barney said to me, "I'm going to kiss Harriet goodnight, so I might as well kiss you, too!" And he did, right in front of John and Harriet.

Barney's parents were visiting him from South Dakota, so he didn't call me right away. It took two weeks and I had just about given up on him. As soon as his parents left, he called Harriet for my phone number.

Our first official date was a movie on a Monday night. I can even remember the movie - "Only Forever" starring Mary Martin and Bing Crosby. Tuesday night he came to my house and asked if I would watch him play baseball in the public field at the end of my street. Our house was only four doors down from the ball field. That was our second date. During the game Barney caught a fly ball and fell and broke his arm, so he was in a cast for our entire courtship, which lasted two months.

On Labor Day, 1940, Barney (Byron Enoch Downs, Jr.) asked me to marry him. We didn't understand the process, figuring we could just drive down to Pennsylvania and get married. When we arrived in Pennsylvania, we were told we couldn't get married because we had not had our blood tests. We returned home, still single, but we didn't give up on our plan. We had our blood tests, obtained our license, and went hunting for a furnished apartment.

On Saturday, September 21, we decided we would be married on Saturday, the 28th in Kenmore. The next night at about 10 o'clock, after arriving home from a date with Barney, I told my mother, "I'm getting married next Saturday at 4 o'clock. I'm wondering if you'd like to come to my wedding." Well, of course, she was hysterical. She just couldn't believe that Barney and I were getting married.

In the meantime, my dad had accepted a job with the Sanitary Refrigerator Door Company in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin and my folks were preparing for the move. Barney and I had talked it over and we decided that either we would get married or forget it, since I would have been forced to move with my family. We were convinced that long-distance romances never worked.

My father was in Fond du Lac training for his new job and my mother was in the middle of packing for the move. Now she had the added stress of planning a wedding.

My mother called my grandfather and told him, "Marian wants to get married on Saturday at 4 o'clock and I don't know what to do." He said, "Get in the car and come right over." By the time we got to my grandfather's house, he had the whole family there and they all stayed up until 2 a.m. planning my wedding. One aunt said she'd handle the reception. The other aunt said she'd be in charge of the church, and mother was to go out and buy us the clothes we needed for the wedding. The one aunt that was taking care of the church made all the arrangements for the wedding.

When my sweet grandfather realized that Barney couldn't afford to buy me an engagement ring, he gave Barney my grandmother's diamonds and took him to the jewelry store to have it set in a ring for me. I still wear that ring today.

During the planning for my wedding, my mother asked, “Do you realize you’re gonna have to look at this man across the breakfast table for the rest of your life?” I said, “Yes, Mother. I know. I will be happy doing that.” She shook her head and said, “Well, I don’t know if I even wanted to do that with your father.”

The day I met Barney I knew this was the man with whom I was to spend my life. And what a glorious life we had together. When he proposed, my Irish beau said to me, “If you don’t come down the aisle in a green dress, I won’t marry you.” He was only kidding, of course, but I wore a green dress nonetheless, and a green hat and green shoes, along with a white fur bunny jacket my mother bought me, accentuated with long, white opera gloves. I only weighed 97 lbs. on my wedding day and was still shorter than either of my parents. Dorothy, my maid of honor, wore a maroon dress and hat with a white bunny jacket and white gloves. Barney brought me a gardenia corsage to match my wedding flowers. As we finished dressing for the wedding, Dorothy and I put on our gloves and laughed as we remembered Ernestine and the sheepskin gloves.

My father came home just in time to give me away. He kept saying “Are you sure you want to do this? You don’t even know this guy. You’ve only gone with him a short period of time.” I said, “Yes, Dad, I know this is the man I want to marry.” So at 4 p.m. we proceeded down the aisle. There was my handsome groom, with his intoxicating smile and, by the way, he had his cast removed from his arm just in time for our wedding.

Following the wedding, everyone gathered at our house for a reception. Aunt Charlotte played the organ at the wedding and Aunt Rose prepared all the food and decorations for the reception. It was fabulous. This took the pressure off of my mother, since we only gave them five days’ notice that we were getting married. Grandfather Bommer had a very large family, seven or eight siblings, but I really only knew two of his sisters, and his brother. All three of them came to our wedding.

Barney and I were anxious to slip away from the reception before anybody could chase us. So we called a cab, snuck upstairs above the breakfast nook, and I dropped our belongings over the porch. We climbed down and crept around the bushes. Our taxi pulled up, we got in the car and went to our hotel without anyone even knowing we had left. We had rented a furnished apartment on Riley Street in Buffalo, but we didn’t move in until after our honeymoon – our one-day honeymoon in a downtown Buffalo hotel. The Lord gave us a big, picturesque, full moon so we would never forget our first night as husband and wife.

Barney was born in Indiana but, as a little boy moved to South Dakota. Times were difficult for them. It was during the dust bowl and his father worked hard, long hours to support his family and keep food on the table. People were moving from town to town, trying to find work and a better location. Barney’s father became a cattle buyer in Mitchell, known as the corn palace city of South Dakota.

According to his mother, Barney was a very patient, quiet little boy and he used to sit at her feet and run the tread pedal on her sewing machine. She was diabetic and her legs were very weak, which made it difficult to run the machine. Without Barney’s help, she would not have been able to sew for her family. She described him as a small, sweet boy, never rambunctious. She gave birth to 12 children and only two of the 12 survived, Barney and his older sister.

When Barney was old enough, he worked for his father and many times would spend 12 hours a day on a horse. When he graduated from high school, he went to the South Dakota School of Mines in Rapid City for a year and then was offered a position with the Coast and Geodetic Survey. He took the position and worked in 27 states over the next year and a half. He went from town to town measuring sea levels.

While in New England, Barney petitioned to attend the Coast Guard Academy in New London, Connecticut. He was accepted and spent the next year at the Academy. He loved studying there and was highly proficient in math. He was always good with numbers. Unfortunately for Barney, he had a difficult time learning Spanish, which was one of the requirements for graduation, so he flunked out at the end of the year.

When Barney left the Coast Guard Academy, he traveled to New York and was hired as an usher in Radio City Music Hall, where he worked for eleven months. He could tell you anything you wanted to know about Radio City Music Hall, including how many seats there were and which seats had the best view of the stage.

Barney then became a salesman for Remington Rand, marketing record keeping programs to companies. This job suited his personality and he stayed with them for the next 18 years. He was trained in Washington, D.C. and started his career there. A few months later a man named Al Sears in the home office, who liked Barney very much, invited him to come to Buffalo, New York to work in the home office in the systems division as his assistant. The programs developed by Remington Rand helped companies to manage their record keeping and saved them money in the process. He enjoyed the work and did it well. He was Al Sears' administrative assistant. This is where I entered Barney's life, and oh what a life we had together.

Our first home on Riley Street was directly around the corner from a YWCA where I taught knitting to women in their 60s. The Red Cross donated wool and we knitted sweaters for children overseas. I could knit a sweater with my eyes closed, but I didn't know how to iron a shirt. I spent two days standing at the window of the laundry on the corner, watching the women iron. I told these women my challenge and they taught me the right way to iron a shirt, and once I knew what I was doing, I did it well. I could be the good wife and keep my husband's shirts washed and ironed.

Chapter 6

The first of October, 1940, my folks moved to Fond du Lac, Wisconsin and took Dorothy with them. Barney and I stayed in New York, but we were not alone. Many relatives were there to help us. Dad was assistant vice president and then he eventually became president of the refrigerator company. He was extremely ambitious and very bright. He took classes and kept educating himself along the way. He was truly a self-built man.

Things were heating up in the War in Europe. In 1941 I found out I was pregnant, but I lost the baby at six weeks. I had two more miscarriages and was beginning to wonder if I would ever be able to carry a child full term.

During this time, Dorothy was not happy living in Fond du Lac. So she returned to Kenmore in April and married Dave Rackliffe at the Kenmore Methodist Church. I was Dorothy's matron of honor. She wore a formal, white wedding dress with a veil, which was much more traditional than my Irish attire at my wedding.

After walking down the aisle, I felt a bit lightheaded. I looked at the preacher and exclaimed, "I think I'm gonna faint." He told me to "just kneel down, pray, and stay there." So I knelt down and stayed there, like he said. When the happy couple had said their vows and it was time to leave the altar, Barney came and walked me back down the aisle. They laid me down on the couch in the reception room in the back of the church. The following day I went to the doctor and found out I was pregnant.

The pregnancy was fairly easy, except that I was tired all the time. When I went into labor I called the doctor and she said to come to the hospital right away. It was a magnificent, sunny Sunday afternoon and the newly fallen snow was glistening. So, before going to the hospital, Barney took me for a ride around Delaware Park to see the snow. When we finally arrived the doctor asked, "Where have you been?" An hour and a half later, December 14, 1941, just one week following the attack on Pearl Harbor, we had our baby girl.

My mother was there to see her first born grandchild. I told her I wanted to name the baby Shari. Mother said, "She'll be a freak if you name her Shari." So we named her Sharon Ruth Downs, and what does everyone call her? Shari.

Early in my pregnancy with Sharon, we decided we needed a bigger place. We had moved into an upper flat on Westgate Avenue. I vividly remember coming home from the hospital with Sharon on Christmas morning. Everybody on our street knew I had given birth and, when we pulled into the driveway, I noticed the neighbors had put up a tree with presents underneath for the new baby. It was such a surprise and a blessing for our little family.

At that time the bakery delivered directly to our house. In fact, it was the same deliveryman we had when I was living with my folks. He came to know me very well and how I craved chocolate when I was pregnant. I wanted any kind of chocolate I could sink my teeth into. The deliveryman wanted me to have a girl so badly that every day he would leave three chocolate cookies at the back door. He kept this up throughout my entire pregnancy. When I had my little girl, he was so excited, he brought me a giant cream puff with about an inch of chocolate fudge on top.

I set up the bassinet in the kitchen and every day I would tend to my chores and sing to Shari "Rosie O'Day, Rosie O'Day..." We had a good time together, just me and my little baby girl. She was a happy baby and laughed a lot. The people in the neighborhood would come and visit us regularly. Aunt Laura came to visit wearing a big, black hat with a wide brim. Underneath the brim it was bright red. When Aunt Laura held Shari wearing that hat, Shari gave

her the biggest smile. Aunt Laura was a kind woman with snow white hair, which she had from the time she was 27 years old.

A lovely couple with 2-year-old twin girls lived downstairs from our flat on Westgate. They had their hands full with those two little pistols. Even when their mother harnessed them with a rope tied to the garage door, those girls could maneuver their way out and were soon headed in different directions with their mother chasing after them. If I had had half the energy of those two little girls when I was pregnant, I would have had a much easier time.

We had a dining room in our flat but no dining room furniture, so we went back to the good, ol' crate boxes. Barney nailed four crate boxes together and we painted them and we put our wedding china in them. We had a card table in the center of the dining room and covered it with a table cloth. My grandfather gave us a wicker couch and chair and my mother gave us some furniture. So every stitch of furniture we had was given to us. Sharon slept in the crib that my father had made for me. Before moving to Westgate Avenue, we had been living in a furnished apartment and had nothing of our own. My mother gave us her bird's eye maple bed and dresser set. We had most of our hand-me-down furniture for many years.

Barney was very successful at Remington Rand. He was moving up in the company. He didn't have to serve in World War II because he was designing record keeping forms for all the armed services. These forms were used to keep track of all the equipment and the food the military was using. He was too valuable at what he did and they wanted him to stay right where he was. I am so grateful that my husband was always there for his family.

During the war years when we had to ration everything, my grandfather would go early in the morning to the farmer's market and buy bushels of apples, tomatoes, and various other produce. He would bring them to us and we would can them. I canned everything including peaches and pears. I spent hours peeling the fruit and preparing it for canning. With Shari in the bassinet in the kitchen, I sterilized jars, prepared the fruit and made sure they were all packed properly and stacked in the cellar. We had a cellar full of all kinds of canned goods. The food didn't spoil, so we ate it all winter long. After the war was over, we finished eating everything in those jars, and then I threw the jars away. I could have reused them, but I swore I would never can another piece of fruit unless we had another war. Canning was a big job, one I thankfully never had to do again.

We lived in the flat on Westgate for less than two years. From there we moved to Wannaka which is located along Lake Erie, east of Buffalo. All this time we had no car, so we would take the bus into town. We celebrated Shari's first birthday in our lovely cottage.

On Saturday nights we would hire a babysitter and go to the tavern along the lake shore. We would dance and sing together all evening. There were no theaters nearby and we didn't have television yet, but we knew how to entertain ourselves. We would also have friends over for dinner and a game of bridge.

At one point in Barney's career with Remington Rand, he was only home three weekends during the year. He traveled all over the United States putting on trade shows. He would set up everything for the show and spend the entire weekend conversing with the attendees and the other vendors at the show. It was difficult for me to be home without him.

We were only in Wannaka for about six weeks. We shared a house with an older couple and then moved to Cheektowaga, a suburb east of Buffalo near the airport. We were there for several years. We lived in an up and downstairs duplex next door to Geri and Henry Davis, a couple who had no children. They fell in love with Shari. Shari spent almost as much time with Geri as she did with me. Soon thereafter they adopted a little boy. I'll never forget the day the busy, 26 lb. 1 year old was placed on Geri's lap. She looked at me with bewilderment and asked,

“Marian, what am I gonna do with it?” So I taught her how to bathe him and how to feed him and helped her set up the nursery. They named him Douglas. He became Shari’s play pal and they spent many hours together.

It was nice to have Geri there. We lived on Ellen Drive and my sister rented the duplex around the corner, so that our two backyards met. By then Dorothy had one son, Gary. This was as close to country living as either Dorothy or I had ever experienced and it was good for the children to have each other.

Did it ever snow in the wintertime! One winter we were snowed in for three days. We still didn’t have a car, so we had to walk everywhere, including the grocery store and way down to the corner to catch the bus. There were two cars on our street that were covered with snow from December to April. We almost had to tunnel in the snow to each other’s houses and we’d share food because we couldn’t get to the store. The husbands had trouble catching the bus to get to work and back. Henry who lived in the other half of our house had a car and he and Barney would share in the shoveling duties. By the time winter was over, the snow was about 12 feet high.

Chapter 7

In 1945, when Remington Rand changed their home office from Buffalo to New York City, we moved to Crestwood, north of New York City. I lost two babies after I had Shari and then I became pregnant again. We lived in a nice, big, two-story house on top of a hill. It had a back porch off the upstairs bedroom. Out of our window we could see the train coming and going from New York City. We could walk all along the tracks. Flocks of Canadian geese and ducks congregated in the park down the street.

We moved into our home six weeks before my due date. The lady who lived there before us had come from a big house and she never got rid of anything. She had boxes from the floor to the ceiling in most of the rooms and the place was filthy. It took three and a half vans to move her out of there. They moved us in with all her mess and dirt. I couldn't stand it. I felt like my skin was crawling. So, even though I was expecting a baby in six weeks, I spent days cleaning up the place.

In May we moved in and Barry was supposed to be born around the 20th of June, 1945, but he didn't come until the 20th of July. Apparently he had become wedged in a "funny spot" and would not come out. The doctors felt they could not take him by C-section and nothing else could be done. They called my father because they were not sure I would survive.

After four false alarm trips to the hospital, I was sent home, where I changed the sheets, got into bed and told everyone "I'm not pregnant; it's just a stone." Then little Barry decided it was time to join the world.

Barney had to call the ambulance and halfway to New Rochelle, Barry (Byron Enoch Downs, II) was born. I kept saying "I'm giving birth to a grapefruit" because that's exactly how it felt. We got to the hospital, but our baby had already been born. They whisked me away, cleaned me up and put me in a room.

Barney was sitting with me in the hospital room and I asked him, "What's that funny noise out there?" It was 3:00 in the morning. He went outside my room to look, and when he returned he said "You'll never believe it. That's our baby sucking his thumb." Barry was sucking so loudly we could hear him clear down the hall.

Our new son was very healthy, but he had done a job on my cervix. Turns out I was in labor the whole time I was cleaning up the house, but the pains would stop before it got to the point where he could push himself out. He was born face up instead of face down.

The births of both of our children were surrounded by headline news. First, Shari was born seven days after the attack on Pearl Harbor. And the day we brought Barry home from the hospital, we heard on the radio that a plane hit the Empire State Building.

Barry was such a strong baby, when we put him on the changing station, we had to hang onto him because he would arch his back and, with his heels, he'd try to push himself right off the end of the table. We caught him a couple of times doing that, so we had to really watch him. He was extremely active for a newborn, perhaps because he was a month old by the time he was born.

When my mother came to visit, Barney would babysit so she and I could go into New York City and see a Broadway play. I can't remember all of the plays we saw, but one of them was "Bloomer Girl" starring Nanette Fabray. I also went with Barney into the City to see plays. On one of our trips, after the play we went next door where the Three Sons musical group was playing. On our way out of the building, I fainted dead away. I was taken to a couch out in the hotel. The Three Sons came by and they held my hand and they patted my head and consoled

me. After a few minutes I was fine. We left the hotel, took a taxi to the train station and caught the train back to Crestwood. I still don't know why I fainted, but I was alright after that.

When we moved to New York, we were in the middle of World War II. Food was being rationed and we were issued food stamps. When I went to Tuckahoe to do my shopping at the A&P (Atlantic and Pacific Grocery Company), there was very little meat, but lots of East Coast fish, lobster, and crab.

When Barry was 3 weeks old, the little girl down the street was jealous that Sharon had a baby brother, so she bit him on the hand and almost bit off his toes. I had to take him to the doctor who bandaged up his foot and his hand. This happened on the day the War ended. We saw everybody celebrating in the streets on our way to the doctor's office. We had confetti up to our armpits. When we returned home, we joined in the celebration. I gave Shari two pot lids and she and I walked down 125th Street and she banged the pot lids together and we yelled, "Hooray, Hooray." That was a night to remember. Thank God, the War was finally over.

On Halloween when Barry was just a few months old, we took Shari trick-or-treating around the neighborhood. The next morning when I got up, I found her in Barry's crib feeding him candy that she had collected. She said she was "sharing" with her little brother.

Shari was a lovely little girl, and nobody could believe how well she talked. One time when she was ill with a fever, the doctor came to the house and was examining her. She looked at him and politely said, "Please don't put that cold stethoscope on me," and the doctor said, "What did you say?" She said "Please don't put that cold stethoscope on me." He said, "How can she talk like that, she's only 3 years old?" I said, "Well, she can say anything."

Grandfather Bommer loved to come to our house to visit, but since he was still working, selling real estate and insurance, he wouldn't show up until after 8 p.m. Shari would already be in bed, but we would wake her up so she could play with her great-grandpa and then she would go right back to sleep. My sister wasn't so accommodating. She told Grandfather under no uncertain terms was he allowed to visit her family after 7 p.m. So he didn't. Grandfather Bommer continued to work until his death at age 72.

Chapter 8

Until we moved to New York we had never owned a car. One day a coworker at Remington Rand said to Barney, "I have this old Willy's Falcon Knight that's about 20 years old. It needs a new part but, other than that, it runs good. Would you like to have the car?"

Barney was excited to finally have a car. He figured out what part was needed and made the part himself from the sole of an old shoe. Then the car ran like new. It had a big, wooden steering wheel and when you pushed the horn it went "a-hooga, a-hooga." We must have driven that car about 10,000 miles. And it always started. The man next door was constantly begging his brand new car to start. He was so desperate at times he would say to his car, "If you don't start this morning, I'm gonna get that old car next door."

We kept the car in the garage underneath the house next door. It was such a treat for us to have a car. Going for drives was something new and exciting. I remember Sharon had to have her tonsils out and when her father took her to the hospital, she was so excited because she was sitting in Mama's seat in the car and Daddy was taking her someplace. She waved at me, grinning from ear to ear. She had no idea where they were headed. I had to stay home and take care of Barry. I felt bad for her, but she recovered quickly.

Barney took very good care of that old car. He drove it all over. It was such a convenience for all of us. After several years, Remington Rand worked out a deal where Barney could go to Detroit and pick up a car cheaper than we could buy it in New York. So we went to Detroit and picked up a new club coupe and drove it home across Canada to Buffalo and then on to our home in New York. That was our first new car. We had had the other car for quite a few years before we had enough money that we could afford to buy a new one. In those days, no one bought anything unless they had the money. No credit. Nothing was ever paid "on time."

We had not had any pets since we were married. One day Shari came home with a little Scotty puppy from across the street. Barry was 2 years old. The lady told Shari she could have him for free. I said "No dogs. No dogs." When Barry saw the dog, he shrieked, "the buppy, the buppy." My heart melted when I saw how excited both of the children were and we had "Bubbles" for about 16 years.

Also when Barry was about 2, Grandfather Bommer died. I knew I would miss him terribly, but I was grateful that he was able to meet his two great-grandchildren before he passed away. Grandfather Bommer and I had such a special bond that I know he will be one of the first people I see when I get to Heaven.

Chapter 9

One Christmas when Barry was about 6, he had lost his two front teeth. So he wrote a letter to my mother and said “All I want for Christmas is my two front teeth,” quoting the famous song. My mother had developed a very dry sense of humor and saw this as an open door to play a joke on her grandson. She went to her dentist and asked if he could give her two front teeth. The dentist gave her two of the biggest, ugliest teeth he had pulled and my mother placed them in a red, jeweled box and sent them to Barry. She wrote a note on the card, “I didn’t want you to be disappointed so I got you exactly what you wanted for Christmas.” Barry was a little confused at first, but realized his grandmother had just played a joke on him. We never laughed so hard.

Shari was our little social butterfly. She visited everyone on the street, and they all knew and loved her. I made her summer outfits, including a navy and white striped, seersucker play dress trimmed with red rick-rack sewed on an applique with her initials. When one of the women in the neighborhood saw the letters on Shari’s dress, she asked her, “What does the SD stand for?” Shari answered, “South Dakota.”

By the time Shari was 3, she could sing over 90 songs. When my mother would visit, or we went to visit her, she would put Shari up on top of the upright piano and that little girl could sing all the songs that her grandma played. One Christmas, we hosted a party for all our friends and several of Barney’s coworkers. Shari was the star entertainment that night. She was never shy and was very talented. She stood in the archway and recited, “Twas the Night Before Christmas.” She knew the whole story by heart, word for word. Our guests couldn’t believe it. Then Shari sang several songs for them, too.

When Shari was about 5, I took her to see the St. Patrick’s Day Parade near St. Patrick’s Cathedral. She couldn’t see it because she was too little, so I put her on my shoulders and walked up Fifth Avenue.

I also remember taking Shari to the play “Diamonds Are a Girl’s Best Friend” starring Roz Russell. It was later made into a movie starring Marilyn Monroe. When the play was over, I said “Come on Shari, it’s time to go home.” She said “No, no, no, we’re gonna stay and see it again. It was so good I wanna see it over again.” She thought the play was going to be like a movie and would be repeated.

Once we took Shari to Navy Week and saw all the ships parked in the Hudson River. We also took Barry and Shari to the Macy’s Parade in New York City so they could see all the big balloon characters. There was so much excitement and so many people.

Another time, the Shriners were having a convention in New York City and we drove the car downtown at about 11:00 at night and drove up and down Times Square until about 2:00 in the morning. The place was alive with people. There were bands playing and people ripping pillows open and shaking them out of the hotel rooms so there were feathers everywhere. Our car had a vent in the front and the Shriners shot water guns at us and our feet were soaked. It was exciting. And the kids were watching everything from the backseat. We drove down around Times Square several times. It seemed there was always something exciting going on in New York.

Chapter 10

Barney continued to do well at Remington Rand and had received several promotions. Traveling the country was still a requirement for his job, along with setting up shows and planning meetings. The company was working on the Eckert-Mauchly computer which was so big it took up an entire room. Then they contracted with the Federal government and Barney would travel to Washington, D.C. on business. He enjoyed his work, and didn't mind traveling. He kept growing in his positions as well.

Everyone loved Barney. He was a very gentle person. He loved people and people loved him. He was always adored by everyone because he was willing to help and was always volunteering to do more than his share, always with a smile and never complaining.

He was always there for me, too. One example was when I had to have all my teeth removed and was toothless for six weeks. Barney cooked all the meals and ground the meat so that I could eat. As hard as he worked at his job, he always took time for me and the children.

In 1947 we purchased a house that was just being built in Bethpage on Long Island. The purchase price was \$7,999. We borrowed a thousand dollars from my dad for the down payment. Twenty-six houses were being built in this tract. We moved in on the 22nd of December and on the 26th of December a big snow storm in New York closed down all the highways so the rest of the houses sat empty until April. It took them that long to get rid of the snow and finish building those houses. So we lived there all by ourselves, except for one man in the corner house. Across the street was a forest of scrub oak trees.

Spring came and we soon had a few neighbors. Martha and Frank Jupay moved in behind us with their two little boys. Frankie was the younger one and he was a pistol with a hot temper. When he'd get mad, he'd straighten his legs and his whole body would become rigid.

The Burkharts lived next door. Mr. Burkhart was a fireman in one of the small villages nearby. When we moved into Bethpage, Levittown was just being started. There were only 300 homes, but eventually 10,000 homes were built there. It was an ever growing place for families because it was close to the schools.

We had a good size yard but no garage. Our upstairs was unfinished. Barney and I built the garage and then we built a fence around our yard and planted a garden and had a huge tree in the front yard. The house had a living room and a dinette, kitchen, master bedroom, and a small bedroom, and we eventually finished off the attic and put two bedrooms up there.

Barney took Barry fishing in Long Island Sound and would tie a rope around him and attach it to the boat so if he fell in he could pull him up. That little boy would sit there and fish with his father for four or five hours. Well that little boy is now well into his 60s and he's still out there fishing.

Barry also loved hunting. He actually became a better hunter than his father ever was. Barney never killed anything other than a few chickens while growing up on the farm in South Dakota.

It was 1948 and no one in our neighborhood had a television. So when Barney came home with a TV he won at a company convention in Boston, we couldn't wait to show it off to the neighbors. It was a huge console television set that went all the way down to the floor, but the screen itself was only 13" wide.

On the weekends everyone in the neighborhood would congregate at our house to watch television. We didn't mind, as long as they brought their own refreshments. Some days we would have 25 to 30 people in our living room watching "The Ed Sullivan Show" on our little 13" TV. One year we had a visitor from out of town and decided to take him to Jones Beach for

the weekend. When we arrived home, there were 27 people in our living room watching television. Our visitor was shocked. "How did they get in?" he asked. We replied, "Oh, heavens, we never lock our door. And we don't mind as long as they bring their own food."

I remember while living in Bethpage, our good friends, Elizabeth and Henry Jens, owned a floral shop up the street from the Grumman aircraft factory. They had an entire section where they grew their own plants. Elizabeth had 18 children. While we were friends she had at least four of them. She would work all day in the fields with the plants, go in, have a baby, get up, make breakfast for everyone the next morning and go back to work. It was nothing for her, and she did it 18 times.

One Christmas, Barry received a cowboy hat and shirt, a set of pistols and cowboy boots, and looked around for more presents. When we visited the Jens that same day and their 18 children were thrilled to open their new boxes of crayons and coloring books, Barry felt a little guilty about expecting more. He really should have been satisfied, since that was also the year he received "his two front teeth" from his grandmother.

Elizabeth Jens would later work with me in Girl Scouting. She was a natural when it came to crowd control. She was also the treasurer of the Lutheran Church. The Jens were blessed to have Henry's mother, Grandma Jens, living with them. I remember once I had pneumonia and was in bed for a couple of weeks. Grandma Jens came every day and took care of me and fed my family. The Jenses were lovely people and all those children were so well behaved and loved and were respectful to both of their parents.

Chapter 11

When Shari was 8 and Barry 5, Mother Downs, Barney's mother, lived with us for about four months. She was severely diabetic, but would not follow the doctor's orders on what she should be eating or when she should take her medicine. She used a test tube of urine to test her blood sugars and once she left the tube in a tin can on the stove and forgot about it and it blew up all over the floor, walls, and ceiling.

I remember trying to bathe that 200 lb. woman and not being able to lift her out of the bathtub. She was almost twice my size. I finally had to let all the water out and put on her nightgown, and then Barney came in and lifted her out of the bathtub. Mother Downs returned to South Dakota to live out the last days of her life.

Our neighbors the Popes and George and Jean Wilford had sons the same age as Barry. Jean, Aleen Pope, and I were good friends and the three boys were inseparable. The Welfords also had a daughter. When the three boys were about 5, Jean became pregnant with their third child.

About that time, my father was spending a lot of time in Florida on contracts for the refrigerator company. He installed refrigerators in all the new mobile homes that came on the market at that time so he was very busy. He also spent a lot of time in New York and would stay there while working. He would be gone for two or three weeks at a time, leaving my mother alone. She became a sedentary person, still very introverted, and when Dad came home for a week, she never wanted to go out or do anything with him. They used to go dancing and take trips into New York City, but my mother was no longer interested.

Then the unthinkable happened. While visiting us on Long Island, Mother went into New York on the train to see Dad. During their meeting, Dad informed her that he wanted a divorce. He added, "I don't want any objection and I want it now." Then the two of them got on the train and came out to Long Island. Dad told me to get a babysitter so we could talk.

We all sat in the living room as my father paced nervously back and forth. Finally he spoke. "I wanna tell you something and I don't want any discussion. It's final." He said, "I've asked your mother for a divorce and I want it as soon as possible. This just isn't working." Up to this point they had been married 30 years.

Dad took the train back to New York and then to Washington and left my mother with me. She cried day and night and I couldn't do anything with her. It placed an enormous amount of strain on our entire family.

One morning that first week after Dad left, I took Barney to the station to catch the train to work. It was pouring rain. I'll never forget that day. Barney got out of the car and walked up to Mr. Pope who was standing there getting ready to go on the train. Barney and Mr. Pope began having a serious discussion. Barney came back, opened the car door and said "My God, Aleen had the baby and she died but the baby lived." With that, he closed the door and went and boarded the train for New York. My mother was facing the wall crying at home and now this. I was devastated. That was one of the worst days of my life and I didn't know how to cope.

I decided I couldn't face attending Aleen's funeral. I volunteered to watch all the children so everyone else could go. I had eight or nine kids that day as well as my own two and I kept them in our toy room in the cellar. My mother came down for a little while and helped me. She asked, "Why did you take on all of these children? How could you do this to me?"

I tried to explain to my mother that she was not the only one facing a difficult time. I said, "Mother, I have a friend who died and they're all at the funeral and I couldn't bear to go the

funeral so I decided to take care of the kids.” I felt so helpless for both my mother and for this young man who was left with two young children to raise alone.

Mother and Dad did proceed with the divorce. I found out later he had been dating a woman he met in Florida while he was still married to my mother. My cousin Dorothea who lived in Syracuse ran into them on the street in New York. Was Dad ever surprised when he heard Dorothea call his name! At that point he had no choice but to introduce the woman. Her name was Louise and she was the secretary of one of my father’s clients.

Louise was not like my mother. In fact, she was the exact opposite. She smoked cigarettes and drank alcohol. Needless to say, I didn’t have a very good relationship with Louise. We were always cordial with one another, but I knew from the moment I met her that she was not our kind of people and I could never understand what my father saw in her.

My mother took the divorce very hard. She stayed with me and Barney for a week or so and then went home to Wisconsin. About five years later, my sister talked Mother into moving to Michigan to be near her. Mother rented a small apartment. While living in Michigan, she was in charge of the music in a fund raising gala, featuring performances by all local entertainers. She led the orchestra in accompaniment. Mother continued giving piano lessons until her death at age 88.

As far as my mother was concerned, she was still married to my father. She never dated or remarried. She never even looked at another man after my father left. As I said, she was a very quiet and reserved person and it went against her nature to go out looking for companionship. She was content with her music and the satisfaction of watching her students master the piano.

Chapter 12

When Sharon was in the second grade I couldn't wait to sign her up for Girl Scouts. I loved being a Girl Scout growing up and finally my little girl was old enough, almost. Sign-ups were in the fall, but she wouldn't be eligible until December. One of my friends had become a leader and told me "Bring her to the meeting anyway."

Sharon and I walked into a sea of little 7 and 8 year old girls and their mothers. Before we had time to find a seat, my friend whisked us away and guided us into a different room where another large group of women and their daughters were waiting to be indoctrinated. My friend said, "Wait, here; I'll be right back."

Upon her return, my friend announced, "Marian, you're gonna be the leader of this troop because you know more about scouting than all of us." And that's how I became a Girl Scout leader. Twenty-seven little Brownies were counting on me to teach them everything I knew about Girl Scouting. And their mothers entrusted them into my care once a week for the next year.

I loved working with children, but these little girls weren't old enough to do the more exciting things such as camping and badge work. Therefore, most of our time was spent on very mundane, simple activities, mostly remedial arts and crafts projects.

Marching in a parade was next to impossible with these girls. Even my own daughter was pigeon-toed and couldn't walk a straight line. I was telling my neighbor Martha that my Brownie troop would be marching in the annual Memorial Day Parade, but I added, "You know, you can't teach 7 year olds to march." Martha replied, "That's ridiculous; of course you can teach them to march." "I said, "Okay. You come down and you teach them to march."

So Martha came to our meeting, determined to prove me wrong. She was certain she could teach those little girls to march. Well, after about the third meeting, she threw up her hands and announced, "You're right; you can't teach them to march." But in spite of their innocent clumsiness, the girls were adorable in full uniforms including hats and gloves, smiling and waving as they passed their proud parents on the sidelines. Martha, by the way, became my assistant leader.

After one year with this troop, even though my daughter was still a Brownie, I decided being an intermediate leader better fit my personality and passions. There were so many things I wanted to teach, but the Brownies were just too young. So Martha became the Brownie leader and I took the Farmingdale 10 year olds, 35 of them. Of all the girls I had over the next four years, 31 became First Class Scouts and 29 went on to become Curve Bar Scouts. We produced the largest number of Curve Bar Scouts in one troop in the entire United States. I had a wonderful time with those girls. They were terrific and I even taught them to march.

Barney, Barry, and Sharon joined me on many weekends with my troops at Camp Edey, the Girl Scout camp in Suffolk County. The girls learned to dig latrines, build fires, and they completed all of the nature badges. When I was growing up, I wouldn't have thought about digging my own latrine, but I learned and then I helped teach my girls how to do it. We taught them how to dispose of garbage when camping. We had a separate receptacle for tin cans and another for garbage. If they messed up and put the garbage in the wrong can, they had to dig in and get it out and put it in the right one. "Oh, do we really have to do that? It's so yucky," they whined. "Yeah, we gotta do that," I replied. They learned quickly to follow instructions.

The girls swam in the lake and spent half their time trying to "drown" my husband. Barney enjoyed swimming with the girls and teaching them to dive. When Barry was about 4, he would jump into the boat and begin rowing on the lake. He only had the strength to row on

one side using both hands, so he rowed around in circles, until the girls would swim out and bring him back into shore. That made him very unhappy and, no matter how tightly we tied up the boat, somehow Barry would figure out a way to untie it and was soon out in the lake rowing again.

The girls bunked in cabins and learned to keep their spaces clean. In the evenings we sang around the campfire and made the traditional S'mores, with chocolate squares, roasted marshmallows, and graham crackers. Oh how our girls could sing. We taught them three-part harmony. They were so talented they were invited to sing in New York City for Girl Scout Sunday. They were also invited to sing on national television.

In the off season, many of the girls' fathers would go to Camp Edey and paint and do repairs, to make sure everything was ready for the girls.

In Farmingdale, whenever my girls moved up to Senior Scouts, I stayed and took on another group of 35 fifth grade girls, continued with them all through the four years and then would send them on through. In the meantime, Claire Duffy had a troop of over 20, and Dorothy Lafferty had another large group. We helped each other with badge work to make sure our girls all made it on to the next level.

We were Lafferty, Duffy, and Downs, all good Irish Catholic names. We each had our troop meetings at the Catholic school in the cafeteria. Whenever the Father saw us he would shake his head and say "I can't believe it; Lafferty, Duffy, and Downs, and they're all Methodists."

One of our troops wanted to earn the dance badge. When doing badge work, I always tried to include several different activities simultaneously so the girls could earn more than one badge at a time. I told them they could hold a dance and each of them could invite a boy to come. The first thing we did was teach them all to dance. We started with a simple box step.

The dance was one of the joint activities we shared with the other two groups. Typical for their age, the girls all towered over the boys. We held the dance in the Catholic school cafeteria which was below ground and the windows of the cafeteria were way up by the ceiling. During the dance the parents were seen peering into the windows from up above.

The girls brought the boys in and formally introduced them to each of us leaders and our husbands and we presented each girl with a lovely gardenia corsage. The dance began at 7 p.m. We had provided what we thought would be enough pop to last the entire evening, but it was gone within the first hour and we sent some of the dads out to buy more. We played the kids' favorite music on a record player and they all danced in squares all over the dance floor. At first they resembled robots, very stiff and mechanical. As the evening progressed, their confidence grew, they became more relaxed, and they all seemed to enjoy themselves.

The three patrols joined forces on another large project. This time it was a dinner with enough food to serve all 35 Girl Scouts and us three leaders. Each patrol was responsible for one course of the dinner. One patrol prepared the hors d'oeuvres, one the main dish, and my patrol was in charge of making cookies for dessert.

I had about 18 girls in the church kitchen baking cookies from boxed cookie dough. We had baked three batches and were starting to make the fourth when we realized there was no more cookie dough. I asked the girls, "Where did it go?" They answered, "I guess we ate it. We only took a little sample here and a little sample there." But somehow they managed to devour an entire batch of raw cookie dough.

The girls set and decorated the table, prepared and served all of the food, cleaned up afterwards and, in the process, earned several badges. We could do so much more when we worked together with the two other patrols because, even if a couple of the girls were unable to

participate, we could still continue with the project. It was rare that any of our girls would miss a meeting or activity, though, because they all loved their troop.

Each of my girls earned five badges when they put on a two-hour minstrel show. It is believed that in most groups, 20% of the people do 80% of the work. That was not so with our troops. Every mother was required to serve the troop on at least one project during the year to benefit the girls. This project was a family affair, with the mothers helping the girls make their own costumes and the fathers helping set up the stage.

Half of my troops' fathers worked at the Burlington Silk Mill in Farmingdale where they dyed all the Burlington fabric. They donated yard samples of pure silk fabric for the costumes. The fabric was 45 inches wide and a yard long. We made the most stylish blouses, but I do believe this is where I got my white hair. That was the most horrendous sewing badge I ever worked. Most of the girls were all thumbs when it came to sewing. They each took turns stitching up their blouses on a sewing machine with the help of the volunteer mothers. That was the most difficult badge any of them had ever earned.

The minstrel show was held at the Farmingdale High School auditorium to a packed audience. The girls not only made their own costumes, they wrote the script and performed all the parts. One of them pretended to be me. At that time I was a golfer and I wore golf socks with a little ball on the back of the heel. One of the girls came out onto the stage with a huge ball on the back of her shoe and the audience laughed hysterically, knowing she was mimicking me. The girls told jokes and sang songs and performed several short skits. It was an amazing show.

Each of my girls earned their babysitting badge which taught them first aid and what to do in an emergency. There was never a shortage of babysitters, because we had so many girls and everyone in town knew they were the best and could be trusted.

When the girls who had bridged up to Senior Scouts (ages 16-18) were having trouble getting a Senior leader, I took over the group for one year. I took them on a field trip to the Air Force Base in Hempstead, Long Island, where they were given a guided tour of the facility and learned about the different aircraft. They were invited back to the base to attend a dance. Many of those same girls later became Wing Scouts. Wing Scouts are Girl Scouts 19 years and older who were interested in aviation. I wasn't sure their interest was in aviation or the young men they met when visiting the base.

One of the keys to my successful Girl Scout troops was forming troop committees. They were a complete support to me and took care of all the outside details, including transportation to outings. I never had to worry about anything except being a leader to the girls. I had a chairman who delegated well and all of the parents were expected to lend their support on at least one activity throughout the year. Many of them were involved in multiple projects and activities. When the girls received their rewards, they were thrilled, and rightly so, because they had worked very hard.

Chapter 13

Sometime after my father and mother divorced, Dad invited us down to Washington, D.C. where he was living. Neither of my children cared much for their grandfather, and they certainly did not like Louise. No one knew quite what to say to her. She was close to my age and talked and acted in a manner that was in such stark contrast to anyone else in our family. Nonetheless, my father and Louise married and stayed together until my father's death 30 years later.

Dad left the refrigerator company and moved to Orlando, Florida. He and Louise bought a hardware store and asked Barney and me to come down and join them in the business. Things were changing at Remington Rand and so we thought about it and decided the move would do us all good.

In 1954 we sold our house in New York, loaded up the family and the dog and drove to Orlando. On our way we pulled off the road south of Ocala, Florida at 2:00 in the morning to figure out the wonderful fragrance that had wafted its way into our car. It was February and the dead of winter in New York, but what we discovered when we stopped was the perfume of the orange blossoms in full bloom. We took it as a sign of good things to come.

We moved into a small rental house and Barney and I both began working in the hardware store. Louise placed me in charge of taking the inventory. I never dreamed there were that many screws, nuts, and bolts in one place.

We attended the Broadway Methodist Church and quickly made many new friends. And, of course, I wasted no time finding a Girl Scout Troop to lead. I knew that was my calling, at least during that time of my life, no matter where I was living. I also served as a volunteer trainer for the Girl Scouts in Florida.

It didn't take us long to realize that we had made a big mistake moving to Orlando. Louise would stand in the middle of the store and bark at my husband, "Hey Fatso, bring up a hundred pound bag of fertilizer for this customer." I despised anyone who would make fun of my husband. He was not fat at all. He was treated like a hired hand. Barney was better than that. He had practically ran a large company and now he was sweeping the sidewalk in front of the hardware store every morning at 8:00 and then working hard all day, running around the store hauling items for customers, and listening to my stepmother hurl insults at him.

Our social life while living in Florida did not include my father and stepmother. Most of our friends were from the church, many of whom became our best customers at the hardware store, because of Barney. They saw how my father and stepmother treated him and how rude they were to the customers. They would come from way across town to buy their lawnmowers and other hardware needs and to try and make Barney feel important.

I worked part time in the store, but I was always available for my children. I also lead my new Girl Scout troop.

We lived in Florida one year before the Civil Rights Movement, but as far as I was concerned, the color of one's skin made no difference to me. We are all God's children and should be treated equally. I soon found that Southerners did Girl Scouting a bit differently, but I wouldn't stand for it. As program chairman, I was told by the Council that they would be providing 75% funding for the white girls and 25% for the black girls. I said, "No, no, no. We're not gonna do that. We're gonna give them each 50%." They explained, "Well, Chicki, you don't do that." I replied, "Oh, yes I do."

Nobody in the South had ever trained a black leader how to lead, but I did. I made it very clear that "A Girl Scout is a friend to all and a sister to every other Girl Scout." Some of the

white leaders found it difficult to accept this, especially from a newcomer. They finally realized they couldn't argue with me and every girl received equal treatment and each received the proper instructional training for badge work, no matter what.

During our time in Florida, my mother's brother Charlie was living in Kissemmee, Florida during the winters, a small community just south of Orlando. No one locked their doors in those days, so Uncle Charlie would show up with his friends when we weren't home. As soon as we turned the corner to our house, we could hear him playing the piano. My mother's other brother, Uncle Bill, lived west of Orlando in a small trailer in the middle of an orange grove. His trailer was such a mess, I would try to clean it up a bit, but he had so much stuff, I could barely move around. I don't think he ever changed his sheets. He was not well and so I tried to check in on him as much as possible and take him to his doctor appointments. Several years later Uncle Bill was found dead in his trailer after it caught fire. He was 95 years old. At least 16 Social Security checks were also found in the trailer, uncashed.

It had only been a few months since I started working at the hardware store when I began feeling as if there was something physically wrong with me. I knew it was more than just working upstairs in the unbearable heat. I couldn't figure out why I felt so poorly, so I went to a doctor. He discovered that my cervix had never recovered after carrying Barry. The doctor thought if he cauterized my uterus the problem would be solved. However, the cauterization didn't seem to help much. As soon as I returned to work I began to feel worse. Once Louise realized how ill I was, she suggested I see her doctor for another opinion.

I went to Louise's doctor on a Friday and the next day he called me at home and said "I want you in my office at 9:00 Monday morning with your husband." I couldn't imagine what could be so serious that the doctor would call me on a Saturday advising me to be seen as soon as possible, and to bring my husband.

On Monday morning when we arrived at the doctor's office, he wasted no time and very pointedly stated, "I want you to know that your cervix is cancerous and needs to be removed right away."

Barney and I were both in shock. We couldn't believe I had cancer. Of course I did as the doctor suggested and checked into Orange Memorial Hospital. The operation took seven hours and he took out everything – my uterus and my ovaries. He also removed a huge blood clot. I was very ill. I spent ten days in the hospital. I counted 17 bouquets of flowers from friends and fellow church members. One woman from the church came every day to my hospital room and changed all the water in the flowers and rearranged them. She never spoke to me. Like an angel, she kissed me on the forehead and then quietly slipped out of the room.

I was very weak when I came home, weighing only 100 lbs. It took a long time for me to recover. We had moved from our rental to a lovely, three-bedroom house we purchased on Meridale Road. I would either lie in my bed in the bedroom or on a lawn chair in the living room. My incision was so long, it was painful to get up and down from the bed or the toilet. And as if the heat and humidity in Florida weren't enough, as soon as I was off the operating table, the hot flashes began, and here I am in my 90s and they are still coming, even with the "patch." Before my surgery I wore an A bra size, and within nine months I grew very large breasts. I told everyone that "what they took out down there grew back here!"

God gave me back my life. Before my cancer, I was not taking very good care of my body. I realized after my surgery that God gave me only one body and I must begin taking better care of it. And that is what I have done.

The neighbors on Meridale were wonderful. We had only lived there four months, but they knew I was home alone during the days following my surgery, so they took turns taking

care of me and cooking all of our meals. The couple next door was originally from Storm Lake, Iowa. The wife would come in and get all our clothes and wash them, iron them, and put them back in the closet. Barney always had a clean, pressed shirt to wear to work. I don't know what I would have done without her help.

I conducted my Girl Scout meetings from the lawn chair in my living room. I was the program chairman for the Girl Scouts there and also had a lovely troop of girls. All our training sessions were done in my home, as well as all of the badge work with my troop. Because of my health situation, I was not able to do the big programs that I had done in Farmingdale.

My recovery was slow, but I gradually returned to being a mom and a wife. Sharon was in seventh or eighth grade while we were living in Florida and performed in a musical production at school. She wore a pink poodle skirt that I had made for her and sang the love song, "Cherry Blossom Pink and Apple Blossom White," while a woman from church accompanied her on the piano. I was so very proud of my daughter, and happy to be well enough to see her perform.

Florida has lovely flowers. I enjoyed working in the yard and I had an exquisite garden there. However, there were two things I could never get used to. First was the humidity. We would go to sleep for about three hours and wake up sopping wet. The next day we would leave the bed unmade so it would dry out. The second thing I hated was the bugs. Spiders and cockroaches scared me nearly to death. If we turned on the lights in the kitchen at night, the cockroaches would scurry in all directions.

While living in Florida, I became fast friends with Meryl Gladstone who lived on our street. We were like sisters. She needed me as much as I needed her. She was the most faithful of all my neighbors when I was recuperating from my surgery. She had three children – Jim, the oldest, her sweet daughter Holly, who was 10 or 11, and a little boy named Guppy who was about 7. Guppy would come with her and crawl onto my bed where I was resting and we'd read books together and talk about whatever was on his mind. Meryl's husband, Tatum, was a Lieutenant Colonel in the Air Force. His job was traveling to accident scenes, analyzing what caused the accidents and reporting everything he learned to General LeMay. Tatum was such a caring man, he was scheduled to travel to England for three months about the time I had my surgery. He told the Air Force he couldn't go until he found out I was alright. So he stayed for three days after I had the surgery to make sure I was going to live and then he went to England. While he was in England, Meryl came every day to take care of me until Barney could get home from the hardware store.

About a year after arriving in Florida, we had had enough. We said goodbye to my dad and Louise, our friends, our church family, and my Girl Scouts.

Chapter 14

We put all of our furniture in storage and left Florida behind, along with my uterus and ovaries. We had no idea where we were headed, but we really didn't want to return to New York City. Barney fixed up the backseat of our Plymouth Club Coupe with a stand and blankets, like a playpen for the kids and the dog. We mounted a table upside down on top of the car to carry our camping gear. Barney had sent out several resumes and we headed north.

The first night we stopped at a campground in northern Georgia. The water in their swimming pool was runoff from the mountain so it was extremely cold. Nonetheless, it was a beautiful campsite. The next night we camped in Indiana, in a brand new campsite up on a bluff overlooking the Wabash River. It was really pretty there, too. The next night we spent in Wisconsin, outside of Madison. The tall trees surrounded our campfire. Every night, after spending the day driving and interviewing for jobs, Barney would read to us from Edgar Rice Burroughs' Tarzan books. We could almost hear Tarzan flying through the trees.

Barney had an appointment for a job interview with Workman Service in Chicago so he left me and the kids at the campground in Wisconsin and took the train to Chicago. Barney had another interview in Milwaukee, but was offered and accepted the job with Workman Service as the office manager in Chicago. Sam Workman was headed to California for a six-week vacation, so he sent Barney to Minneapolis for the first six weeks to train with the manager there. "When I get home, you can come back and I can get you started here in Chicago," Sam explained.

When Sam returned from California, Barney had done such a good job in Minneapolis, he asked Barney to stay and head up a new division in data processing instead of taking the job in Chicago. We were all thrilled, as we were beginning to like Minnesota. We borrowed some money from my mother and rented an apartment in St. Paul. We set up our camping gear, since everything else was still in storage. We had all we needed – sleeping bags, camping stove and dishes. We "camped" out in the apartment for the six weeks until Barney received his first paycheck, when we bought a few things for the apartment, and paid my mother back.

The Nelsons, whom we had known in Cheektowaga, New York, were now living in Minnesota and gave us some furniture, as did the people who owned the apartment house. Before long we were living quite comfortably. Later we bought a television. Barry and three or four neighborhood boys his age gathered at our apartment to watch the Mickey Mouse Club every afternoon. They would all sit Indian style with their innocent eyes fixed on the screen singing along ... "Who's the leader of the band that's made for you and me? M-i-c-k-e-y, M-o-u-s-e."

Our daughter was now a typical teenager. She would try to ignore me whenever I asked her to do something, anything to get out of doing it. I would tell her, "You know, Shari, if you ever said 'Yes, Mother, I'd be glad to,' I'd faint dead away." One time she came home from school and I asked her to clean her room, and she answered, "Yes, Mother, I'll be glad to." She went upstairs and cleaned her room and when she returned to the kitchen, I was lying down on the floor, full length on my back with my arms spread out, pretending I had fainted. She rushed over and yelled, "Mother, Mother, Mother!" She slapped my face on each side, "speak to me, Mother." I opened one eye and said "I told you I'd faint dead away if you ever said 'yes, Mother, I'd be glad to.'" She was so angry with me for scaring her.

We lived in the apartment for about a year and finally saved enough money to retrieve our furniture from storage in Florida. We moved from St. Paul to 28th Avenue South in Minneapolis and across the street from Lake Hiawatha. Barry was elated when he began catching fish in the lake. Minehaha Creek was deep and yielded a few fish as well.

We loved our new neighborhood. There was a house down the street that was once owned by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. It had been converted into a museum.

Our house had a large upper floor and a basement which we set up as a playroom. The kitchen was also downstairs. We gathered with some of our new friends for Thanksgiving dinner in our basement.

We chalked up our year in Florida as a life experience we did not want to repeat. We settled into our new surroundings and continued on with our lives. We joined the Minehaha Methodist Church and made many new friends. The children were happy in Minnesota.

Barney became involved in the church. For three years he served as the Lay Leader for the Minneapolis Diocese, which included all of the Methodist Churches in Minneapolis. There were about 15 churches at that time.

I was Barry's Cub Scout leader and drew from my experiences as a Girl Scout Leader, teaching them some of the same crafts, including buddy burners, which is a useful homemade heat source for camping. I was only allowed to be Barry's leader for the first year because he would be turning 10, and at age 10 the boys were required to have a male leader. I had been a Girl Scout leader in New York and Florida, and, after a year with the Cub Scouts, I led my first Girl Scout troop in Minnesota.

Chapter 15

In 1956, after 16 years of marriage, Barney and I finally took time out for a real honeymoon. Some friends volunteered to keep an eye on the children for two weeks. We drove from Minneapolis to Florida, along the Mississippi River, stopping at Vicksburg, Gettysburg, and other historical spots along the route. I remember eating at a restaurant on the river that had once been a hospital for the soldiers of the Revolutionary War. We spent two days in New Orleans, enjoying the Cajun food and the quaintness of the homes and the horse-drawn carriages. The New Orleans bus tour was the most interesting one we had ever taken.

We stopped along the northern Florida shore and watched the boats full of shrimp. Barney and I ate two bowls of shrimp at one restaurant. We rode a glass bottom boat at Silver Springs, Florida where we saw colorful fish and huge snakes. I had a movie made of me with a six-foot-long snake wrapped around my neck and arms. I wanted to show my Girl Scouts and my children that I practiced what I preached. I was always telling them not to be afraid. They were amazed when I showed them the film.

We traveled to Tallahassee, Florida and saw the capitol and ate some more shrimp. We visited the Barnum and Bailey Circus headquarters in Sarasota, Florida.

Dolphins swam alongside our ferry out to Sanibel Island. The beach at Sanibel Island was world famous for its shelling. I spent hours collecting shells and washing them and packing them to take home. I convinced Barney to send our suitcases home by greyhound so we could pack the car with shells. I had 35 Girl Scouts back home and what wonderful projects we could do with all those shells.

On our way home we did some bird watching in Miami, visited St. Augustine's, the birthplace of Florida, and wound our way through Georgia and Tennessee, stopping at the Grand Ole Opry. It was an unforgettable honeymoon and well worth the 16-year wait.

Chapter 16

In 1957 we purchased a home in Richfield, Minnesota on Pillsbury Avenue, South, and lived there for nearly 20 years. Shortly after we arrived in Richfield, I was called on by Mary Lillenburg, the New Neighbors hostess, who invited me to join the New Neighbors Club, where new people in town gathered together to get acquainted and participate in group activities. They also held a luncheon once a month. When I arrived, there were about 60 members. Mary was there, as well as Ellen Bond, the hostess for the northern part of Minneapolis. After I was in the club for about six months, Mary had to resign as the New Neighbors hostess for Minneapolis so I applied and was chosen to replace her.

As hostess I was responsible for calling on all new neighbors in the area, but they had to have moved from at least 50 miles away. It was my job to do as Mary had done for me, to invite the new neighbors to join. I had a booklet with a list of sponsors, one representing every type of business, offering discounts and coupons to the new residents. We had a car dealer that provided me with a car with "New Neighbor City Hostess for Minneapolis" written on the side.

I remember once I did not have a grocery store sponsor. Apparently they had tried for years to find one in Minneapolis, but no store would sign on. I went into National Foods one day and talked to the men in charge. They decided they would become a sponsor. They would donate a dollar a call. The contract wasn't filled in right then, but they signed it anyway and I walked out very dignified all the way to my car. When I was away from the store, I yelled "Yippee," as loudly as I could and went right to Ellen Bond, who had previously told me it was impossible to obtain a grocery store sponsor. So that was a feather in my cap of which I was very proud.

The job as City Hostess gave me the opportunity to meet many wonderful people and to earn a small salary. I also received commissions for selling sponsorships, and the League paid for all my expenses when I attended the conventions.

The purpose of the club was to connect people together through activities. We taught bridge, golf, tennis, and dancing. Every three months we held a dance for all the members.

I remember calling on a new lady who lived about six blocks from our house. I was telling her all about Minneapolis, showed her our booklet and how to contact the fire department, the police department, and the hospitals. The booklet also listed all of the parks and everything she would need to know about the area. As we were chatting, we suddenly heard fire engines close by. She said to me, "Somebody's in trouble." I finished my house call and headed home. As I came down my street, I could see the fire engines at my house. Sharon had hosted a sleep-over the night before and cooked breakfast with her friends. They had fried a large package of bacon and saved the grease. When she came home from school that day, she was melting some of the grease on the stove to heat up some food and left it to answer the telephone when the kitchen caught fire. As I approached our house, I saw Sharon and Barry sitting on the front porch. Before they saw me, I heard them talking to each other, "Oh, boy, Mother's really gonna kill us this time. We really did it up good." Luckily the firemen put the fire out and it was contained in the kitchen. I was just thankful no one was injured.

New Neighbors was a national organization headquartered in Cincinnati, Ohio. There were New Neighbors leagues in all the leading cities – Kansas City, Omaha, Denver and, of course, Minneapolis and St. Paul. I started as the Assistant City Hostess and then I later became the City Hostess for the south part of Minneapolis which included all of the suburbs.

For my house calls I tried my best to dress in a professional manner with hat and gloves, rain or shine, whether it was sweltering hot or 30 degrees below 0. I went into new housing tracts

where people were moving in, but sometimes construction was still going on and I would get my car stuck in the mud.

The club began to grow quickly because I was constantly on the move, recruiting new members. In 1961 at the national convention in Cincinnati, Ohio, I was selected as the Hostess of the Year for the entire United States. They presented me with a bottle of champagne, a new briefcase, and several other gifts. When I returned to Minneapolis, the local club held a luncheon in my honor.

One year the New Neighbors Club entered a float in the Aquatennial Parade. Everyone in the club helped decorate the float. We had a flat-bed truck and built an arch like a canopy over the top and the president of the club sat under the canopy and the vice president and treasurer sat in the front. We had Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts walking alongside the float.

We even hosted a camping trip for the New Neighbors Club at a northern Minnesota campground. The Indians who lived there put on a pow-wow, beating their drums and dancing for us. Everybody in our club joined in the dance. We all played cards at night and the men went fishing during the day. There were about 20 couples and their children. We not only made new friends, we were all learning about our new State.

Of course I was involved with scouting in Minnesota and took the liberty of recruiting Girl Scouts while meeting with new neighbors. I met one family with two daughters, Amy and Nancy Brawley, both eligible for Scouts. The mother was working, so I approached the father and he brought the girls to our meetings. Their mother and I became close friends, and, little did I know, in 1965 Amy would become our daughter-in-law.

I advertised my Girl Scouts for babysitting service to the new neighbors. Also at that time, I was teaching Sunday school and many of my Girl Scouts were in my class, so I knew they were developing into well rounded, grounded, young ladies with deep moral roots.

One of the women in the New Neighbors League had a 6 year old daughter and a 1 year old son. The boy was disabled, unable to sit up or feed himself. My Girl Scouts, 15 and 16 years old, were so well trained and trusted that this woman had them stay with her two children so she could take part in the New Neighbors activities.

Some of my Girl Scouts knew me so well they were finding it difficult to call me Mrs. Downs. It just seemed too impersonal to them. However, they didn't think it would be proper to call me by my first name, so they decided to vote on what to call me. It took them three weeks, lots of debating, but they finally decided on the name. So at one of our meetings, they had me kneel on a cushion and they touched each of my shoulders with a troop flag, knocked my hat off and said I was to be known from that day forward in Girl Scouting as Chicki Downs. I expected Ducky or Downy, but I never dreamed they would name me Chicki. I asked "How come you chose that name?" they said, "We'll tell you, Chicki Downs, in case you don't do what we want you to, we can call you Chicken." So ever since that day I have been known as Chicki.

Chapter 17

Sharon graduated from high school in June of 1959 and was married six months later to Donald Parrish. On the day of Sharon's wedding, chaos ensued at our house with out-of-town friends and preparation for the ceremony. When everyone arrived at the church, Barney said "Where's Marian?" They had forgotten me. I was still at home. Apparently when they left I was in the bedroom doing something and they just assumed I was with them. So Barney came back and picked me up.

It was a lovely wedding. Sharon was beautiful and her father was extremely proud, walking her down the aisle.

In 1962, after a difficult pregnancy, Sharon gave us our first grandchild, Carolyn Marie Parrish. We call her Carrie. When Don called to tell us the baby had been born, I hopped on a plane and flew to Seattle where Sharon and Don were living. Don worked for Boeing Aircraft.

This was my first time in Seattle and I was thrilled when I saw Mt. Ranier. As we descended, I saw the Space Needle, which had just been completed for the World's Fair.

Don met me at the airport and took me to see my first grandbaby. Of course she was adorable. Four days later, we brought her home from the hospital and many of Sharon's friends came to see the new addition. About two hours after arriving home from the hospital, Shari said to me, "Mother, I don't feel very good." I felt her forehead and it was burning hot. So we returned to the hospital to discover that Shari had a kidney infection. She pleaded with me to not let them keep her.

Shari did not have to stay, so I took care of her and the baby. I never changed my clothes in eight days. I also kept up the house and the bedding, which was a challenge with Shari's 104-degree fever. The sheets would be drenched and I had to dry them in the oven because of the rainy Seattle weather. I also gave Carrie her first bath.

Shari and Don lived on the side of a mountain and we could see all of Seattle, the World's Fair, the Space Needle, and the boats across the peninsula. Many nights I sat in front of the window rocking the baby and watching the boats on the harbor.

Shari was finally beginning to feel better. After eight days Barney came from Minneapolis. He took one look at me and said "My God, you look awful. What happened?" I told him all I had done while Shari was ill.

Barney did not tell me right away that while I was gone our 16 year old dog, Bubbles, was not doing so well and he had to have him put to sleep. It was a joyous time with a new baby, but marked with sadness of losing a dear friend and beloved member of the family.

Barney and I borrowed Don's car and drove all around the peninsula and down to Tacoma along the ocean. We picked up shells and had a wonderful time. My mother also came to see the baby and we took a photograph of the four generations - Mother, me, Shari, and Carrie.

Chapter 18

Between my job with the New Neighbors League and Barney's work, we had done very well financially. I was also sewing for people, primarily making suits. We were able to buy a lovely home on the corner of Pillsbury and 63rd Avenue South. We loved it. It was a nice home, three bedrooms with a huge fireplace in the family room and two-car garage. It had a big basement which we finished off and made into an office for me and a bedroom for Barry.

At that time, my sister and her husband were having difficulties with their 16 year old son, Craig. Dorothy and Dave had adopted Craig right after he was born. He had been the joy of their life, but his teen years were taking a toll on them and the rest of their family. They were at their wit's end and were about to return him to the State of Michigan, when Barney and I stepped in.

I told my mother that, if they asked us, Barney and I would take Craig and see if we can help. It could have been a risky proposition if, in our quest to help one young man, our own son would be influenced into bad behavior. Our prayer was that the opposite would be true, that we, as well as Barry, could set Craig on the right path to success in adulthood.

So Dorothy and Dave put Craig on a plane and Barney picked him up at the airport in Milwaukee and drove him to our home in Minneapolis. From that point on, Barney tried very hard to form a relationship with Craig, which was met with much resistance.

We turned the basement into an apartment for the two boys, replete with a ping-pong table and plenty of room for them. The last straw for Dorothy and Dave was when Craig became involved with a woman who lived in the neighborhood who was promoting sex between him and her 12 year old daughter, as well as herself. Craig was very upset because he wanted to continue relations with this girl. The woman had encouraged him to wear all black clothes and to crawl out of the upstairs window and sneak over to her house at night. It was a miserable mess.

Craig had no desire to obey our rules, either. We had never lived near him, so he didn't really have a close relationship with us. So Barney took hold of this boy and applied some firm love and began to straighten him out.

At one point Craig was so defiant he threatened to leave our home. Barney said, "Well, now, Craig, I'll tell you, you leave here and within three minutes the police will be notified to pick you up and you'll be sent back and you will never be allowed to come back here again." Craig gave him a hard time and went downstairs and called his father. He yelled so loudly into the phone at his father that we could hear every word from upstairs.

Sharon's husband's mother had purchased a house across the street from us and their 19 year old son George befriended Craig. One night George took Craig out drinking with friends, who were all much older than Craig. When Craig returned home that night, Barney took a hold of him and wrestled him down to the floor. With his knee in his chest and Craig's collar in his hand, he exclaimed, "I want you to know something, Son, I'm the boss and I set the rules and you will not smoke and you will not drink as long as you're in my house. You will obey what I say. I am generous and I'll make the rules, but you must live up to them. There will be no ifs, ands, or buts." This was just what Craig needed. From that moment on, Barney was the boss in Craig's life and Craig grew to love and respect Barney and did whatever he was told.

Dorothy paid for Craig to go to a psychiatrist while he was living with us. He went once a week and was told that neither Barney nor I had the right to tell him what he could or couldn't do and that he could do anything he "damn well pleased." Everything the psychiatrist said was unraveling any kind of relationship we had begun to build with Craig. So one day I decided to go with Craig to see the psychiatrist. This man ripped me up one side and down the other, telling

me I had no right to tell Craig what to do, that he was 16 and old enough to run his own life and I should butt out. I could almost feel my hair standing on end and I took Craig by the arm and we left. I said to Craig, "You will never, ever go back to that man again." And he never did. I added, "We said these are the rules and you will live by our rules as long as you are living in our home. We're not doing anything that's wrong. All we want to do is help you. We want you to get straightened out so you can go back home."

Well, that young man calmed down, settled in, and straightened up his life. He spent his sophomore year in our house, bonding with his "brother" Barry, and socializing with my 45 Girl Scouts who met in our home every week. He eventually fell in love with one my Scouts, Sherbette Callstrom. He returned home and finished his last two years of high school and went on to college.

While in college, Craig decided to become a Wesleyan Presbyterian minister. He eventually married Sherbette and, upon graduation, became the minister of a church in Blue Rapids, Kansas. He was the only minister who lived in the city limits. All the other ministers came from other towns to preach on Sunday and then went back home. So no matter what religion the people were, Catholic, Jewish, Protestant, Craig went to see them in the hospital or in the jail, wherever he was needed. He was a wonderful pastor. Everyone adored him. He loved working with the youth, and could relate to them because of what he had gone through himself as an adolescent, and the fact that he still had a lot of little boy in him. Everyone in town was amused by the pastor who rode his motorcycle everywhere he went.

In 1987, after 12 years in Kansas, Craig was given the opportunity to transfer to a larger church in Nebraska. On the 7th of January he was installed into the new church. He and Sherbette had bought a house there, since there was no parsonage for the clergy. On the following Saturday he was out jogging with a friend who was a doctor, and one mile from the hospital, they came to a hill. Craig said to his friend, "I'm gonna rest for just a minute, go on ahead, I'll meet you at the top of the hill." When the doctor got to the top of the hill and looked back, Craig was lying on the ground. The doctor rushed down to see what was wrong. Craig had stopped breathing. His heart had disintegrated and he died right then and there. He was only 40 years old. He was survived by his wife, Sherbette, two sons and a daughter, and both of his parents. No one had any idea that he had a heart problem, and because he was adopted, no one knew if it was a genetic condition.

Barney and I had just attended Craig's installation in the church in Nebraska, and a week later we flew to Kansas for his funeral. There were so many people at his funeral that not everyone could fit inside the church. The yard outside was full of people, and they hooked up a loudspeaker so all could hear the service.

Craig was dearly loved, and too young to die. His little girl was only 2 years old and his boys were not much older. It was such a shock to the entire community, as well as to his family. He was buried under a tree on a panoramic hill in Blue Rapids, Kansas.

Craig had two sets of parents mourning his death – his adoptive parents, Dave and Dorothy, and me and Barney.

Craig and Sherbette's children are all grown now. The United Presbyterian Church saw to it that all three of them received a college education. One son is a doctor's assistant, the other son a pharmacist with a Ph.D. Their daughter teaches high school business courses.

Craig would be very proud of his children. Sherbette remarried and lives in Grand Island, Nebraska and has a wonderful husband. She works in the library there. Sherbette was one of my Scouts who became part of my family and I still consider her a part of my family.

Chapter 19

Little Carrie was 9 months old when Barry graduated from high school in 1963. In celebration of his graduation, Barry and I drove to Seattle where Sharon was living. We camped along the way, first at Mount Rushmore in the Black Hills campground. Barry loved to fish, so we caught our supper. As we cooked it on the open fire, a half grown bear walked through our campground and kept right on going. He didn't pay any attention to us at all. The air was so cold we slept fully clothed inside our sleeping bags, under a full moon which illuminated the President's faces. By 4 a.m., we moved inside the car, turned the heater on and drove around to stay warm. Between 4 and 6 a.m. the animals came to life and we watched buffalo, deer, and wolves.

The next night we camped in Yellowstone and it was even colder than it had been in South Dakota. In Idaho we slept one night in the car behind a gas station.

When we arrived in Seattle, Don and Shari were a bit envious of our adventures and said "Let's all go camping." So we packed up and went to Forks, Washington to a brand new campground. We were the first group to camp there. It was right on the Pacific Ocean. I remember they had a counselor who would walk up and down the shore and tell us about the shells and stones that were there. We had a wonderful time with Shari and her family.

We also camped at Mt. Ranier. There were several tree stumps at the site and we put bread out on the stumps for the animals and birds. Carrie loved watching them. She would get up close to the birds and talk to them.

We walked as far up Mt. Ranier as we could. Don had Carrie in a knapsack on his back. The mountain was covered with clouds so we could not see the peak. We asked God to please raise the clouds so we could see the top of the mountain. And He did. He raised the clouds so we could see the top and then lowered the clouds down again. We thanked Him for that magnificent experience.

It was time for Barry and me to return to Minneapolis. Don had been looking for a job in Minneapolis and had scheduled an interview with Control Data. So Don, Shari, and Carrie rode home with us in our car. Don did get the job and he moved his family to Minneapolis. They bought a home in New Hope but it was not completed so they lived with us for three months.

Shari was pregnant at the time. I remember taking her to the hospital in Minneapolis, where Carrie's little sister, Cheryl Lynn Parrish, was born on July 9, 1964. Cheryl arrived just one day short of sharing her birthday with her 2-year-old sister. I brought Carrie to the hospital and she waved at her mother and her new baby sister through the glass.

Sharon had several miscarriages following her two births and was told by her doctor she would not have another baby. So she and Don adopted a little boy and named him William Byron Parrish. He was born on April 6, 1969 and was 5 weeks old when he became part of our family. When Barney and I came to see our new grandson, the woman helping with the adoption looked at Barney and said "This baby looks just like his grandfather." And he did. When Billy was 7 weeks old, Sharon found out she was pregnant. She was blessed to carry her second son, Richard Lester Parrish, to full term. He was born on New Year's Day, 1970. So Bill, at 7 months old, had a baby brother. Sharon's pregnancy with Richard was difficult and included weekly shots in order to carry him to full term. He was very small, but healthy. Praise the Lord.

Shari and Don were divorced when Billy was about 16 years old. Shari then married George Thomas Dornbach on March 2, 1984 in San Jose. Billy began to act up and Sharon decided to send him to live with his father. Don had remarried also, and Billy didn't get along well with either his father or his stepmother and left after graduation. He is doing very well now.

George has two daughters, Lisa Jill Dornbach and Heather Lynn Dornbach from his previous marriage. We have come to know and love them both as part of our large family. Both of the girls are married now and have children of their own. Lisa is a school teacher in the Sacramento area and has two sons. She married a man who designs all of the lighted signs in Times Square. Heather is married and has a son and two daughters. We see them once in a while when the families are together. We love George. He has been a wonderful husband and father. He has also been a big help to me over the years.

Chapter 20

From 1957 to 1962 I worked with the New Neighbors League. We had been sponsoring 40 events every month and had grown to 1450 members in Minneapolis. There were subcommittees for every aspect of the club. I decided it was time to retire and spend more time with my Girl Scouts. I would take a group of 45 girls from 17 different senior high schools and lead them for five years.

The girls were not the only ones learning new things. When we became a Mariner troop, it was also new to me, as we learned everything there was to know about ships. I took the girls to Great Lakes Naval Training Base where there were over a thousand sailors. We ate in the dining hall and stayed in the WAIF quarters on the base for three days and those sailors did everything but turn inside out trying to get to my girls. They were really sharp girls, ages 16 to 18. We went to a ball game on the base and each girl had at least five sailors to escort her to the bleachers and sit with her through the game.

My girls were always well behaved. On the same trip, I took them to Marshall Fields in Chicago and turned them loose to shop. They knew my rules and they respected me and I trusted them. I was sitting in the glove department on the main floor and next to me was a tower inside the store so that the girls could go all the way through the store and still be within earshot. At one point, the store manager came over to me and asked "Are you the one who turned all those girls loose?" I said, "Yes. But don't worry; I have complete control of my girls." He said, "That's ridiculous. They're all over the store." I said, "Yes, I know, they're doing their shopping." He said, "Well you said you had complete control." I said "I do. Let me show you," and I whistled and immediately, from all directions, the girls popped their heads over the railing and asked, "Did you call, Chicki?" I said to the man, "See what I mean, I have complete control of them." He was speechless.

The girls had earned their own money for the Greyhound bus ride and the shopping trip. We were not charged to stay overnight at the base. We all had such a good time. Not only did one of those girls become my daughter-in-law, another one married my nephew. They both still talk about that trip.

While many of our trips were memorable, none so much as the two-week bus excursion to New York and Washington, D.C. A lot of planning went into that trip and all 45 of my girls had to earn their way. Three grandmothers chaperoned the group, including me and my two assistant leaders, Georgia Parrish who was my daughter's mother-in-law, and Meryl Wiggins, Wiggy for short. Georgia had never been outside of the Wisconsin/Minnesota area her whole life. Wiggy was one of the sweetest women I had ever met. She was 5 feet in height and as broad as she was tall. I was a good leader, but I'm not good with finances, so I put Wiggy in charge of the money. That way I was able to lead the troop and not be bogged down with the business end of it.

In September of 1963 we began planning our trip the following July. The World's Fair was in New York that year, and that's what the girls all decided they wanted to see. They also wanted to travel to Washington, D.C. The girls earned their money primarily by babysitting. We had them bring money to Wiggy each week to put into their account. The total estimated amount each girl needed to earn was \$160 for hotel and food accommodations throughout the entire trip. Wiggy taught them all how to budget their money.

I would never ask my girls to do anything I wouldn't do myself, so I gave piano lessons and I made ballet costumes for the dancing school. I earned my money just as I had required the

girls to earn theirs. The parents then decided they would earn the money to pay for the bus. So they put on a huge spaghetti dinner at the Catholic school.

The day of the dinner was November 22, 1963, the same day that President Kennedy was shot and killed. There was such an uproar that the entire country was in shock. We were not expecting much success with the dinner, but, nonetheless the girls' relatives, friends, and neighbors all came out and we cleared \$600.00, the exact amount needed for the Greyhound bus.

After months of planning and saving, we were finally on our way. The first leg of our trip took us to Youngstown, Ohio, and by our second night we had reached Washington, D.C. We stayed at a lodge, eight girls to a cabin. Georgia and I walked around the lodge to check on the girls. They seemed to be having fun, giggling and chatting. We didn't say anything as the prattle continued on well past 11 p.m.

The next day, at about 2 o'clock in the afternoon, after a few hours of sightseeing, I said to the bus driver, "Back to the hotel." The girls whined, "No, no, no, Chicki, don't you remember, we're going to the Smithsonian Institute." I said, "It's back to the hotel." I told the bus driver he was excused for the night and he exited the bus.

I stood in front of the pouty faces and said to them, "You've all made the rules for this trip. What are the rules for the hotel rooms?"

"Lights out and mouths closed at 11 o'clock," they answered.

"That's right. However, I was walking around with Mrs. Parrish last night and we saw that you were all having a wonderful time. But the mouths weren't closed and the lights weren't out at 11 o'clock. So it's now 2 o'clock. I want you to all go lie on your beds and rest and think about it. At 4 o'clock, you come to my cabin and you tell Mrs. Wiggins, Mrs. Parrish, and myself whether you are going to continue on with the trip or if I will be putting you on a Greyhound bus home."

All the girls replied, "Oh, no."

I reminded them, "You made the rule. I'm just making sure that you live up to it. Because I'm not gonna have any sick girls on this trip." So they all quietly exited the bus and proceeded to their rooms.

At 4 o'clock the girls entered our room. When they came in, the first thing I said to them was, "Give me your Girl Scout promise," which they did, in between sobs. Then each girl said, "I want to go on the trip. I promise I'll obey the rules that we set."

That was a turning point in our trip. From then on I never had to check a room or anything with those girls because they were there. When we went to the World's Fair I let them go out in patrols. I said "You meet me back here by 2 o'clock" and at five minutes to 2 they were all there.

One of the most exciting parts of the trip was seeing the Rockettes at Radio City Music Hall. It is a spectacular building, with a seating capacity of 6500 people. I imagined my Barney as a young, handsome usher there before we were married, dressed in his uniform and donning his infectious smile.

In planning this 14-day trip, the girls had written a letter to Hubert Humphrey, the Senator from Minnesota, and asked if he could meet them and show us the Senate at the Capitol. The girls also wrote to Clark McGregor, our Representative, asking the same thing. Representative McGregor made a reservation for us and we were met at the gates of Arlington Cemetery and were escorted to President Kennedy's grave. We had created a wreath to put on the grave. We formed it into a trefoil and decorated it with artificial yellow chrysanthemums on top, about 3" thick. Around the sides we put fake evergreen leaves. It was exquisite. Then we took brown pipe cleaners and we wrote GS Troop and our troop number on it.

Hubert Humphrey took us to lunch. He then showed us the Senate and explained how everything worked. Clark McGregor took us to the House of Representatives and explained to the girls how the Legislature functioned. When we came out of the Capitol building, there was a band from the State of Montana playing on the steps. Robert Kennedy was there and his wife Ethel, and he was receiving an award from Lyndon Johnson, who was President at that time.

Our 45 girls had two different uniforms – our regular Girl Scout outfit and then we made cruise outfits with a navy blouse, culotte skirt, and red jacket. We collected patches from all the places we visited and sewed them on our jackets. It was quite impressive to see 45 girls and 3 adults all dressed alike. We were wearing our cruise outfits that day. We were asked what group we represented. “We’re Girl Scouts from Minneapolis, Minnesota,” we answered. We were then introduced to Robert and Ethel Kennedy.

During our 24-hour stay in Philadelphia, we saw the Liberty Bell and other sites. Then we spent four days in New York City, three days at the World’s Fair, and another at Jones Beach on Long Island. There we met with some of the Curve Bar Scouts that I had in my troop in Farmingdale, Long Island. They were now mothers with future Girl Scouts of their own. It was a sweet reunion and an inspiring time for my Minnesota troop, to sing songs with these wonderful, young ladies I had led not so long ago. The Farmingdale group brought lunch for everyone and we had a bonfire on the beach. Many of the Minnesota girls had never seen the ocean before and I know they will always remember the wonderful time we had.

We returned on the bus to our hotel room in New York City. As I said, Georgia had never been anywhere in her life and was a bit paranoid sleeping in a high-rise hotel room in such a large city. As she was pinning all the drapes together so that nobody could get into our room, I reminded her “We’re 26 stories up, they can’t get up here, Georgia.” She made me laugh, but I understood it was because she had led such a sheltered life. I assured her that no one was going to break in and attack three old ladies.

Our next stop was New London, Connecticut. We visited the Coast Guard Academy where my husband had been a student when he was young. He had spoken about it often but this was the first and only time I had ever been there. We visited the submarine base and the whaling village.

Then it was on to Albany and across to Niagara Falls for two days. My aunt and cousin came down and we took the girls on the Maid of the Mist underneath the falls and all around. We had a wonderful time. We stayed in a hotel in Canada. The French bell boys were all enamored with these 45 high school girls. They thought the girls were cute so they planned a party for them. The next morning the bell boys said to me, “Madam, the girls didn’t show up for the party.” I said “No, they didn’t, because they knew they’d get killed if they did, by me.” He kept saying “No, nobody came, nobody came.” I said, “No, because I have good girls.”

Then we went across Canada to Grand Rapids, Michigan where my mother and sister lived. We stayed in the Girl Scout camp there and my sister and my mother invited the whole town out to welcome us. My girls sang for the crowd and told them all about their trip and what a grand time they had. As the girls returned to the bus, my mother thanked them for coming and gave them each a bag she had prepared with an apple, some cheese, and other goodies. My sister and mother were so thrilled that I stopped by with my group.

From there we went through Chicago and back home. Sherbette, the girl who later married my nephew, was part of this group of girls. My nephew was living at home in Michigan at the time and came down to meet the bus. When Sherbette stepped off the bus, he kissed her in front of all the girls which delighted them all. It was so romantic. When we arrived home, all the

girls' parents said "Chicki, this is the deal. Next year, we leave the girls home and you take us on the trip."

I am sure the memories from that trip have never left any of those girls. Thankfully, they all stayed healthy through the entire two weeks, except for one girl who became constipated and I had to give her an enema.

I took those same 45 girls camping many times. Even though they were from 17 different high schools in Minneapolis-St. Paul, they attended every meeting in perfect uniform. We had crews and they elected crew chiefs who performed inspections. If a girl missed two meetings without a perfect uniform, she was out of the troop and the next one on the waiting list was in. I only put one girl out in all my years of leading. They all came because they wanted to be there. People would say to me, "Oh you're too strict. Girls won't do that." Well, they did.

I think we make it too easy for girls these days. Girl Scouting has changed completely now and it's a shame. They have lost the incentive they had when I was a leader. When it was run by volunteers, we were strict and everyone learned manners and how to represent the Girl Scouts in a positive light. We also had more exciting programs and activities. The people they brought into the national organization did not know badge work and did not have daughters in troops. They had no understanding of the importance of having the girls accomplish difficult projects or goals. It's the same thing with the Boy Scouts. The Boy Scouts who achieve Eagle are outstanding men. We have had many U.S. Presidents who were Eagle Boy Scouts. It was part of the training to be good citizens on into adulthood. And today I see young people and they dress atrociously and they don't take care of themselves. I saw a little girl the other day that must have been 10 or 11 years old and she had on high heels. It's absolutely ridiculous. They showed on television one morning little girls, 9, 10, and 11 years old, having their eyebrows plucked, having facials, and shaving their legs. They are trying to make women out of little girls, not letting them be little girls. I really feel sorry for them.

I guess my goal was always to have the girls achieve as much as they could, to grow into fine, young women. And I think I played an important part, assisting their parents in doing what they needed to do and teaching them how to work. Hopefully more women will lead girls into scouting with the same emphasis we had. I think God put me in that position to work with those girls and to love them and to help them grow and mature. I also hope that someone who reads this book might take the initiative to return Girl Scouting to what it once was.

By the way, when I took my scouts out camping, on Sunday morning we would have an all-church service. We had Protestants, Catholics and Jews, and we had some who didn't go to church at all. We would sing a song or say a prayer from each church and have them tell a little bit about their church and what they did there. It was really a wonderful opportunity to interact. We always said grace whenever we shared a meal together, even when camping. These girls learned to respect one another, no matter what religion they were. It also deepened their desire to do what God would like them to do. My relationship with Jesus Christ was no secret and my girls respected me and my religious beliefs.

Chapter 21

In the fall of 1964, I took my mother on a trip to Germany to visit my sister's son, Gary, his wife, Lucy, and their 7 month old daughter, Mary. Lucy's mother, Melba, also traveled with us. Dorothy and her husband, Dave, had lived in Austria for over ten years.

Gary and Lucy met us at the airport in Frankfurt and took us to their home in Heidelberg. Their sweet, little Mary was the rolliest, polliest, cutest baby I had ever seen. She had bright red hair to match her rosy cheeks.

Gary, Lucy, and Mary lived in an apartment on the second floor. From their living room window we could see the entrance to the Heidelberg Castle. A train track led up to the castle at the top of the mountain.

This was the first time my mother or I had ever been to Europe. We spent two weeks with Gary and Lucy and they drove us all over Germany in their Volkswagen bus. We saw everything there was to see. We bought jewelry in a little town about ten miles away, and ate at a restaurant in Munich which overlooked the famous church with the little wooden dolls in the steeple clock. The dolls come out every hour and half-hour and, as the music plays, they go round and round.

We saw the site of the 1936 Summer Olympics in Berlin. It snowed one day while we were there, in October, and we actually saw people training for a marathon in the freezing, cold weather.

At the Oktoberfest parade, my mother was waving her hand with a handkerchief and crying like a baby. I turned to her and asked, "Mother, why are you crying?" She said "I never dreamed I'd see anything so wonderful."

While we were there, we traveled to Paris for a weekend. My mother didn't want to go, so Melba and I boarded a double-decker bus, the first seats upstairs right in front. We went all the way from Germany through France to Paris. On the way the bus driver said, "Now if you'd like to go to the Follies Bergere, it's the 200th anniversary, you have to go tonight. The only tickets we could get were for tonight." So I talked Melba into going with me to the Follies.

We sat in the balcony next to an American sailor who had high-powered binoculars with him. The show started and the curtains parted. The entire stage was like a huge spider web. They had ropes and girls woven into the web like spiders. I took a double take and realized all the girls were nude.

The sailor said to me, "Would you like to look?" I said "Of course." So I looked and then gave the binoculars to Melba to look. When she did, she exclaimed loudly, "They're nude, they're nude!" And she closed her eyes and never opened them the rest of the performance. I enjoyed the show very much. I thought it was elegant, not crude or vulgar like in Las Vegas. It was really very delicately done, the way the dancers were woven together and how everything was choreographed with the music and dancing.

It was non-stop entertainment. When one performance ended and the curtains closed, another act immediately came out in the front followed by the curtains opening to another larger scene. Melba missed a fabulous show.

While in Europe, we tried to take in as many sites as we could, including all of the cathedrals and shopping areas, as well as the lush wine country. We traveled to Heidelberg and watched the people dance around the May Pole in the middle of town.

One weekend while we were there, Mother and I took a bus to Adelboden, Switzerland, to visit the Girl Scouts Chalet. I had no idea that, only months later, I would be visiting the Girl Scout Chalet in Mexico.

When Dorothy's husband, Dave, died in 1999 following a long illness, she had his ashes spread at the top of his favorite mountain in Austria where he loved to ski. They also placed a bronze plaque up there with his picture telling that he is buried there.

Chapter 22

In February of 1965 I was off on another adventure. I had been asked to represent the United States at the Girl Scout Chalet in Cuernavaca, Mexico. You had to be a Girl Scout leader or volunteer trainer in order to be considered for this trip, so I asked my co-leader Wiggy to join me. There were leaders from six different countries represented, including Brazil, Canada, Mexico, Norway, and the United States.

Wiggy and I left our husbands behind for a month and boarded a Greyhound bus in Minneapolis, Minnesota. We got off the bus in Dallas, Texas and spent the night. While in Dallas, we took a bus tour to see the route that President Kennedy had taken and the place where he had been shot just one year earlier.

The next day we climbed aboard a Mexican bus, the Transporta Del Norte, which took us into Mexico. That was an experience and a half. We were the only English speaking people on the bus. Everyone else spoke Spanish. The driver would be going along and then all of a sudden he would drive off into a field. We were stopped three times by the police in our first ten miles into Mexico. The police made everyone get out of the bus and then they took the entire luggage off the bus. I think they were looking for dope peddlers. Some of these women had funny hairdos, great big, spiral bee hives, and Wiggy and I thought they might have had drugs hidden in there. Every time the bus would stop, one of the women would run to the bathroom and they'd have to drag her out. We couldn't understand a word they were saying.

We had no idea why the bus driver would take us off the road and drive into a field and then go back onto the road. Eventually the bus made it to Mexico City. We spent two days sightseeing there. We went down to the main square where there was a beautiful church and several stores. Two children "adopted" us, accompanying us everywhere we went and talking to us. We had no idea what they were saying so we just smiled and nodded in agreement.

Then it was on to our final destination, Cuernavaca, which is about 50 miles south of Mexico City. Our bus went up over the top of a mountain and down into the valley where Cuernavaca was located. This was in February and all the trees were in bloom. They were yellow like Easter lilies which stood straight up. They even grew in the trees. There were purple trees that were absolutely gorgeous. We were taken to the Girl Scout Chalet where we met the ladies from the other countries who were there.

We had such a good time. We worked in patrols, slept in patrols, and had duties like we would give our own patrols to do. One time we would have to set the table for the meal and another time we would serve the meal. Another time we would clean up after the meal. It was interesting because they used all Spanish names. The only one I remember is they called a fork a tenedor. We learned to speak a little of the language while we were there. We also shared how we did things in our own troops. We shared songs as well as programs and projects that we had completed with our girls. We taught them plays that our girls had performed. We all shared what we made with our own troops.

We were there on Girl Scout Sunday and they took us to Acapulco to church. We all went in full uniform. There were also Girl Guide troops from Mexico in their uniforms.

One thing that stood out in my mind about Mexico was the pineapple. I had never tasted fresh pineapple right from the farm. It was so sweet and juicy, I ate it every day we were there.

We were taken to a private beach next to Acapulco, but had to go through a very poor town to get there. The children had no clothes or shoes and were playing in the mud.

We had only been at the beach for about a half an hour when one leader had become so sunburned she was in bed for a week. The sun is so intense closer to the equator, and it seemed

especially warm for us Minnesota gals. The water was warm and wonderful. We took a boat out into the ocean and saw a statue of a saint underneath the water. We also saw the homes of Hedy Lamarr and other movie stars who lived along the shore of Acapulco.

We noticed a man on the road with an armadillo and he stopped to let us see it. Then he tried to sell it to us. All we wanted was to take a picture of it, but the man wouldn't let us. So we bought the armadillo, paid him for it, took the pictures, gave the armadillo back to him, and got in the cab and left.

All our travels around the area were by taxi cab. I remember going from Cuernavaca to Acapulco and the taxi driver stopped at a rest stop. We were going to buy some candy and he got in front of us and said no. "Infirma, infirma," meaning we would get sick. He saved us from getting sick by not allowing us to buy the candy.

The taxi driver took us to a huge cave and we saw stalagmites and stalactites hanging from the ceiling. That was creepy, but very interesting.

One day they put up a pinata that looked like a chicken. They blind folded us and gave us a stick and we hit the chicken and finally when it broke open it was full of candy, which was good candy that didn't make us sick.

We toured the castle where the King of Spain had lived with his wife. Here we saw more of those absolutely magnificent trees with the bright yellow blossoms that looked like Easter lilies. In San Jose, California where I later lived, we had La Jacaranda trees with the purple flowers, but I had never seen anything like these ever before, or since.

Our last night was spent in Mexico City and the next morning we were ready to leave for home. I said to Wiggy, "I'll go down and get the cab, you bring the last suitcase and I'll meet you downstairs." I waited and waited. I had the cab ready to go and Wiggy didn't come. Finally she got out of the elevator and she was crying. I said "What's wrong?" She said that the young bellboy would come down one floor and then he'd stop at every floor. He tried to kiss her and hug her. She'd say "no, no, no" and then he'd go to the next floor and try again. So by the time she got downstairs, she was hysterical. The bellboy was trying to make time with her and she wouldn't have anything to do with him. Wiggy was about 55 years old at the time. She couldn't convince him that she was not interested in young, Mexican men.

On our way home, we stayed overnight again in Dallas and then we returned to Minneapolis. We were gone for over a month and had a wonderful time. My sweet, understanding husband was thrilled for me, but equally delighted that I was finally home. Not too many husbands would approve of their wives being gone that long, let alone into a foreign country, on a bus no less. It was a true testament to our strong marriage.

I'll never forget how much fun it was working with the women from other countries. We shared with each other and I know our troop benefitted immensely from everything we learned. I had the opportunity to tour three Girl Scout world centers in my lifetime. I wish I was still young enough to be involved in scouting. I always loved working with young people and I also enjoyed teaching the leaders.

Chapter 23

After graduating from high school, our son, Barry, spent a year in college. He didn't accomplish much while there, majoring in girls and swimming. So we said, "Son, join the Navy, see the world." And he did. He had basic training at the Great Lakes Training Center. Then he asked Amy for her hand in marriage.

Amy and Barry were married in 1965 at our Methodist Church. His sister, Shari, and her husband, Don, stood up for them. I was the only one in the congregation, along with Carrie, our first granddaughter.

After the wedding, Barney and I drove the bride and groom to Virginia Beach, where Barry was stationed, and helped them find their first apartment. They lived there for about seven or eight months when Barry was scheduled to go to sea on the Eugene A. Green. He was trained as a sonar electrician and was headed to Vietnam.

Shortly after Barry left for Vietnam, Amy found out she was four months pregnant. At that point we decided she shouldn't be alone, so we brought her home to live with us. Amy gave birth to Byron Enoch Downs, III, on September 20, 1966. We call him Buddy. Amy and Buddy lived with us until Barry returned from Vietnam.

Since his discharge from the Navy, Barry has worked for a company that sets up office cooling systems. He is currently the manager of the company.

One day before Buddy's second birthday, his sister Kellie Ann Downs was born. Amy and Barry's third child, Heather Shannon Downs, was born on March 28, 1975 .

After 20 years of marriage, Amy and Barry were divorced. Barry then married Jennifer Granville in February of 1988. They also became a blended family, as Jennifer has a son and daughter from a previous marriage.

Chapter 24

Nineteen-sixty-five marked twenty-five years of marriage with my friendly Irishman. Our life together was as wonderful as the day we met. Our church held a lovely reception for us and dear friends and family lavished us with gifts. Our busy lives had flown by so fast that it didn't seem possible we had been married that long.

Now that Barry and Shari were both on their own, Barney found time to join the Shriners, something he had wanted to do for a long time. He also joined a Boosters club, a subsidiary of the Shriners. In 1968 he had worked his way up to what was called the Big Booster, which is equivalent to president of the club. It was an enjoyable group. They performed community service work, but the social gatherings were exciting, too. When he was inaugurated as the Big Booster, they had a special ceremony and a ball at the Curtis Hotel. I wore a green gown, of course, Barney's favorite color, and we were treated like a king and queen. They put tables together and had us standing on the tables where the Potentate and his Lady (Barney and I) were greeted by all of the attendees. I remember that each lady was given a stuffed tiger as a souvenir.

As the Potentate's Lady, I had the responsibility of decorating the tables for the monthly luncheons, also held at the Curtis Hotel.

Because of our affiliation with the Shriners, we joined the Golden Valley Golf Club, which was only open to Shriners and their wives. They held dances at the Golf Club every month. Many times we recruited the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts to help escort people in and out of their cars.

I never was a very good golfer, but I really did enjoy the game, the exercise and being in the scenic outdoors. Once while golfing with a lawyer and his wife, my ball went into a sand trap. when I knocked it out, it went right into the hole, and the lawyer nearly had a heart attack. I said "God did it," because I knew it certainly couldn't have been me. Sometime later, when we sold our house, we moved into an apartment near Golden Valley so Barney could play golf more often.

Not only did Barney love golf, but he also loved to drive. Sometimes he would drive all the way from Bethpage, New York to Fond Du Lac, Wisconsin, nonstop, 36 hours. When I knew he needed a break, I would have to practically beat him over the head to get the wheel out of his hands. He usually drove a Club Coupe, like the one we drove from Florida to Minnesota.

Chapter 25

The New Neighbors Club had been a great job, but I felt it was time to begin a new adventure. I had used Ovation Cosmetics for years and it came natural for me to sell them, because I liked them. It was a multilevel business and it didn't take me long to build an organization across the Midwest. I had representatives in Indiana, Wisconsin, Iowa, and Minnesota. We were doing very well and I loved it. I enjoyed teaching women how to cleanse and care for their skin. I don't think I was very good with that part of the business, but I was good at sponsoring and teaching others to do it.

Barney had worked hard to make Workmen's Service Tabulating Company into a very large, successful business. He loved his work. He talked the University of Minnesota into putting all of their alumni on tab cards. It wasn't long before several colleges and universities across the United States were doing the same. The electric company and phone company used their services, rather than hand printing their billings.

Barney had worked for Workmen's Service for ten years when, one Friday, the president of the company called him and his assistant into his office. He proceeded to thank Barney and his assistant for "building this wonderful business for me." He added, "I just sold it for \$3 million and I don't even know if you will have a job come Monday morning."

Barney came home so heartbroken he cried all night long. He had put everything he had into building the business. It was our future, or so we thought. He went to work the following Monday morning and found that he still had a job, but unfortunately he was demoted. All of the workers were devastated. One young man was so distraught he had a heart attack and died.

Barney was never the same after that. While he was still loving, kind, and helpful to anyone in need, he had lost some of his spark. He had started with Workmen's Service and built it from the ground up. He had initiated many innovative ways to do the business. There were times when Shari, Barry, and I went with him to his office on the weekends to learn how to keypunch and verify cards, to help him meet his deadlines. If he didn't meet those deadlines, then the company would have to pay a penalty. He met all the deadlines and saved the company an enormous amount of money.

Barney stuck it out until 1967 and then retired. He worked for a short time as a controller for Dairy Queen and then our life took an unexpected turn.

Chapter 26

In early 1968, Barney joined me at a convention for Ovation Cosmetics in Los Angeles. There we met Bob and Phyllis Secord from Denver, Colorado and became fast friends. They were funeral directors but were also working for Ovations. However, their newest venture was selling bras.

At least once a week for several months following the Ovations convention, Bob called begging, “Chicki, you know, you’d be great in this bra business. You really ought to hear more about it.” I kept telling him, “I’m too busy.”

During this time, I was involved in professional dress making as well as selling Ovations products. One day as I was putting together a suit, I became irritated when the darts outlined on the pattern would not provide a properly fitted garment. I was constantly changing the position of the darts, not realizing at the time that it wasn’t the darts and it wasn’t the pattern. It was the bra.

Bob kept calling me and badgering me to join the bra business. Finally, he said “Chicki, come to Colorado. We’ll take you to see Pike’s Peak and the Air Force Academy, and we’ll even take you bird watching in the Rockies.” I loved bird watching and he knew it, so I agreed to spend three days in Denver.

Bob and Phyllis picked me up at the airport and immediately whisked me away to their home where Phyllis fitted me in a new bra. It was the most comfortable bra I’d ever worn, and it looked great.

That night Phyllis took me to a spa where I sat on a bench with a group of ladies as she opened her suitcase full of bras. A lady came from the exercise floor and noticed the bras and asked, “Oh, are these those bras? Could I try one? I heard they were wonderful.” So Phyllis fit her in a bra. While she was fitting her, other ladies came in from the exercise floor. Before long, Phyllis had fit 14 ladies. I saw them all go from their old bra to the new bra and every single woman purchased multiple bras.

“I’m no dummy,” I thought, “There’s something to this.” So I went with Phyllis the next morning to a farmhouse in Greeley, Colorado where she had scheduled a fitting. Seven ladies showed up and Phyllis began by talking about the bra. She then took the first lady in the bedroom and showed me how to fit her in the bra. We brought the woman back out and everyone in the room was crying. We had no idea what was wrong. The next lady dried her eyes and said, “I’m next.” She came with us and, as we were going down the hall, I said to Phyllis, “What do you suppose they’re crying about?” She said, “I don’t know.” So we fit the lady. She was fine with us. She put her clothes back on, came back out and the next lady went with us, but they were all crying again.

As we walked down the hall I told Phyllis, “I’m gonna ask them why they’re crying. I can’t understand it.” She said “Okay.” So we brought the third lady out and I said “I gotta ask you, why are you all crying? Did we hurt your feelings or something?” They said, “No, didn’t you know? Robert Kennedy was murdered last night.” That was devastating news, especially since I had met Senator Kennedy just a few years earlier.

All those women bought bras. I went home with Phyllis and she showed me a copy of her latest royalty check, which was ten times the amount of any of my checks from Ovation Cosmetics. I called Barney and informed him, “I’m not coming home until Sunday.” He said “Uh-oh, are we in the bra business?” I answered, “I’m afraid so.”

I stayed until Sunday and learned all about the bras and the business, as well as the marketing plan. I went home and started the bra business on the 23rd of June, 1968. It all happened so quickly but it was very exciting.

I arrived home on Sunday from Colorado. On Monday morning Western Airlines called, saying “We have a big package for you out here. Will you be coming to pick it up, or do you want us to deliver it?” I said, “I’m not expecting any package.” They asked, “Are you Marian Downs?” I said, “Yes.” They said, “Well we have this package out here. It’s from someplace in Iowa.” I said “I’m not expecting anything.”

So Barney went out to the airport to pick up my package, which was my new inventory of bras sent by Bob Secord. I hadn’t even signed any papers or given them any money. Barney brought the package home and said “Well, I guess now we really are in the bra business.”

I joined the Figurette bra business in the middle of one of their marketing campaigns. If I could sell \$5,000 of merchandise two months in a row, I could go down to the Mercury dealer and pick out any car that I wanted – any color, any equipment. I was driving a four year old Dodge Dart that had automatic nothing, a stick shift, an a.m. radio, and a heater. I was told to go down to the local Mercury dealer and pick out my car. This is part of a program called “If You Can Count To Four.” I’ll go into that later.

Anyway, I did what they told me. On Monday morning I went down to the Mercury dealership and said “I’m here to select a car.”

The salesman asked “What kind would you like?”

I looked around and I said, “I like the looks of this Cougar here.” It was a green, XR-7, really sharp.

As I sat in the front seat behind the wheel, the salesman described all the features of the car. He told me it had 420 horses under the hood. I said “Golly, I thought they put an engine in there; I didn’t know they put horses underneath there.” The man, not realizing I was joking, shook his head and sighed, “Oh, no.”

Pretty soon it dawned on me that this young man had dollar signs in his eyes. I’m sure he was thinking, “Boy, the first thing this morning, I’m gonna sell this old lady a car.” I said, “Oh you think I’m gonna buy this car, don’t you.” The salesman answered, “Yeah.” I said, “No I’m getting it for free. I’m starting a new business here in Minneapolis and they’re gonna give me this car for free.” He exclaimed, ““Madam, this is a Mercury. They don’t give Mercuries away for free.” I said, “Oh, yeah, I’m gonna get it. They told me if I did certain things that I could drive this car for free.” The salesman tried to get it through to me that “They don’t do that with Mercuries.” He turned and walked away from me and went over to where a meeting was going on in a glassed-in office.

Bob had told me I should get pictures of the car and put them up everywhere to motivate myself. So when the man returned, I politely informed him, “I really am gonna get this car free,” and asked him for some pictures of the vehicle.

Again, the salesman said, “Madam, they don’t give Mercuries away free. There’s no way. This is a very expensive car.” And so he gave me pictures of the car and I went home and posted them in every room of our house. I was determined that I would earn that car.

It was the 23rd of June and I had to sell \$5,000 worth of bras before the first of July. I visited my friend, Elaine Howe, who was a seamstress in Minneapolis. Day in and day out, she sat at her sewing machine in her basement, surrounded by cement walls, making funeral netting for coffins. I took her hand and said, “Elaine, come out of the cellar into the sunshine and sell bras with me.”

I fitted Elaine in a bra and, of course, she loved it. I explained clearly everything I knew about the business and shared my enthusiasm. “You’ve got to help me build this business,” I exclaimed. Elaine was my first recruit.

I sponsored a couple of other people who had been in the cosmetic business with me. I fit bras from sunup until 2 the next morning. Barney would have to tell the customers, “You have to go home. She’s gotta go to bed, she’s so tired.” But they all wanted bras.

My Girls Scouts, their mothers, aunts, grandmothers all became customers. They came in groups to be fitted for bras. I was having so much fun, and making money at the same time. It was very exciting. By the first of July, Barney figured it all up and we had over \$5,000 in sales, including my inventory and that of Elaine Howe and the others we had sponsored. We were on our way in the bra business – training recruits and fitting customers. It was nonstop.

Chapter 27

When we entered the bra business, we lived in a condominium in Edina, Minnesota, which had a circular staircase to a basement leading to a huge room next to the laundry room. Each time I sold a bra I hung the customer's used bra on a line in the basement. Before long I had a clothesline full of nasty looking, stretched out, lifeless bras.

We set up our business in the basement. We held marketing meetings one night a week and everybody in our group could bring people to the meetings. There were times when we would have 60 to 70 people show up. We couldn't fit them all in the basement, but we had two window wells and we had the overflow of people standing in the yard outside the window where they could hear Barney explain the marketing plan.

Each couple worked together, the women fitting and selling the bras, the men handling the paperwork and inventory. That was one of the keys to our success. It would never have snowballed had it not been for so many of us working together.

We had sold \$5,000 worth in our first eight days and another \$5,000 before the end of July. In the middle of August I flew to Des Moines with my daughter to pick up the keys to my new Mercury. Shari said to me, "Mother, they're never gonna give you a car free." But, sure enough, they gave me the keys to the brand new, green XR-7 Cougar. It had five miles on the odometer. Sharon and I drove my new green Mercury to Denver to my first Figurette bra convention. I had only been in the business for about six weeks. Shari actually got into the business, too, but didn't stay long. It just wasn't her cup of tea.

The president of Figurettes, Hi Hand, lived in Los Angeles. He was a very smart businessman, especially when he hired Angela Serritella. I have had the honor of working with Angela since I came into the business and she and I are still very close friends. She was the creator of the Figurette bra and never stopped working on it, improving it, adding to it, testing it, trying it on different people. Larger women were coming to be fitted and Angela worked diligently to make the bras bigger so the women were comfortable, not hung from the shoulders, but supported underneath without any underwire. She tested the bras on the ladies who came into the business to sell. She would put them in the bras and say "Wear this for a month and then come back and let me see it and maybe I'll take a little tuck in here or there." Over the years she continually improved the design of the bras.

We had young girls in their late teens with really large breasts. Once we supplied them with a cup that actually fit, their breasts did not get any larger. They were comfortable and they looked great. Many of them commented that it was the first time they were able to put their arms down to their sides because now there was no breast tissue bulging out the sides and underneath their armpits.

A woman named Penny Rich had an idea for a suspension bra and started a bra company. She had bras made in a foreign country and they were of very poor quality. Primarily she sold inventories. She did not give very good training. Angela took and expanded her idea and designed the Figurette bra which was of much better quality. Angela was a dressmaker, so she knew how to measure for different sizes. She ran the factory for Hi Hand. They were both lovely people. They did their best to take care of us.

Angela went to the factory one 4th of July weekend and sewed bras herself in order to fill back orders so we would not be without inventory. That's the kind of person she is. She and I have spent many hours together and always get along very well.

Angela was a diligent, dedicated worker, but always gave God the first day of the week. Whenever we were on the road together, we would find a full gospel meeting in the

neighborhood. Angela is a strong Christian woman and never missed an opportunity to worship the Lord wherever she went.

Angela also created lingerie for us that was becoming. I modeled one of her new creations at a banquet in Salt Lake City, a long, poppy colored night dress.

Whenever we received a bonus check, it was sent directly to our door by special delivery. I remember one day while we were having a bra business meeting and the doorbell rang. When I went to answer it, there was my bonus check. Barney showed the check to one of the men in the meeting who had been a little skeptical about joining. When he saw that it was over a thousand dollars, he was so excited he and wife his signed up right then and there.

Hi Hand hired a man named Del Remmi. Del was a sharp businessman, good at what he did. He had built a business in Nutralite, food supplement products. He had retired from that business and was looking for something to do. So Hi hired him as vice president to train all of us and teach us how to sponsor and how to build our business. Del was very good at doing that.

However, one thing we discovered about Remmi early on was that he would embellish just a little bit on the marketing plan. Barney did not agree with that. He felt the plan was good enough as it was. Barney's motto was to tell the truth and not to try and oversell it. So Del would be up on the platform talking about the program and getting carried away a bit. He'd look down at Barney, Barney would give him a "look," and then Del would change his tune. Del worked with Hi Hand for ten years. He was the one who encouraged both me and Barney when we earned our cars.

Starting in January, 1969 Figuettes, held their annual conventions in Las Vegas and Barney and I attended every year. The amount of our sales and sponsors would determine our cost to attend the convention each year. If we earned a car that year, we would pick up our car on the way and drive to Las Vegas. Many times we would arrive on Sunday and attend a wonderful church service held in the building behind Circus, Circus.

We were not attracted to gambling, but we did visit downtown Las Vegas and shop, and took in a few side shows. Marque entertainment included Wayne Newton, Barbara Streisand, Bill Cosby, Helen Reddy, and Barry Manilow. Interestingly, Barry Manilow opened for Helen Reddy. He was a huge hit, but she seemed like a cold fish.

Years later, when Barry Manilow became popular, I took a group to see him at the Hilton in Vegas. He is a fantastic entertainer and very talented. We sat in the \$100 balcony seats and during his finale, "Copa Cabana," they had this contraption that brought the whole stage up to our level so we could see close up. It was about 20 feet in the air. That was very exciting.

We saw Olympic skater Dorothy Hamill perform, as well as several impersonators of famous people, many of whom were more entertaining than the person they were impersonating. We saw Don Rickles, paid \$70 a ticket and ended up walking out after about 15 or 20 minutes. He was thoroughly disgusting. He was crude and insulting, as was Buddy Hackett.

Zsa Zsa Gabor put on a good show as did Dinah Shore and, of course, Bob Hope. We saw Phyllis Diller at the Tropicana. She started out with the dirty language and, when we didn't clap, she cleaned up her act.

We attended conventions in Las Vegas from 1969 until 1978, when the business was sold to Cameo Couture. Cameo Couture owned the company until 2002 or 2003 and was bought out by Jeunique. Jeunique held some of its conventions in Palm Springs, which was a lot more relaxing because there wasn't as much activity as there had been in Vegas.

One of the bad things about going to Las Vegas every year was the exposure to and the enticement of gambling. Some of the young couples who were making \$3,000 or \$4,000 a month in Figuettes had never had that kind of money before. When they came to Las Vegas, they

believed they were going to make it big. In reality, you don't make it big in Las Vegas. Some of them lost their homes and their marriages. It was very sad. It was one of the reasons I never would gamble.

One time the president of the company received a call from someone at a casino saying that one of their people was into them for \$40,000. "We just want to make sure he is good for the it," they explained. I thought the president of Figuettes would have apoplexy. There was no way he was going to underwrite this person. The person was fired and lost all of his perks, including an airplane the company had provided for his travel. He lost it all because he couldn't resist gambling in Las Vegas and trying to make a big shot out of himself.

It was heartbreaking to see these young people become so carried away by the spirit of the place and the encouragement to gamble. Just a nickel here and a dime there, then it's fifty cents, then it's a dollar. The next thing you know they're out of luck, and money.

Chapter 28

During our first convention, Bob Secord had arranged for me to be on a panel with him answering questions from other sales reps. I had been in the business six weeks and here I was on a panel and talking about bras.

Elaine Howe and her husband, Orv, also attended the panel meeting, along with their daughter. I remember all of us sitting in the lounge one night until very late nicknaming all the bras. Double B was Beautiful Baby. Double C was Cute and Cuddly. Double D was Delightfully Delicious. We had trouble with Double E, so we named it Excitingly Entrancing. Double F was Full of Fun. Double G was Goodness Gracious. Double H was Holy Hannah. Double I was Ayeyaiyai. Double J was Jumpin' Jiminy. Double K was King Kong. Double L was Lollapallosa. Double M was Mama Mia. That was all the double sizes we had in the bra business. Throughout my career I would amuse my customers by using those nicknames.

I had received my first car around the 10th of August, 1968. In September, Del Remmi, vice president and sales manager, came to me and said, "Now, Chicki, if you do \$20,000 two months in a row, Barney can go down and pick out any Lincoln that he wants." My husband was raised on a farm in South Dakota. Never in his wildest dreams did he think he would ever drive a Lincoln. I set my goal to get Barney his Lincoln and in March we sold \$20,000 worth of bras and another \$20,000 in April. By this time, over 50 in our group had also earned cars. On Memorial Day, about one month before we had been in the business a year, Barney flew to Des Moines, Iowa and was handed the keys to a great big, green, 4-door Lincoln Continental. It was the most magnificent car. It had everything. Now we were both driving brand new cars.

By March we had made Major status and again in April by sponsoring more and more people. We opened up the market in Wisconsin with Al and Phyl Anderson. He was a school teacher. Elaine and Orv Howe were also building a large organization.

We went to a marketing meeting at Orv and Elaine's home one evening. Before the meeting started, Barney said he had to use the restroom. When he went into the restroom, we heard him laughing out loud. We couldn't understand what was so funny in the bathroom. When he came out, he said "You gotta come in and see this." So we went into the bathroom and he lifted up the toilet seat. Underneath were the words "Orv and Elaine will be Majors in April 1969." Their 9 year old daughter told us they had signs all over the house and she had put the one under the toilet seat.

Over the next ten years I had nine different Mercuries and Barney had two Mark 4s. By 1972 we made Diamond Major, which meant that we had sponsored four people who were equal to us as regional directors and we were all in bonus. We were among only 23 other couples who ever made Diamond Major.

I remember the time we were honored in 1972. The convention was in Seattle, Washington at a lovely hotel there. I made a white dress and put a silver sheer overdress on it so that it shimmered like silver. I had planned our attire so that Barney and I would match. For the four days of the convention we had four different outfits that all matched. One of the outfits I made was lavender, so I bought Barney a lavender dress shirt. "I'm not gonna wear a lavender dress shirt," he said. I replied, "Oh, wait until you try it on." And yes, he wore the lavender shirt. He looked dashing in it. One night we wore yellow outfits. The night we were honored, Barney wore a white dinner coat and white trousers and I wore the silver dress with the white underneath and Barney bought me a huge orchid. We were honored on stage as Diamond Majors, with about 100 of our people cheering us on who were attending from all over the United States.

Nine in our group were now driving silver Lincolns. At one of our meetings, there were nine of these silver Continentals parked outside our house. We lived in a predominantly Jewish neighborhood and they all stood in their yards with water hoses, practically drowning their lawns while watching “those people in the bra business” in their silver Lincolns.

We were a bit perplexing to our neighbors. We lived on a corner and I mentioned to the group that it would be nice if we had a huge flag pole with a United States flag. The next thing we knew, 200 of our friends came together, dug a hole, put up an American flag, about 10 feet high, and we all stood around it and sang The Star Spangled Banner and recited Pledge Allegiance. Again, our neighbors were muttering, “Ya never know what those people are gonna do, those bra people.” It was no secret to anyone what business we were in; all of our cars donned signs with the company logo and the words “Figurette Bras and Girdles.”

We held training meetings at our house every Monday morning and we would have 15 to 20 women in their pink smocks and white slacks. We would teach them all how to fit bras of all different sizes.

I remember working with a group of nurses from a hospital in Des Moines and one fit into a 42 HH. We put her in the bra and she loved it. She had sores from her breasts lying flat against her flesh for so long, but the sores soon disappeared and she was very comfortable. She would call me about every month for four or five months to tell me how thrilled she was and grateful that I was able to help her. That’s why I was in the business. I loved helping people and making life better for them, both from the financial angle as well as being able to make them comfortable for being who they are. I guess it’s the Girl Scout in me, service to others.

Chapter 29

In 1972 we reached Diamond Major status and the company took us on our first trip. Dorothy and Don Bachelor, a couple in Omaha, Nebraska we had met through the New Neighbors League, put us over the top, made us eligible for Diamond Major. Barney had been working with Dorothy and Don over the phone from Minneapolis, explaining the workings of the business. I was in Texas working with another couple.

The last order was placed at 2:00 a.m. which gave us Diamond Major status. At 8:00 the same morning we left for Cabo San Lucas. It was a real squeaker. Barney flew from Minneapolis and I traveled from Texas and we met at the Los Angeles Airport, where we were to board our flight to Mexico. The international section of the airport was way down at the other end. We came in the door of Mexican Airline terminal and the other Diamond Major couples saw us coming and screamed "They made it!" They all ran up and hugged us. We were each presented with a fresh flower lei.

Our flight took us to La Paz, Mexico where we were met by several 4, 6, and 8 passenger planes. They flew us from La Pas down to the tip of the Baja peninsula. At that time Cabo was nothing more than a small resort at the very tip of the peninsula. There were about three houses and a fishing village and nothing else for miles in either direction. We could walk for 20 miles and never meet a soul on the shore of Cabo.

It was nighttime when we landed at our final destination. The little planes landed in a field where we were met with men driving jeeps who escorted us to a lovely resort. We walked up a long flight of stairs to the top where Del and his wife were standing, along with waiters with trays of margaritas. A Mexican Mariachi band played behind them. We were each greeted with a kiss and a drink.

Each couple had their own little cottage overlooking the ocean. After we settled in, we all met in the dining room which had a spectacular view of the Pacific Ocean. The room was open, with no windows, so we could feel the cool, refreshing sea breeze and view the full moon along with a million stars that lit up the night sky. It was absolutely gorgeous. God had brought us to a wonderful place. We were so spoiled. The little Mexican girls would come to our room every day and fix our hair for a dollar.

We stayed at this little resort for a week. One day Barney and I went fishing with Orv and Kathy Leinan. Orv was a farmer in Iowa, and Cathy was a registered nurse. Neither of them knew anything about fishing. Barney was a real fisherman so he spent his time helping everyone. We were all catching blue marlin and dolphin fish. We went out on little boats which each had a sun deck over the top where we women could sit while the men fished down below. The men sat in chairs and each had a heavy pole with a line in the water. All of a sudden, the fish would take the bait and it would jump way up out of the water and dance on its tail and then go back down and then come back up again. It sounded like thunder when they came out of the water. It was very exciting, especially for those who had never fished before. And for us, we had never seen fish that big. All we could do was scream. I caught an exquisite sea green dolphin fish (also known as mahi-mahi) with a bright yellow belly and dark blue polka dots.

Barney had spent so much time helping everyone else learn to fish that he hadn't caught any for himself. So the day before we were to go home, Del said to Barney, "Where's your fish?" Barney answered, "I've been helping everybody else and I haven't had a chance to get one myself." Del said "Six o'clock tomorrow morning you and I will go out."

So the next morning, Barney and Del went out and Barney caught a 6 foot, 155-pound blue marlin. It was the biggest fish anyone in our group had caught. Barney was so excited when

he finally caught his fish. Our guide said “We’ll mount them and send them to you in Minneapolis. It will only cost \$1,000.” So we spent the \$1,000 and had both our fish mounted and sent home. Everyone else sent their fish home, too. It turned out to be a really dumb idea for us, since we had no where to put them. We didn’t have a wall big enough for a 6-foot fish.

That was our most memorable trip, not because we packed those two fish everywhere we moved, but because it was our first trip with the company and we had worked so hard to qualify at the eleventh hour.

In 1973, we attended the Figurette convention in Seattle, Washington. We took in all the sights, including the Space Needle.

The following year, the convention was in Snow Mass, Colorado, high up in the mountains. At the banquet I was shocked when they announced my name, honoring me as one of the top in the nation in sales and sponsorship. They said my name, and then announced that they had a surprise for me. They whipped the gold table cloth off the wall behind the stage and there was an oil painting of me. It was huge, painted by an artist who has also painted all the Kings of England. It was very becoming. It really looks just like me in my purple and gold outfit. I remember the first time one of my great-granddaughters came to visit and I had the painting on the wall above the fireplace. She was only 3 years old, but she stood there for a few seconds and then said “Uhhh, Nama Chicki!” She is now 46 years old and I think I should give it to her so she will never forget her Nama Chicki.

Being in this business was a partnership. Husbands and wives worked together, giving them all the opportunity to attend conventions and travel to exotic places together. Barney was so busy helping me in the business that he no longer had time to work at Dairy Queen. And we were doing so well, he didn’t really need to. When we arrived home from our first trip, we were even more motivated to make this business a success. We sponsored more people and sold more bras. The trips continued and the friendships grew. Orv and Kathy Leinan are still in the bra business, 42 years later.

On many occasions we traveled to Scottsdale, Arizona to train others in the business. I remember one young couple from Wisconsin. The husband’s name was Bob, who was a football coach at a high school in O’Clair, Wisconsin. He and his wife were in Arizona receiving the keys to their new car. We gave out keys to 103 cars that week. So many cars were being awarded that a separate leasing firm was formed specifically for us. Mercuries and Lincolns were the two choices, but the people could choose the color. Many in our group took a little longer to qualify than others, but eventually they were all driving their new cars.

The secret to this whole business is setting goals and doing everything in your power to reach them. When I went down to the car dealership in Minneapolis and was given pictures of my future car, from that day forward I drove the Cougar, in my mind, instead of the old Dodge Dart I was driving in reality. In fact, when I first started in the business, I went to a lady’s house for a fitting and she took one look at me and had me lay down on her couch with a cold rag on my forehead. My face was beat red and she asked me what was wrong. It was close to 100 degrees outside and I was driving the old Dodge with the windows rolled up, pretending I was driving the XR-7 Cougar with air conditioning. I was determined I was going to earn that car and so I imagined driving it until I actually was.

As I told my recruits, “You’ve got to set your goal and keep the blinders on and just work towards your goal.” That’s what I shared with my own children as well as my Girl Scouts. I would set the goal that Barney and I would be going on a certain trip, and both of us worked long and hard to get to that point, but in the end it was very rewarding in so many ways. It was all so surreal. For Barney and me it was like a fairytale – the cars, the trips, wonderful new

friends. More importantly, though, we were blessed to be helping so many others fulfill their dreams and educating women all across the United States about breast health.

Chapter 30

In 1975, Barney and I were host and hostess of the National Convention in Minneapolis. We rented the Minneapolis Auditorium and filled it to capacity, 2500 people. We invited the Oral Roberts singers to perform one evening, as well as the World Action Singers. It was a family affair. We hired sitters to entertain the children while the meetings were going on. One day they took the children to the St. Paul Zoo and the next day they went to the beach for a picnic lunch. This afforded many couples the opportunity to attend the convention together because now they were encouraged to bring their children.

Our beginning ceremonies for the convention included a circus and a parade. All the Diamond Majors wore costumes and paraded into the convention hall as elephants, 12 feet long and 8 feet high. Angela Serritella, the vice president and creator of the Figurette bra, and Hi Hand, the president, rode in on these "elephants." The enthusiasm generated from the convention continued and we all kept up on volume of sales and sponsorships.

That same year, Barney and I held a meeting with our new directors. We spent the weekend talking with 21 couples about how to develop their own businesses. We honored the achievements of some, and encouraged those who lacked enthusiasm. It was a fruitful meeting.

Our group was growing. Barney worked with the men, teaching them the marketing plan and answering questions. I taught the women how to fit the bras and develop their business and gave them suggestions on where to make new contacts.

One of the keys to our success was that, when we sponsored people, we didn't leave them hanging. We taught them everything we knew about sponsoring other people. In our first six months in the business, we opened Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wisconsin, and Iowa. Elaine Howe's brother came from Spokane, Washington and brought his wife, who was a registered nurse. I remember putting her in a 32 double G bra and had her jump up and down to prove to her that nothing moves when wearing one of our bras. She was amazed at the quality of the garment and soon became our new recruit in Washington. That's how we did it. We were sponsoring people and they were earning cars and trips and sponsoring more people. It was spreading like wildfire.

The husbands taught the marketing plan and the wives were the bra specialists, teaching the other women how to measure and fit bras and how to train others to fit them. We also taught them the importance of caring for their inventory, keeping their bras fresh. We taught them that, when they fit a bra and the lady decided to buy that bra, that's the bra she took home so that they would always have a new, fresh bra in their suitcase. Otherwise they would end up with a suitcase full of demos, or used bras.

As bra specialists, we presented ourselves in a professional manner, wearing pink smocks, white skirts or white slacks. Barney taught all the men how to keep track of the inventory, write up the sales slips, and place orders. When we first started with Figurettes, the shipments came from Des Moines, Iowa. Later the company moved to Phoenix, Arizona. At that point, we had to supply all the inventory. We carried our entire inventory in a suitcase, arranged in numerical order, starting with the 28s and then the 30s, 32s, 34s, and up, and we'd go A, B, C, D, so that we would have A, B, double B, C, double C, D, double D, E all the way up in the book. We had each person keep track on a recipe card what bras they had so they knew what to order.

Barney would assemble the inventories, making sure everyone had what they needed. It was a fun business with everyone working together. Training meetings were held once a week so everyone knew their role. Interestingly, when we first started, the only training I had was from my quick trip to Colorado where Phyllis introduced me to the business. So we practiced on our husbands. Then when they went to the banquets and conventions, the husbands would get together and share stories. “Does your wife try it on you?” “What size were you?”

We also had banquets once a month and everyone would bring their prospects and we would share the business. Barney would explain the marketing plan. He always told it honestly, never embellishing it in any way as Del Remmi would sometimes do. I think people appreciated Barney’s honesty and integrity. A woman from South Dakota tape-recorded Barney so she could share it with her group at home. That was all she needed to grow her group and qualify as a Major. Barney’s tapes were also used at national conventions.

I covered a lot of miles in my car, traveling to and from shows, sometimes all the way to Wisconsin, many times arriving home after 2 a.m. If successful, I would sell \$400 to \$600 worth of bras in one night. I not only sold bras, but I also sold the business. I would ask “Does anyone want to own their own business?” Well, of course, the hands went up, and they were “hooked,” no pun intended.

Dorothy and Don’s group in Omaha was growing fairly quickly. We also sponsored the Andersons in Balsam Lake, Wisconsin and they sponsored several people, who in turn sponsored more people. Our recruits were from all walks of life, people looking for a way to supplement their income, or just wanting to make a change in their career. The Leinans, the Andersons, and Barney and I put together a seminar at O’Hare Field at the Hyatt House in Chicago and 500 couples attended. Angela Serritella was the featured speaker.

Angela developed the formulas for the bras and registered the sizes. When we first started in the business, we all tried on the bras and Angela would pin them until they were a perfect fit. Angela worked miracles fitting one of our recruits from Missouri who was a 32 GG.

No one knew that we had invited Angela to speak at this convention. We wanted to surprise everyone, so we had her on a luggage cart covered with a sheet. When we wheeled her onto the stage, everyone cheered when she popped out. Then, for the first time, she displayed the new bathing suit she had created. This was not a company sponsored convention. We three couples put the whole thing together.

People were joining the business because they saw the potential for success and they were shown the actual bonus checks many were receiving for their work. They also believed in the value of the product, which made it a natural sell. That’s how the business grew. Our group just kept getting larger and larger. Having our husbands to help with the paperwork freed us up to promote the product. We all worked well as a team.

One time we held a banquet in Minneapolis where one of our couples owned a sign business. The husband built a bra that was 12 feet wide and 6 feet tall. He painted it to look just like a Figurette bra and hung it on the wall in the convention hall.

The company formed a council of Diamond Majors, consisting of five Diamond Majors who would serve for two years. We would all meet together in Phoenix and discuss ways to improve the company and the marketing plan. We would explain any problems that we were having in the field, so that those in the company office would understand what challenges we were facing, particularly with getting product and the development of new products. It was very productive, but it was also a lot of fun because we all became close friends. We were on the first board. At the end of the two years we relinquished our position to others.

Bob and Phyllis Secord, who had recruited us into the business, were the only ones who had five Diamond Majors in their group. Both of them had graduated from college as funeral directors, owned their own funeral home, became bored with it, and wanted to do something

different. As I said, like me, they were in the cosmetic business and from the cosmetic business we both entered into the bra business and did very well. The Secords were the anchor to our success. They wanted the best for us. Barney and Bob were like two little kids driving their brand new Lincolns around town and honking their horns at everyone and waving. Phyllis was a lovely person and I loved her dearly. They are both gone now, but they had an exciting life and did a lot of good and helped many of us to be who we are today.

One thing that truly contributed to our success was Del Remmi's presentation which he called "If you could count to four." It forced us to focus on getting to where we wanted to go. He placed a chair in the bathroom and said "I want you to stay in here until you find out who you are, what you are, and what you really want to do with your life."

Barney went first. Then it was my turn. I really believe that exercise changed my life. There's nobody but you and the mirror. I had to decide between me and myself who I was and what I wanted to do with my life. I was nearly 50 years old and I had been successful in several things – as the hostess of the New Neighbors League, as a Girl Scout Leader, as a trainer. But I didn't really have direction to my life as to what I really wanted to do.

Then Del had each of us sit down and he said "Now write it all down, define it. I want you to really decide what you want to accomplish in your lifetime." It forced me to recognize the potential I had and what I could do and what was the most important thing in my life. Of course, the most important thing is Jesus Christ. I am a Christian. I love the Lord and I believe the Lord has had his hand on my shoulder my whole life, guiding me and directing me, and helping me in all that I do. I felt that one of the things I was supposed to do is educate and help other people to achieve a better way of life and I believed the bra business was the way He facilitated it.

I've always been a teacher, from the time I taught Sunday school and vacation Bible school and later the Girl Scouts. I had 109 girls, including my own daughter, who made Curve Bar because I inspired and encouraged them and saw to it that they did the work, that they honestly earned the Curve Bar. I am a Curve Bar Scout myself. The bra business put these same qualities to work.

It's really amazing how many people are out there floundering and not knowing where to go or what to do with their lives. They're unhappy, dissatisfied, and don't know why they're unhappy and dissatisfied. I believe it's because they don't have any direction to their life. They don't know where they really want to go. Del's exercise was wonderful as far as I was concerned.

First you have to define who you are and what you are, and then you decide what you really want to do with your life. What do you want to accomplish? God gave us each a magnificent body and a mind, even our health and what are we to do with it? What are we really going to try to accomplish with what He has given us?

The second important lesson I learned was to pretend that I had already accomplished what I had set my mind to do. That was what I did when I pretended I was driving that new car. I pretended I was a Diamond Major and it wasn't long before I became one.

Chapter 31

We had begun working with Figuettes in 1968 and ten years later the company was sold to Cameo Coutures, Inc. We would travel to Dallas for conventions, as this was the new headquarters. We now sold Figurette bras along with the Cameo line, giving our customers more choices.

When we joined Cameo, they developed a computer program which simplified the ordering process and we were able to receive our merchandise more quickly than ever before. They had a customer service staff that was always available to assist us if we had a problem. Their annual conventions were all held in a Dallas hotel where we stayed. There would be 400 to 600 people at the different banquets.

We still went to Las Vegas in January, but instead of going out to the different cities, they set up the conventions themselves. We would have a large crowd there. Sometimes there were 1000 people. Since we were in the top echelon in the selling, our group sold a lot of bras every year and we were always in the top ten in receiving awards.

We no longer wore pink smocks. Cameo decided they wanted us to look more professional, so we were provided suits, a jacket, and skirt or slacks. At one time I had a total of ten suits, one of every color. They were high quality suits and I still have three of them.

Every year at the convention we received top honors. One woman asked "What do I have to do beat you?" and I said, "Honey, you have to run like hell." And the very next time she was number 1 and I was number 2. The competition was good for all of us, and, of course, for the company.

The new owner, Novice Nicholson, came to San Francisco to meet with us. He introduced himself as one of our new vice presidents. Adjusting to the new rules and new regulations was difficult at first, but we were all excited about the business. We continued to be very active and became a large part of the new company.

The new inventory included lingerie which helped expand our business. Some people came into the business wanting only to sell lingerie, which worked out well because many of us preferred promoting the bras. The catalogs were changed twice a year, at which time the company held a huge convention in Dallas, replete with a fashion show for their lingerie and casual attire. I did wear the lingerie, but I was more interested in selling the bras. Very few of the people in our organization were interested in selling lingerie.

Our group was earning good commissions every month. We were leaders in the Cameo business, always in the top ten in sales. We worked towards all the trips. Every year they offered a Caribbean cruise and trips to many other countries.

Cameo took away the cars, but added more trips, including cruises, which was a new experience for Barney and me. We earned our first cruise on the Costa Carla which set sail out of Florida. We were met at the ship by John Frederick, one of the owners of Cameo. It was a seven-day cruise in the Caribbean. We had a wonderful time. It was unbelievable that we were on such a wonderful vacation. And for free!

One of the most memorable trips was to Rome, perhaps because it was the first big trip we had earned, and our first trip to a foreign country, other than Mexico and Canada and my trip to Austria and Paris with my mother in 1964. We flew all night and then boarded a Greyhound bus to Naples, where we toured a cameo factory. A cameo is a shell from the ocean and the brown part is the inside of the shell and the white part is the outside. They scrape it and make these exotic figures. I had no idea then that this was where our company Cameo got its name.

The company had made all the plans for our trip to Italy. Barney and I decided before we went that if we were going that far, we did not want to go home after seven days. I called the

travel agency they were using and tried to arrange for travel from Rome to London and accommodations there. The travel agent said, "Oh, you can't do that." I replied, "Oh yes we can. We just won't tell anybody. You make arrangements to come home from London three weeks later." And so Barney and I went to Florence for two days, then we went to Venice for two days and took the train to Innsbrook, Austria and met my sister and her husband who were again living there. They knew the area well and we toured with them for ten days.

We had a wonderful time with Dorothy and Dave. Then we went to Geneva, Switzerland and took the train to Paris. After two days in Paris, we went to London for two days and then we went home on the 15th of May. We had a wonderful time. We didn't have any reservations anywhere. Barney had said, "You can't do that." Well, we did. We never dreamed we would ever have the opportunity to travel to all of these places and see the things we saw, including the Statue of David and the Cathedrals. When we arrived in Paris, Barney said "Let's throw the suitcases in the room and go see the Eiffel Tower." As we stood there gazing up he said "Never in my life did I ever believe I'd stand underneath the Eiffel Tower in Paris, France." He was so excited.

At a restaurant in Switzerland a woman noticed me admiring the exotic water lily cactus. She asked if I would like some pieces to take home. I gave her an inquisitive look and she explained, "If you rip off the little pieces and plant them, they will grow." I said, "Sure." So she gave me four little pieces about 2" long in a wet napkin in a zip-lock bag. I took them home but had forgotten about them. About two and a half months later I found them and discovered that they had little roots that were just beginning to come out so I planted them. I still have that plant and it is huge. The blooms are similar to a water lily, white in the center with deep pink petals on the outside.

While we were building the bra business, we continued selling cosmetics, as did many others in our group. By 1976 Ovarations realized they were losing me so they offered me the job of National Director. They gave me stock in the company, and agreed to pay all of our moving expenses. The only drawback was we would have to move to Los Angeles but, as always, we were up for the challenge. We could run the bra business from anywhere, and it seemed like a good opportunity, since we had so many recruits keeping us going in both businesses. So I took the job and we moved to Los Angeles.

My new job took me on the road for up to two weeks at a time, flying all over the country, teaching women how to sell the product and how to build their own businesses. Every time I returned from a business trip, my neighbors would tell me how my husband seemed so lost without me, wandering around, all alone. He wouldn't eat unless they fed him.

On a road trip to Springfield, Missouri in the dead of winter, after sitting in the airport for seven hours trying to get a plane to Chicago and spending three days sitting on the floor in the Chicago Airport with no food, I decided that would be my last road trip. I quit my job. I needed to be home with my husband.

I continued to sell bras and cosmetics, but for three months I also worked for a Beverly Hills employment agency. I remember a young man came in with long, stringy hair and dirty jeans looking for a job. I had a job that he qualified for, but he looked so terrible. I told him, "If you think I'm gonna send you out for a job, you're crazy. Look at you! Your hair! Your clothes! If you represent me, you gotta look good. You go get yourself cleaned up, come back and see me tomorrow and if you look proper, I'll send you out." The next day, he came in clean shaven, with a haircut and nice slacks and clean, pressed shirt. My boss was very impressed with how I handled the situation.

Neither Barney nor I really liked living in Los Angeles, but we tried to make the best of it. On my birthday in January of 1978, Barney took me to a place called Zuma Beach outside of Malibu, California. We took our chairs and sat on the sand watching the sunset. It was a site we

never forgot – no, not the sunset -- the two young men who were running up and down the sand, in and out of the ocean. They were totally nude. They were not bothered in the least by us two old folks sitting there.

Chapter 32

We finally had enough of L.A. Our daughter and her family had moved to San Jose in northern California and we talked about moving there. We would be able to continue selling bras and cosmetics. Barney said, "If you can find us a house, we'll move." Three weeks later I went to San Jose, found a house, came home, and we packed up our things. In April of 1978, the same year Cameo bought out Figuettes, we moved to a very nice neighborhood in a suburb of San Jose. We had a smaller cottage behind the main house where I sold bras and cosmetics. The bra business was doing so well, I decided to drop the cosmetics. Barney was helping me with the bra business, but also landed a job in the automotive department at J.C. Penney's in the mall near our home.

Dad died in 1980. We didn't visit him very often since we left Florida, but on our last visit we could see that he was quickly losing his memory. He kept asking to see our little boy, Barry. We told him Barry was a grown man and had to stay home and work. He never seemed to grasp that fact.

Louise had Dad cremated and she scattered his ashes over the ocean. She didn't have a funeral service for him so we never had the opportunity to say goodbye. My sister Dorothy decided to hold a funeral at her church in Michigan and I had one at my church in San Jose. We both said our goodbyes as best we could.

In 1981, the year following my dad's death, we bought a mobile home in northern San Jose and moved the shop to Santa Clara.

In 1982, one of Mother's former piano students heard she was dying and drove to see her. For 24 hours he and his wife stayed at Mother's side and he played the piano for her. Thirty years later, that student nominated her for a major national teaching award in New York, which she won. He accepted the award on her behalf and presented our family with a lovely plaque and a booklet with a picture of Mother and a story about her career in teaching music. That student is now an accomplished musician and CEO of a piano company with a Master's degree. He gives much of the credit for his success to Mother, whose musical background began with six months of piano lessons at the age of 10. My mother died at the age of 88. I traveled to Wisconsin to attend her services and visit with my family.

In 1987 we sold the mobile home and moved into the very nice Camden neighborhood, a suburb of San Jose. About that time, Barry's daughter, Kellie, came to live with us. Barry and Amy were in the middle of a divorce and Kellie needed to get away. She was 18 years old and in her last year of high school.

Kellie had been living in a basement apartment in Minneapolis with her folks. They had too many kids and not enough places for people to sleep. We bought her special furniture including a vanity dresser and I had a huge pillow on her bed with a sign "Welcome to your new room." A purple ruffled bedspread also brightened her room.

Barney would take Kellie to and from school. She would come home and share stories about her time in ROTC at the high school. The way she described some of her experiences was hilarious. One time they had gun practice and she said they had to take a big rifle and pound it on the ground, and then they had to move it into different positions and then they were supposed to put it over their shoulders. Well, she never got it over her shoulder. She lost control of it and it fell to the ground. In the evenings, we would all lie on the bed and eat popcorn and watch television together.

While Kellie was living with us, we attended Los Gatos Christian Church and she was baptized the first week of January on a Sunday evening. Even though we had been baptized already, Barney and I were baptized along with Kellie and two other teenagers.

Kellie was a sweet, adorable, young lady and never shy on dates. She also joined the Rainbow Girls. I took her to Gunny Sacks, a wholesale dress shop in San Francisco, where we could buy evening dresses for as little as \$5 each. We bought her six evening dresses. We then went to the yardage store and bought all kinds of trimming, lace, ruffles, and ribbons and Kellie decorated all of the dresses and made them look like very expensive gowns.

Kellie graduated from Leah High School in San Jose and returned home to Minneapolis. We thoroughly enjoyed having her with us. She truly illuminated our lives.

Barney had developed diabetes over the years and the one thing he hated about the strict diet was giving up was his popcorn in the evenings. That was probably his favorite thing about Kellie living with us. But, like a little boy, he would sneak a forbidden snack whenever I wasn't watching. Because of his illness, I was now attending meetings alone and leaving Barney at home. One night I drove halfway to my meeting when I realized I had forgotten something. So I turned around to go back home. I came rushing into the house just in time to catch Barney walking to his chair with a big bowl of popcorn which he wasn't supposed to have. He was caught with his hand in the popcorn bowl. If I wasn't there to say "No, you can't have popcorn," he'd have it anyway, knowing it was not good for his health.

Barney and I were blessed by the traveling opportunities afforded by Cameo's rewards program. We went on three Caribbean cruises and then they offered a trip to Hong Kong, China in 1988. We were determined to meet the sales and sponsorship requirements for this trip, and we did.

How exciting to fly across the Pacific Ocean. The trip was delightful and educational. Orv and Elaine, the first couple we sponsored, also earned their way and went with us, as well as another couple we had sponsored from Milwaukee, Ron and Terri Wysocki.

After we landed in Hong Kong, Barney stood with his arms straight out turning his body around in a circle and exclaimed, "China, China! Just think, I'm in China. Not South Dakota, but China." He never dreamed, as a farmer's son, ever traveling all the way to China.

We took in all the sights and sounds of China, the city life, the countryside, the food, and even the Peking duck farms. Only the government owned cars. Most people rode the bus, taxis, or bicycles. They transported their goods as well as their families on truck beds that were hooked to the backs of their bicycles. It was a very educational trip, but we "kissed the ground" when we returned home. We are so blessed in the United States, and traveling to China helped us appreciate what we have.

Chapter 33

On October 17, 1989, I was working in my office in San Jose and was serving the needs of a new mother. She had her four-week old baby with her and I had fit her in a bra and we had just completed our transaction. The woman said to me, "The baby's hungry, I better nurse him before I go." As she was nursing the baby, all of a sudden, the earth started shaking. I was experiencing my first earthquake since moving to California and it was a big one, 7.1 on the Richter scale, hitting the San Francisco and Monterey areas.

Many items in our studio fell over. I had my customer stand in one doorway with her baby and I stood in another. Everything was falling around us. After the shaking subsided, I had her sit down and said "You wait here." I went outside to see the damage and I noticed at the end of the driveway a telephone pole with sparks shooting into the sky. I said to my customer, "You're not going home, not until we get this situation a little bit more settled than it is right now." Of course, all the people from the surrounding buildings were out wandering around. We didn't have much damage except a few pictures that had fallen off the walls and I had a lightweight bookcase that fell over.

I became extremely concerned about Barney who was home alone and had become quite handicapped. I tried calling him but there was no answer. My customer stayed until the men in the building thought it was safe for her to get in her car and drive home. That took about half an hour. After she left, I locked up my office, got in my car and went home to see what happened to my husband.

It took me about an hour to get home. As I pulled into the driveway, I saw Barney coming out of the house, limping on the sidewalk. When he saw me he burst into tears. He was so frightened. When the quake hit, Barney had rolled back in his wheelchair and became stuck. He could see the lamps falling over and could hear the china falling out of the china closet crashing onto the floor. I went and got his wheelchair and settled him down.

We lived in a duplex and so I went next door to check on the lady who lived there. She and her children seemed to be alright, just a little shaken. We could see there was quite a lot of damage on our street and I said to the neighbor, "I've got this big table, let's put it outside with some food so that we can feed the neighbors." So she and I emptied our refrigerators and we were setting up an eating station in front of our house and all of a sudden, I noticed my husband had taken the brakes off of his wheelchair and was rolling down the driveway into the street. One of the neighbors ran and caught him and brought him back. I said, "Don't unlock your wheelchair anymore; just stay right here so that you're safe with me."

Pretty soon our son-in-law and grandson showed up and they found we had candles lit in the house. Our son-in-law exclaimed, "Oh, you can't light candles, it might set the house on fire." So they went and got batteries and lit flashlights.

It was quite an event. It was dark all night. There were no lights because the poles were all down. My first earthquake and it had to be a big one. We were lucky we were safe and the things that we lost were not that expensive nor were they that important. We lost some wine glasses and some of my china. But other than that, we were just fine.

Chapter 34

Barney and I celebrated our 50th wedding anniversary in 1990. He had taken it very hard when Workmen's was sold, but his involvement in the bra business with me gave him a new spark. We met many new friends, traveled all over the world, and attended all the conventions, being recognized for our hard work and successes.

Barney's health deteriorated quickly after our move to San Jose. Eventually I was unable to care for him and had to move him into assisted living. This was one of the most difficult decisions of my life. However, the following year he was able to travel with me one more time.

Barney's last trip was a Caribbean cruise. We had purchased an electric scooter for him as he was becoming more non-ambulatory by this time. He was able to get around on the ship because we took his scooter on board. This truly lifted his spirits. The handicapped room also made his trip more comfortable, as it was large enough for him to maneuver in his scooter. It was a memorable time, but somewhat bittersweet, knowing this would be his last trip.

Barney had his scooter at his last convention. We were #2 in the nation in sales that year and, when it came time for us to be honored on stage, the vice president of the company and another lady lifted Barney up under his arms and walked him up onto the stage. He stood on stage with me as we received our award. He was so proud and I was doubly proud of him because I know how difficult it was for him. I had made a gold dress for the occasion and Barney had a matching gold tie and cummerbund under his tux. The vice president said to me later as we spoke of that evening, "That's an event we'll never forget."

A trip to Australia was offered in 1993 but Barney's health would not permit us to go, and I would not go without him. A year later I moved to an apartment on Saratoga Avenue in San Jose with my shop located down the street.

Chapter 35

On June 15, 1995, the Lord took my sweet Barney home to Heaven. When he died, it was like saying goodbye all over again, because I was already living alone. He was such a wonderful, kind, caring man. I miss him terribly. Every life that Barney touched was impacted forever in a positive way. Whatever he did, he put his whole heart into it – as a husband, a father, grandfather, friend, and coworker. He was not only my husband, but my best friend and for many years my coworker. We built an awesome life together, a loving family with our two fantastic children. I think I have 11 grandchildren, 36 great grandchildren and 7 great-great-grandchildren. That list is growing all the time; so by the time this is published, I'm sure there will be many more.

Barney and I were married for 54 3/4 years. Shari, her husband, our best friend, Misi Hill, and I were all at Barney's bedside in the hospital when he went to be with the Lord. Misi was first a customer and then went into the bra business with us. She was such a godsend when Barney was at home and unable to care for himself. There were times I had to be away and she would fly from Portland, Oregon to stay with Barney and give him his shots and take care of him. I hated to leave Barney, but if I didn't attend the conferences, the members of my team would not receive credit for attending. Barney understood this as he had been my right hand in this business for so many years.

It was amazing how people came from all over the country to Barney's services. The vice president of the bra company spoke at his funeral. Angela Serritella also spoke. Business associates drove all night from Los Angeles to San Jose to attend his service. It was a special occasion.

First we had a service in San Jose for Barney and then I had him cremated. Two months later I mailed Barney's ashes to Mitchell, South Dakota where we were going to have him buried. The family and I flew to Minneapolis and then drove over to Mitchell, South Dakota and had him buried at the feet of his mother and father. There was room there for him and his sister is just across the way, so I felt that was the best place for his remains spend eternity, with his mother and father and sister and her family.

We had a service for Barney in Minneapolis at our old church where all of our Minneapolis friends gathered. Many of them drove to South Dakota to be with us for the small ceremony at the grave site. Barney was already in the ground and had grass covered over him. It was a very nice gathering, with many kind words, saying our final goodbyes to a wonderful man.

Following Barney's death I continued to run the bra business by myself. I was not able to do anywhere near the volume we did before. We worked so well together as a team, we sold thousands of dollars worth of bras every month and sponsored others to do the same. There just weren't enough hours in the day for me to do all of that by myself. And as I was getting older, I was not able to move as quickly as I used to.

Barney and I made some wonderful friends in the bra business, and helped a lot of people fulfill their own dreams. Oh what memories we have of the places we have visited all over the world. There is no way we could have done any of that had it not been for the bra business. And to share those times with the love of my life made it all the more wonderful.

Chapter 36

In 1996, I began traveling again with friends. I obtained top ten status that year and won another cruise. None of the places I have visited, however, could compare to my trip to the Holy Land. I was a widow, 79 years old, when the opportunity presented itself. Oh how I wish Barney could have shared this one with me. When my church, Central Christian, made the announcement for the trip during a Sunday morning service, I was so excited that I went home and called my friend Angela Serritella in Los Angeles.

“How would you like to go on a trip with me?” I asked.

“Where would we go?”

I said, “You better sit down, this is big.”

“What do you mean?” she asked. “Where would we go?”

“How about Israel and Jordan?” There was dead silence on the other end of the phone.

“Are you still there?” I asked.

“You mean walk where Jesus walked?”

“Yeah. How would you like to do that?”

She answered, “I’ve always wanted to do that.”

I told her that our church was going and I would like her to go with me.

Her reply was a resounding “Yes.”

The announcement came in the spring of 1998 and we had until October to save up for the trip. We would be in good hands, as the pastor, Mark Leaper, and his wife were going, as well as the couple who owned the travel agency where the trip was booked.

Twenty-six of us signed up to go. We left on October 22 and returned on November 4. We flew from San Francisco to Frankfurt, Germany and stayed overnight in Frankfurt and then took a plane to Tel Aviv, Israel the next day.

Upon landing in Tel Aviv, we began what was called the Journey of Faith to the Bible Lands of Israel and Jordan. We were on an Italia tour from the United States. Our hotel was lovely and very comfortable. First we visited several synagogues in the area and then were taken to one of the largest diamond distributors in the world. Several in our group purchased diamonds, something they could not have afforded to buy in the States.

The next morning we traveled to the ruins of ancient Rome in the city of Caesarea. We visited the theater and the aqueduct, continued to Mount Carmel and to the Carmelite monastery. Then we went where Elijah fought against the gods of Bael. We drove to Magni and visited the ruins and the water system there.

Then it was on to Nazareth and the Church of the Enunciation and St. Joseph’s Grotto. This gave me goose bumps, knowing that this was the actual town where Jesus was raised. Nazareth is a quaint little town with very narrow streets. The people were as curious about us as we were of them.

In Caesarea we visited the huge outdoor stadium made of stone. This was the site of generations of theater productions. It was a breathtaking spot, right on the edge of the Mediterranean Sea.

A taxi took us to the top of Mt. Tabor where we visited the Church of the Transfiguration. What a majestic view of the valley! To think that people worshiped there over 2000 years ago!

After we left there, we drove to Tiberius where we had dinner and stayed the night. While in Tiberius, we took a private boat ride across the Sea of Galilee. A young man throwing his net out of his boat and drawing in the fish reminded us of the descriptions in the Gospels of Peter and John. We could imagine Jesus walking on the water.

In Kibbutz Ginosar we saw a boat that was discovered in 1986 which dates back to the days of Jesus. It had been brought up out of the water and was being restored. It was very well preserved. Just think, Jesus may have ridden in that very boat.

Peter's house in Capernaum had interesting architecture. They built a church over the top of the house and now have actual services there. The walls and gateways were all built with huge stones and mud mortar which have survived over 2000 years. It was amazing to see how much was preserved from Jesus' time.

We visited the Church of Multiplication in Capernaum, as well as the ancient synagogue and, of course, the Mount of the Beatitudes where Jesus delivered his Sermon on the Mount.

We traveled to the border of Israel and followed the Jordan River from the north to where it is believed John the Baptist baptized Jesus, marking the beginning of Jesus' ministry. The water was so clear we could see the deep, rocky bottom.

I had made the decision before leaving California that I was going to be baptized in the Jordan River. I had already been baptized as a baby, and again as an adult, but this was the opportunity of a lifetime. We wore our swimsuits and were given white robes to wear over our suits. Eleven in our group were baptized.

What a thrill, to be baptized in the Jordan River, just like Jesus. In addition to the rocky river bottom, the water was very cold. We held onto ropes that led us in a line down to where our pastor Mark baptized us one at a time. When he brought me up out of the water, he led me over to the assistant pastor who was off the shore so that I wouldn't trip and fall. Angela was unable to submerge her ears in the water, so she opted to photograph my baptism. I cherish the baptismal certificate I received after being baptized in the Jordan River, at the age of 79.

Jordan, Jericho, and Amman all brought the Bible to life. It is difficult to imagine how people could live in such a dry desert with so little vegetation. Many still live in tent houses, which were undoubtedly similar to how the people lived 2000 years ago. The streets of the town of Juras are lined with houses that had no roofs. The sides of the buildings are still standing, presumably preserved for over 2000 years, made of rock and mud mortar. In the heart of the city stands a series of 12-foot columns, 25 to 30 of them, with a big arch that had once been a building. They also had an outdoor auditorium where people could sit on stone seats on both sides with a stage in the center for plays and other forms of entertainment. The Bedouin women all wore scarves to keep the sun off their heads and to keep their bodies cool. Where we were staying, they had a collection of costumes that we could try on and then have our pictures taken. Of course, Angela and I had our pictures taken in full Bedouin garb, with baskets under our arms and our gowns touching to the floor.

Our side trip to Petra was quite memorable. We were told it was too far to walk from where we were staying, so a man who smelled as if he hadn't bathed in two months, took us in his two-seater buggy and he rode on the fender and his horse pulled all three of us up to Petra. We had no idea what to expect. For about a mile and a half we were between two solid rock walls, 50 feet high. The road was maybe 5 feet wide, just enough room for the horse and buggy. So we proceeded through this tunnel-like road and then all of a sudden we saw a huge, pink building in front of us. It was absolutely magnificent. And to imagine it had been built over 2000 years ago. It was carved out of the side of this rock. There were carvings on it of people up above and they turned it into a temple down below. We went into the temple and, interestingly, there was no back door, just more solid rock. There was a large open area in front of the temple where we could purchase souvenirs or take a camel ride through the area. The pillars and the carved rock walls are grand. Some are even multicolored. It was like nothing I had ever seen before. I have heard that just before the Lord returns, the Christians are going to flee to Petra and the Orthodox Jews are going to Masada.

After we left Petra, we continued down to the Dead Sea to cross back over into Israel. When I read of Ruth and her mother-in-law, Naomi, I am amazed that they walked all that way, through such a desolate region, alone. Not a tree, not a blade of grass. Now herds of goats and sheep are around and I have no idea how they keep them fed and watered.

We stayed at a lovely hotel near the Dead Sea. The Dead Sea is picturesque. It has no fish, but is more like an outdoor spa. We put on our bathing suits, covered our arms and legs with wet, black mud, and then sat in the Dead Sea to wash off with the warm, salty water. We felt so relaxed and rejuvenated at the same time. We traveled to Masada the next morning.

Masada is a mountain, but the top is flat like a pancake. The only way up is by cable car which goes across to Mt. Masada. Then we had to climb 65 steps from where we exited the gondola. The village of Masada is where people from Jerusalem used to come for their rest. About half way up on one side there is a shelf like area where Nero stayed. He was protected there as no one could get to him because of the size of the walls. There are still houses there but, again, no roofs. The 65 stairs were covered for protection from the sun. They also had a booth up there where they gave massages.

We then traveled to Bethlehem, the birthplace of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is a fairly large town, about 6 miles south of Jerusalem. Bethlehem is about 80 miles from Nazareth, which gives a little perspective on the trip Joseph and Mary made just before she gave birth. We saw where Jesus was presumably born. It has been fixed up real fancy with colorful tiles, now somewhat of a tourist trap.

We spent several hours in Bethlehem and then traveled to Jerusalem. It is a very modern city. The men wear black stove hats and black clothes and the women wear modern, colorful clothing. We spent three days in Jerusalem. One of the first things they told us we could do was plant a tree in the forest in Jerusalem in honor of a loved one. So I planted a tree in honor of my 1 year old great-grandson, Jacob James Parrish (Shari's grandson) who was born with cystic fibrosis. He has not been well all of his life and I planted a tree in his honor in the forest in Jerusalem and have a certificate saying so. My goal is that he will grow as tall and healthy and lovely as this tree is going to be. Angela planted a tree for her children.

On the way back from the tree planting ceremony, our bus driver who had been driving us everywhere and telling us about all the sites, took us into Jerusalem just at sunset. The sun wasn't quite set, so he stopped at a street corner and announced "Now you all get out of the bus and go around the corner." We weren't sure what we were going to see or do, but we trusted him because he had already taught us so much. So we all got off the bus and went around the corner and in front of us was the whole city of Jerusalem with the sunset behind it. It was the most breathtaking sight I've ever seen. We could see all of Jerusalem, the golden dome of the church and the Mount of Olives and the wall around Jerusalem. It was breathtaking. The brilliance of the sun shined for several miles each way. We were all crying it was so awe-inspiring.

Today the 3000 year old city of Jerusalem is the capital of the Jewish faith. It is also the Holy City for Christianity and Islam. We were in Jerusalem for three days so we saw many important sites – the Dead Sea Scrolls, many well preserved ancient buildings, the tombs, the Mount of Olives, the Temple Wall where we prayed and put our prayer requests in the wall. We ate at many different restaurants and the food was unusual but very good.

Standing at the location of the three crosses where Jesus was crucified was very emotional for Angela and me. We are both Christians and have received the gift of salvation and know the price that Christ paid to save us. To visit the many places mentioned in the Bible and to walk where Jesus walked was a once-in-a-lifetime experience. I know I could go on, describing in minute detail everything we saw and how we felt, but everyone must experience it for themselves to understand what a tremendous emotional and spiritual impact a trip to the Holy Land can have on an individual. I know it changed me.

I have been to every State in the United States. I've been to most of Canada, most of Mexico, Costa Rica, Asia twice, South America twice, and Europe close to 15 times. I've been to Israel and Jordan and was baptized in the Jordan River. I caught a dolphin fish in the Pacific Ocean, and I swam with dolphins off the coast of Florida. God blessed me with good health and a business that afforded me the opportunity to fulfill my childhood dream of seeing the world.

Chapter 37

In 1999, I earned another trip to London and Paris. Barney was gone so I called my 24 year old granddaughter, Heather and asked “Would you like to go on a trip with Grandma?”

Heather asked, “Where would we go, Grandma?”

I said, “You better sit down for this one.”

Heather said, “Really, where would we go?”

I said, “How about London and Paris.”

You should have heard Heather squeal over the phone. She was ecstatic. She flew from Minneapolis and I flew from California and we met in London and spent a week together. We took the Chunnel over to Paris and spent 12 hours there. We saw William Shakespeare’s house, Oxford College, and all the different churches. We saw where Lady Di and Charles were married. We saw the changing of the guard at the Palace. I took Heather to see Les Miserables at the theater. We were in the eighth row back.

I have been to London three different times and Paris three times. I enjoyed each trip, but this one was extra special. I was delighted to have given Heather this opportunity. I wish I had been able to do the same for all my grandchildren.

Chapter 38

In 2004 my life took another detour when I underwent heart bypass surgery. Shari was living in Vacaville, California, and thought it would be best if I lived with her for a while, until I was able to get back on my feet.

After about four months, I had recovered from my heart surgery and I moved from Shari's home into my own apartment. I fell in love with Vacaville. It's a cute, little town. Before long I was back to my old self. I thought, "There's no reason why I can't start my business back up right here in Vacaville." So I rented a two-room studio downtown and placed an ad in a small, local newspaper with a circulation of about 35,000. I began talking to everyone I met about the bras. I started receiving phone calls and soon I had a good business going here.

Then some of the women I had worked with in San Jose called and said "I need more bras." So I ordered the bras and had them sent directly to them. I received invitations to speak to several of the clubs in the area. The title of my talk is "What is the Altitude of Your Attitude?" I offer guidelines for better business productivity and stress that a new lease on life will come from adding wider dimensions, brighter insights for today and tomorrow. I tell my audience they can experience the exciting adventure of growing in life, if they can learn to harmonize contentment, happiness, and a feeling of total success in their lives. The program is aimed at the busy person wanting to expand their mind. The sky is the limit, I am living proof of that.

I joined the Vacaville Soroptimist Club and, after living in Vacaville only two years, was named Senior Citizen of the Year. The previous year, Jeunique honored me with the Founders Award for outstanding achievement for company loyalty and amazing spirit. Along with a beautiful plaque, I was presented with a two-week, all-expenses paid Mediterranean cruise. In 1997, while living and working in San Jose, I had received the "Women Helping Women" award from the Soroptimist International.

While I missed Barney, my dear husband and traveling partner, I was still willing and able to take a few more trips. My friend and colleague Sharon Calhoun accompanied me to South America. I invited another friend and colleague, Margine Yeaton, to join me on the Mediterranean cruise that I had won from Jeunique. That would be my last cruise.

Chapter 39

At 87 and 89, my sister and I were not ready to lie down and die just yet. One day she called and asked if I would like to meet her in Omaha and spend Memorial Day weekend with her and her family. It was a special time visiting with Craig's three children. It was difficult for them losing their father at such a young age, but he would be so proud of all of them.

On Monday morning, Dorothy and I rented a car and she drove me to Branson, Missouri. Four hundred miles was quite a trek from Omaha for these two old ladies, so we took our time and stopped halfway. We saw seven shows in four days during our stay in Branson. The day we were to come home a tornado whipped through Branson, so we spent several hours in the cellar of the hotel where we were staying. After the tornado passed, we went to our last show, Roy Rogers' and Dale Evans' grandson, who showed old pictures and told stories about his grandparents and all the adventures they had shared over their lifetime.

On our way back to Omaha, we stopped in Kansas City and visited more relatives. After two days in Omaha, Dorothy and I flew back to our respective homes. It was my first time in that part of the country and I thoroughly enjoyed seeing the lakes, mountains, and rock formations.

Dorothy and I made many trips together over the years, but our most recent was in 2010. I flew to Greenville, Michigan where she lived and from there, Dorothy drove and I navigated our way across Canada to New York. This was probably the same route Dorothy and I took in the backseat of Dad's old Buick when we were little girls.

I flew to Grand Rapids, Michigan where Dorothy was living. The first leg of our trip took us to London, Ontario. Dorothy had made arrangements for us to stay at a lady's house where she charged \$20 a night. It was a brand new apartment house, 13 stories high. Her apartment was on the ninth floor. It had all new furnishings. We arrived around 4:00 in the afternoon and asked the woman if we could take her to dinner. She said, "Oh, no, you come ahead, I want you to have dinner with me. I've wanted to make my husband's special dinner and he's passed away so I'll make it for us."

So the sweet lady made us a lovely dinner and we spent the evening visiting with her. We had our own bedroom and private bath. The next morning she prepared a hearty breakfast and we were on our way.

We were looking for the Lewiston Bridge which enters into Canada. We drove and drove and couldn't find the bridge. Finally, I asked Dorothy, "Do you think we're already in Buffalo? Maybe we missed a turn along the way." Sure enough, we were in Buffalo and didn't even know it. We still don't know how we made the mistake or how we ended up in Buffalo, which was where we wanted to be.

We spent several days visiting our cousin Shirley and her husband Clyde in the town of Tonawanda, north of Buffalo. One day we went to Rochester to visit our other cousin Dorothea. Shirley's daughter Charlotte, named after her grandmother, taught kindergarten and asked if we would like to come and share in her classroom. Oh, what fun we had working with the children. After we left, they asked their teacher, "What happened to Grandma Chicki and Grandma Dorothy? Aren't they coming back? We like them."

It was a thrill visiting our old high school and watching our friend's granddaughter play volleyball. I even saw my old boyfriend whom I had dated for years before I met and married Barney. He lived four blocks away from the Spiegel's. It was special seeing him since he died a year later.

We also visited a house near the park in Buffalo that Frank Lloyd Wright had built and they have made into a museum. Both Shirley and her brother Bruce work there as tour guides.

While in Buffalo, Shirley's husband took Dorothy and me on a tour of all the sites of the city. We saw the downtown area and Lake Erie and how things had changed since we were young.

The day we were to leave for home, a huge snow storm hit the Buffalo area. It is not uncommon in October to see snow in Buffalo. We decided to go home the northern route through Niagara Falls, which was the route we thought we were taking when we arrived. It did not snow on us the rest of the way home. That would be our last trip together.

Shortly after our trip, Dorothy moved from Wisconsin to Seattle to be near her family. She was also receiving cancer treatments there. All things considered, she did quite well. I flew to Washington to see her in May of 2013 to celebrate her last birthday. She passed away in early 2014. At her request, she was buried in Austria, alongside her loving husband, Dave.

Chapter 40

In December of 2005 and into January of 2006, northern California was hit with a series of heavy rain storms. The creek near my apartment was ready to overflow. I was the only person in my complex who had the wherewithal to move her car. I decided to drive over to my daughter's house. The streets were like rivers and I had no choice but to continue driving, even though the water had reached the floor boards of my car.

When I arrived at Shari's, she could not believe I drove through the water. The inside of my car was soaking wet. When I went back home, the water from the creek had seeped into my apartment. I was forced to move into another apartment, where I stayed for about a year.

By 2007, I had begun to slow down a bit and the time had come for me to look into moving to a retirement home where I would no longer have to shop and cook for myself. I visited Merrill Gardens in Vacaville where the staff was very sweet and kind but the residents seemed so old. I had been too busy to realize that I, too, was getting older. I wasn't thrilled about the move, knowing the rooms were so small I would have to give up my bra business. But if I did that, how would I have enough to live on?

As always, God had it all figured out. There just so happened to be a room available with a larger living area and a smaller room off the living room. It was perfect. I set up my office in the back end of the living area and conducted my fittings in the smaller room, where there was also enough space for my large inventory. Just outside my living quarters in the hallway, there was a bench which worked well as a waiting area for my customers. Word traveled quickly and I had fittings scheduled ever day of the week, except Sundays, of course.

In every local community where I have lived, I have tried to educate women on breast health, including breast-feeding. I was still attending conventions for the bra business, teaching and training in Los Angeles. The last convention I attended was in Florida. I had planned to stay a little longer and visit Epcot and other attractions. Those plans changed drastically when, on the first night, I got up to use the restroom in my hotel room and fell and broke my arm on the side of the bathtub. Incidentally, I won two awards at the convention, but was unable to accept them in person because of my injury. I also won another trip, as I did at most of the conventions.

My grandson Buddy lives in Castle Rock, Colorado. His sweet wife, Lori, flew to Florida to pick me up. I spent the next seven weeks with Buddy and Lori and their son, Alexander, age 7 at the time. Buddy and Lori have a large, blended family, but Alexander is their only child they had together. The other children are grown.

It was a delight to get to know Lori and Alexander and spend time with Buddy. They all took good care of me until I was able to return to California. My associate, Neva Thorson, was keeping my bra business going, and when I returned home she continued to assist me, as it was difficult for me to hook the bras with my weak arm.

It was a long recovery, but I was finally normal again. Then the following year I came down with pneumonia. Over the next six months I had three bouts of pneumonia, including three 8-day stays in the hospital. Following each stay I had to have round-the-clock care at home for several weeks. Shari stopped by every day after work to check on me. She was by then in her 70s and recently retired from her job as an office manager for a small company. She was also caring for her husband who was not well. I certainly appreciated her help because I know how busy she was.

I returned to working the business, attending church and Bible studies, and Wii bowling. We had tournaments at Merrill Gardens, and once I bowled a 245. I began using a walker, but was still receiving calls for bras. People continued to come from all of the United States to buy bras. My customers, many of whom have been with me for over 25 years, told me they wouldn't

wear any other bra. They were so thankful I was still able to keep them in their bras. It was amazing how so many stayed with me through the years and through all my moves to different towns.

Chapter 41

There was a higher purpose in our business, aside from the cars and the trips. Traveling was the icing on the cake for me. I always wanted to see the world, and that I did. But we also made a decent living for ourselves and were placed in a position to train many more to do the same. We were given an opportunity to serve the Lord through helping others.

In June of 1988 I worked with a group of young people which was sponsored by the movie star, Hugh O'Brian. He believed that young people needed training and help. So they invited me to be one of the speakers and help these young people set goals and to share with them. I told them that, if they would join hands with the Lord, He would lead them throughout their lifetime. We had young people from all over Northern Minnesota who came to take this training. During the three-day training, they lived in the dormitory at a nearby college.

Phyllis Keuckenber, the executive vice president of Jeunique, calls me the "Energizer Bunny." We've known each other for over 40 years. She always says, "When I grow up I'm gonna be just like Chicki." Well, she's not a young lady. She's getting along in years, too, a grandmother and great-grandmother.

As I said, when Cameo added the lingerie line, I continued to emphasize the bra business. I am a bra lady. I've always believed in fitting every woman in a decent bra. These bras are the very best. They have sizes from the very smallest to the very largest. Late in my career I fit a lady who wore size 42 KK. As always, when she jumped up and down, nothing moved.

There was an infomercial on television the other day about a certain bra. After they fit several women in their new bras and had them model them, the woman said, "So, see, we have bras that fit every woman." The largest woman on that stage wore a 38DD. I'm here to tell you, that is just the beginning of where we went with our sizes. "What about the women with the E through N cup sizes?" Well, they came to us.

I cannot stress enough how rewarding it has been to help women feel good about themselves. Some of these women had no hope when it came to finding a comfortable bra, or even finding a bra that would fit at all. A young lady from Texas came to see me who had just had a baby. Her husband was in the service and they were stationed at Travis Air Force Base near where I lived. This woman was one of many who have run into the same dilemma when shopping for bras.

The reaction by every woman was the same when I would fit them in the bra and have them jump up and down. They could not believe it. Nothing moved. They were not hung from the shoulders any longer. Many women have suffered years of back and shoulder pain from the weight of their breasts.

Several years ago I received a call from a nearby jail. They apparently found my number on the Internet. There was a woman in the jail who was so large they couldn't find a bra to fit her. I went to the jail and took Jean Vistica, one of my associates, with me. We had to sign in and prove who we were. We waited in the waiting room for a few minutes and then two guards came out to escort us into the jail. A female guard carried our four suitcases full of bras and we followed her to the jail cells. There were two more female guards inside the cell area.

They brought the prisoner to us and I measured her to fit her into the right garment. As always, I had her jump up and down. The four guards were amazed. They said "Wow, I didn't know you could do something like that."

I fit the woman in her bra, they paid me and one of the guards helped carry our suitcases all the way to my car. The guards each took one of my cards and came to see me later and I fit them each in a new bra. I had also given one of my cards to the inmate who was wearing the new bra.

A few months later, I received a call from the inmate. She had served her time and when she was released, they kept her bra, because it was the property of the government. She was almost in tears, stating "All I have is \$25, but I need a bra." I told her, "Today, Honey, the bra is \$25," even though it was a \$60 bra. I told her when she got a job she could come back and pay full price. And that's exactly what she did. She eventually straightened out her life and came back to see me several times for bras, and always paid full price.

I had two women, one came from San Jose and one came from Vallejo and both of these women I fit over 20 years ago in San Jose. They were still wearing the same bras. The bras were in terrible condition, but they were still wearing them. They looked me up and finally found me on the internet. They each bought four bras because they knew these were the best bras on the market and they never wanted to be without again.

A black woman I sponsored in Palo Alto held fashion shows at black women's conferences all over California. She wanted her gals to look their best in the clothes they were modeling, so she brought them to me to be fitted for bras. I did this for her two or three times when I lived in San Jose. She called me in Vacaville and said she had a fashion show coming up in Elk Grove, near Sacramento, and would I fit her ladies in bras. I said, "Sure," and so she brought these five women over to Vacaville to be fitted. These were all good sized women, from size 40-KK to HH. With Neva's help, we were able to fit all of them in new bras to model their fashions.

Before they left, the group insisted that I attend the fashion show. Of course, I said I would. Neva drove me to Elk Grove, to the Hilton Hotel for the event. The special dining room was beautifully decorated, ready for the show. There were both men and women in the group. It was a religious group, all wonderful, friendly people. They introduced me as Sister Downs. Did I mention Neva and I were the only white folks in the room? All the gals looked great in their outfits, smooth lines and no bulges, with special accessories and shoes to match each outfit. They all loved how they looked and felt in their new bras and became regular customers.

It is not only the large breasted women who need help. Smaller women have their own issues, and there is a solution for them, too. An 80 year old woman who had recently moved into Merrill Gardens Retirement Home came to see me about a bra. She was almost certain I wouldn't have a bra small enough to fit her little buds, but she thought she would at least try. I turned her little buds into blossoms with a 34-A Jodie mastectomy bra. While she is not a mastectomy client, this was the best fit for her. I inserted small, silicone prosthetics called "Little Secrets" into the bra. These are manufactured by True Life in Michigan. When she looked at herself in the mirror, a broad smile appeared on her face. She exclaimed, "My husband is not going to believe this!"

Chapter 42

Neva was a Godsend. As I was getting older, it had become more difficult to hook the bras, especially on the very large women. Neva is a retired nurse who had been ordering bras from me for years. One day she decided to join the business. Her decision was timely, given my broken arm and three bouts with pneumonia.

Returning home from yet another trip to the hospital, this time just for the day, I found a customer in front of my door, waiting to be fitted for a bra. I had totally forgotten about our appointment. I told her I had just returned from the hospital and would have to reschedule. She became very concerned about my care, and it just so happened she owns a business that provides home care services to those in my predicament. She stayed with me for several days and later returned for her bra fitting. I am thankful I was able to pay her fees because of my income from the bra business.

During my various illnesses and injuries, Neva was able to keep the business going. Reorders were fairly simple, but fitting new customers required a bit more time and expertise and she learned well.

When the president of the company died, there was a short period of time we did not know what was going to happen with the business. I had one customer who came all the way from San Jose, which is about 100 miles, and bought 12 bras because she was afraid they would go out of business and she did not want to be without.

I had another customer who used to live in San Jose. She called me and said “I bought bras three years ago from you. I don’t live in San Jose anymore; can I still come and get bras?” I asked, “Where do you live now?” She answered, “Charlotte, North Carolina.” And believe it or not, she flew all the way to California and bought four bras from me. She said “I won’t wear another bra. I love this bra.”

Eventually the company was sold to Ian Weingarten, a 36 year old man who knew nothing about the bra business. He was married and had two small children. Whatever he learned about the bra business was from spending time with me. He would call me frequently seeking my advice. I tried to instill in him the importance of this business, that it is not just a money making venture, but a ministry to women of all ages and sizes. Those who sell the bras must be expertly trained to fit them properly. As with anything, there is a wrong way and right way. The salespeople in the department stores have no idea what they are doing, but they do the best they can with the few sizes they have available.

Unfortunately, Ian Weingarten discontinued the business. I then contracted with Custom Fit Bra Company, Ltd. in Flower Mound, Texas for my inventory and also continued to sell Jodee bras, as well. Jodee specializes in mastectomy bras. I was also selling from my large inventory. I put in a lot of hours, but I didn’t call it work. I enjoyed every minute of it. Some days I spent a lot of time doing paperwork and I didn’t mind that, either. It was all part of the business, the part that Barney used to do. Oh, how I miss him. I do hope that future leaders in the business will find another company to represent and take what I have taught them to continue educating woman on good breast health.

There have been many incentives over the years to succeed in this business. However, no amount of trips or cars or other awards can match the satisfaction of seeing the smiles on the women’s faces when they finally have a bra that fits. I love people and I love helping people.

I have met so many wonderful people through the bra business, customers as well as other women in the business. One of those women, Mary Shaw, introduced me to Dona Bakker and both she and Mary have become wonderful friends. Dona has helped me write my story and Mary has spent many hours editing the manuscript. I could not have done it without them. I pray

that God will use the experiences of my life to encourage other women to fulfill their own dreams and to be a blessing to others.

At age 94, my failing health took me to a rest home. I am no longer able to work the business I loved. I thank the Lord for sustaining me throughout my life. I am able to live comfortably in my later years. I have had a glorious life and I know it will go on until He is ready to take me home.

Chapter 43

As women, we all aspire to maintain the youthful shape and firmness of our breasts. Our worst enemy is gravity and our worst nightmare, other than breast cancer, is an ill-fitted bra! Although some researchers would disagree, I am of the firm belief that the two go hand in hand. If you are “dumped” in front, and your bra rides high in the back, you are not wearing the right bra.

Breasts that are held in the proper position, cradled in a good support bra, can defy gravity and alleviate the problem of sagging. Are all women doomed to sag eventually? No, they are not. I am 95 and I don't sag. Even people who exercise regularly can retain or even restore the youthful shape and firmness of their breasts when properly fitted.

For over 40 years I taught women how to take care of their breasts. I have spoken to many groups about the importance of good breast health and the prevention of breast cancer through wearing a properly fitted bra. I have personally fitted hundreds of women in bra sizes up to 52 N. Yes, you read that right – N as in Nancy.

The findings of a study of more than 4,000 women concluded that women who wore their bras 24 hours a day had a 3 out of 4 chance of developing breast cancer and women who wore bras more than 12 hours per day had a risk factor of 1 in 7. Women who wore their bras less than 12 hours per day had a 1 out of 52 risk, while women who wore bras rarely or never had a 1 out of 168 chance of developing breast cancer. (Singer, Sydney and Grismaijer, [Dressed to Kill: The Link Between Breast Cancer and Bras.](#)) I would disagree. This study could lead the reader to conclude that going braless would prevent breast cancer. However, the real problem with this study is that they failed to ask, “How many of these women were wearing the wrong bra?” I am of the professional opinion that the answer would undoubtedly be “nearly all.”

Can a poorly fitted bra lead to health problems? Absolutely! Every female has to deal with gravity, many are affected by breast feeding, and it is an obvious observation and well known fact that not all breasts are created equal. Whatever the situation we face, we all want to do our best to keep our breasts healthy. Without proper support, stretched ligaments result from prolonged sagging. The unsupported weight of the breast can impede blood flow and hinder the lymphatic system, which carries toxins out of the breast area, from functioning properly. Many women experience headaches, backaches, neck pain, sloping and indentations of the shoulders and, because the weight of the breasts, is not appropriately aligned and supported. A properly fitted bra can help avoid these undesirable effects and give the support needed.

I've seen many “braless” proponents over the years and their sagging and uncomfortable condition left them all looking awful and feeling miserable. The worst case I have ever seen was Sally. Before I began to fit her, she warned me that what I was about to see I had probably never seen before. I assured her that I had fit thousands of women and I had seen it all. Boy was I wrong! When she removed her blouse, I was horrified. Sally had, at one time, had very large breasts. However, after many unsuccessful attempts at finding a good bra, she had hopelessly concluded that braless was her only option.

Sally's large, elongated breasts now drooped down to her waist where she secured them in place with a belt. It was the saddest thing I had ever seen. I proceeded to gingerly roll each breast up, like wrapping tissue over a pencil, the tissue being so deformed and shapeless. The skin underneath her breasts all the way down to her waist had become chafed and raw. After putting her into the bra, she was so happy she cried.

Every woman, no matter what her age, has her own personal breast challenges. Factors such as shape, size and formation, pregnancy, the use of hormone therapy, going braless, unusually small or large breasts, or wearing an improperly fitted bra all contribute to the

problems women face. In addressing these challenges, begin by considering the bra you are now wearing. Most likely, it is doing more harm than good.

- Do your bra straps slip off your shoulders?
- Does your bra ride up in the back?
- Do you have grooves in your shoulders caused by the weight of your breasts?
- Does your neck and back ache?
- Do you have one breast larger than the other?
- Would you like a matched pair?
- Are you dumped in front?
- When you jog or exercise, would it help if your breasts were supported so that there was no bounce?
- Would you like your clothes to fit and flatter your figure?
- Would you be pleased if all of the breast tissue was returned to where it belongs, in the cup and held in place?

If the answer to even one of these questions is “yes,” you are definitely wearing the wrong bra, as are most women.

When a woman goes into a department store her choices are very limited. Cup sizes ranging from A-DD are common, but these “potluck” bras” do little to provide proper comfort and support for the majority of women.

The proper fit of a bra is crucial to healthy breasts and breast tissue. In an article for Healthy.net by Michael Schachter, M.D., entitled “The Prevention and Complementary Treatment of Breast Cancer,” he writes:

“Over 85% of the lymph fluid flowing from the breast drains to the armpit lymph nodes. Most of the rest drains to the nodes along the breast bone. Bras and other external tight clothing can impede flow.

The nature of the bra, the tightness, and the length of time worn, will all influence the degree of blockage of lymphatic drainage. Thus, wearing a bra might contribute to the development of breast cancer as a result of cutting off lymphatic drainage, so that toxic chemicals are trapped in the breast.” (“The Prevention and Complementary Treatment of Breast Cancer,” Michael Schachter, M.D., F.A.C.A.M.

The lymph nodes begin in the abdomen and, when the underwire compresses the tissue under the breasts, it spreads the tissue and cuts off the circulation. Most commercial bras do not hold the breasts in their proper, natural position and if a woman has very large breasts, she will never find a bra in a store that fits properly.

There are five elements of a properly fit bra:

1. The front center seam should lie as flat as possible against the chest wall.
2. The back of the bra should lie low, well beneath the shoulder blades.
3. All of the breast tissue should be comfortably contained within the cup of the bra.

4. The cup should be full and free of any puckers.

5. Any underwires should lie on the rib cage, never on the breast tissue.

Underwires are unnecessary and are not found in a properly constructed bra. (The ABC’s (and D’s) of Bras,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 27, 2000, Sylvia Rubin, Chronicle Staff Writer.)

The reaction by every woman is the same. I would have them jump up and down. They would say “You’re kidding.” Then they could not believe it. Nothing moved! They

were not hung from the shoulders any longer. Many women have needlessly suffered years of back and shoulder pain from the weight of their breasts.

After fitting women in their new bra, I also taught them how to care for their bras so they will last a long time and not lose their shape. Hand washing and line drying is always best. This is why I never sold just one bra to a woman, I would sell her at least three, so that she was never without, or forced to go back to her old bra that did not fit properly.

Through educating women, they are becoming more and more aware that their breasts can be firm, not just two wet sacks of Kleenex hanging down. When I started the business in 1968, 1 out of every 28 women was having a breast removed. It's now 1 out of every 5, possibly even more in metropolitan areas. I think that is just awful. And on top of the trauma of losing a breast, there is the chemotherapy and radiation and the financial burden all that entails. I truly believe if they had been placed in a properly fitted bra, nine times out of ten they would not have had the problem in the first place.

In my training, I taught what is known as the Bowen Chest Procedure. This is something that can be used for all types of breast conditions, from painful breasts, fibrotic tissue, mastitis, post-mastectomy to prevent lymphedema, lactation conditions, but particularly to promote lymphatic drainage as a means of cancer prevention. As I stated earlier, underwire bras cut off the lymph flow and promote stagnation.

The moves are performed by pushing the breast tissue aside rather than working through. The procedure can be done through lightweight clothing. If one breast is painful, begin with the other side first. The following example is for the left side:

First, use your left hand, palm down, to gently push the top of your left breast downward. Then place the edge of your right pointer finger on your chest centered at about nipple line. After exhaling a deep breath, move both hands toward the side of your body, taking the slack of the skin only. Now make the move by taking the slack to the center, as far as it will go, while putting comfortable pressure along the right hand pointer finger only. Then inhale.

Second, with your left hand, lift your left breast. At about nipple line place the pad of your right pointer finger. After exhalation move the slack with both hands towards the center. Then make the move by adding light pressure with your right pointer finger taking the slack with both hands toward the side of the body as far as it will go then inhale. Repeat the procedure on the other breast. (Taken from Bowen Chest Procedure flyer, by Greg Kennedy, RBT.)

The most difficult part of my job was seeing the increasing number of women shopping for mastectomy bras. Since we first started fitting mastectomy patients, reconstructive surgery has come a long way. When I first started in this business, mastectomy surgery involved removing everything down to the ribs to where there was no breast tissue remaining and thus no skin left for reconstructive surgery. It was a gruesome sight. Some women had lost both breasts, and others had lost only one. To make matters worse, there were no prosthetics on the market at that time.

In 1974 or 1975, after discussing the problem with my dear friend, Angela Serritella, who was a nurse and who enjoyed sewing as do I, we pooled our talents and our resources and created a prosthesis that would fit into the bras featured by the company we represented.

When a woman goes to a department store to be fitted for a bra after a mastectomy, she can be charged from \$300 to \$500 for a prosthesis that doesn't fit properly. So we were determined to give these women another option. It was bad enough

they had to go through the cancer and the treatments and the surgeries, the least we could do was help them find a properly fitted prosthesis and a bra that would fit their needs.

We first tried filling the prosthetic with polyester, but found we needed some kind of weight to keep it in place. So we went to the hardware store and found a foot long bar that was used in fishing. It was made of lead so we were able to cut it with tin snips. We would bury the piece of lead in the polyester to balance the weight with the other breast. We created these prosthetics for about ten years. These women had nowhere else to go. Some months I would fit up to ten mastectomy patients. Doctors found out about me and sent women to me to make sure they were fitted in the right bra.

Prosthetic breasts have come a long way since those days. We began carrying sizes 1 to 18. Seventeen is a very large breast. My favorite is the heart-shaped silicone design by True Life, which I purchased from a Michigan distributor. They feel closer to real skin than any other prosthetic I have sold in the past.

I never put my clients into a mastectomy bra directly following surgery. It takes a while for the body to heal and for the swelling to go down. I would put them in a “sleep” bra for at least two months, which would give them comfortable support while recovering. When they were ready for a mastectomy bra, they would be properly fitted with one that was comfortable which they could wear for a very long time.

Over the years I have encouraged and helped many women who did not feel very good about themselves and the way they looked following the surgery. Our mastectomy bras helped, but the emotional scars run deep. Sometimes husbands are turned off by their partner losing a breast. For a woman to go through breast cancer and all it entails, and then to have to deal with a shallow and cruel husband just boggles my mind. However, I did find many husbands who were sensitive of their wives’ conditions and told me that they would pay any amount of money to have the right bra helping her to feel good about herself again.

I believe I have saved many lives over my 40+ years in the bra business. My immediate goal was to teach other women to do the same thing because I knew there would come a time when I would not be there to help. I would like for every woman in the United States to be fitted with the proper bra and to stay healthy and free from breast cancer.

Chapter 44

The world has changed in incredible ways over the past 94 years. Amazing discoveries and inventions have made our lives easier, travel more accessible, and people living longer. It saddens me, though, that, along with those changes, we are seeing the moral fiber of our country disintegrate before our very eyes.

Prior to the 1960s, who would have dreamed that any reference to God would be forbidden in our public schools? Materialism has become our God and, when both parents are working, many of our children are left to raise themselves. Their caretakers have become the television and the Internet.

The Girl Scout Promise reads: “On my honor, I will try: to serve God and my country, to help people at all times, and to live by the Girls Scout law.” The Girl Scout law states: “I will do my best to be honest and fair, friendly and helpful, considerate and caring, courageous and strong, and responsible for what I say and do, and to respect myself and others, to respect authority, use resources wisely, make the world a better place, and be a sister to every Girl Scout.”

Over my 35 years as a Girl Scout Leader, I emphasized to each of my girls the importance of every aspect of the promise and the law. They learned to serve others, honor God, and respect themselves and each other. When these attributes are taught to young, impressionable girls, they stay with them their entire lives.

When I was a leader, it seemed every girl wanted to be a Girl Scout. We were involved in serving the community wherever we were needed. We were constantly learning and discovering new things. Now it seems the only time I see a Girl Scout is in front of a grocery store selling cookies. As I stated earlier, my girls were required to wear their full uniform when attending meetings or any other Girl Scout affiliated activity. Nowadays, a pair of jeans and a vest thrown over a T-shirt passes as a uniform. It’s just appalling to me. I still believe if you dress like a slob, you will act like a slob.

Little girls today are no longer allowed to be little girls. They are enticed to wear makeup, high heels, and low-cut, tight-fitting clothes when they should be playing with dolls and going to Girl Scout meetings.

And it is getting worse. On television the other day I saw the saddest documentary about little girls, the ages of my Girl Scouts, being sold for sex, hired by pimps to walk the streets and sell their bodies. “Where are their parents,” I ask? Unfortunately, working moms and dead beat dads are becoming the normal family. Many children have parents who are strung out on drugs and/or alcohol and have no business being entrusted with the precious lives of children.

Then there is the matter of abortion. It is not a political issue. It is a moral issue. It seems the most dangerous place for a baby these days is in his or her mother’s womb. The number of people who would love to have children but can’t rises, but those who don’t want children, either kill them before they are born, or totally neglect them after they are born. Because it is legal to kill babies before they are born, we as a nation will be judged for this atrocity. Since Roe v. Wade, over 50 million of God’s little children have been destroyed.

Chapter 45

As you can see throughout this book, my faith in the Lord means a lot to me and I have never been shy about sharing it with others. I have loved the Lord since I was a little girl and I can't remember ever not going to church. I've gone to a lot of churches in my lifetime and I wanted to share how my faith has guided me and taken me through all the different years.

As I stated before, Grandfather Bommer was the strongest influence in my life in helping me to develop my faith. He was my father's father and I was his oldest grandchild and he and I were very close. He guided and directed me many times. Grandfather always had the Bible on his dining room table and would read it every morning to Grandma and whoever else was there. He was the one who facilitated my transfer to Houghton Academy for a year in high school, which was a turning point for me in my walk with the Lord.

We belonged to the Kenmore Methodist Church and went there from the time I was about 7 or 8 years old. When I was about 14, I taught daily vacation Bible school. I was married in that church and Barney and I attended there after we were married until we moved from the area.

I was just looking at a picture of me with my group of students in vacation Bible school and I am wearing a hat. I still wear a hat to church every Sunday and nowadays I'm about the only one in the church with a hat on. It doesn't bother me, because I've been wearing a hat to church my whole life.

As I said, I also taught Sunday school at a very young age and was able to control up to 50 kids of different ages, from 1 year olds to about 8 or 9. I was always good with children and I love teaching them.

After we were married, Barney and I attended an adult couples Bible study on Sunday morning, before church. Whatever church I have attended over the years, I have always been very active in serving.

After the revival meeting at Houghton Academy where I received Christ, I wrote the following letter to my mother:

"10:35 Thursday evening after church.

Dear Mother: I went to church tonight to their revival service and Rev. Pitt had his sermon on Acts 9; 1-16, 16 being the text. When you get this letter, look up these verses and read them. After the sermon he asked the people who were not Christians to take the Lord Jesus into their hearts and He would forgive all their sins. I did this and at the close of the service the minister said that those who wanted to be saved to come to the altar and pray. All the others that I was with went out but something held me there. And so I went up to the altar and prayed, but I didn't understand it very much. It made me feel like crying. Then I arose and started to go out when Miss Pool, my history teacher stopped me and asked me if I understood about being saved. I answered no so she drew me aside and started to explain to me. Then she prayed (out loud) to God to save me and when she finished she told me to pray. Something happened to me and I asked the Lord to forgive my sins and then I started to cry. Then she started to pray again and when she finished she told me she knew that God had saved me.

Then she explained to me how to pray and what to read in the Bible. She talked to me about the girls and told me the kind to associate with and things like that. She is going to take me to church with her tomorrow night.

It would be very nice if you wrote to her and thanked her for showing me the way to Jesus. Her name is Miss Alice Pool, Houghton College, Houghton, New York.

I wish you would read the verses I sent to you and really try to be a better Christian. Pray at your meals and each one take a turn so that when I come home you too will be Christians. You have to suffer to be a Christian and to see the glory light but I know you will feel much better in the end and never fail God for Dorothy's and my sake.

Well, I've got to go to bed now but I'm going to pray that Dorothy, Dad and you will be saved and will see the glory light, too. Good night and God be praised. God Bless you, Love, Hinky.

P.S. - Write to Miss Pool right away. I think it is your duty."

I know I was a little harsh and straightforward, but I had just accepted the Lord and couldn't wait for everyone I loved to have that same experience. Of course, I thought I knew everything. Here I am, almost 80 years later and boy do I realize now how very naive I was at 17. I also know that my mother loved the Lord in her own quiet way and was a devout Christian woman. Dorothy and I were raised to always do the right thing.

I feel that tithing is a very integral part in service to the Lord and I have done that all my life. I always make sure He gets part of what I earn so that His work can continue on.

I have always attended small group Bible studies in addition to Sunday service. When I was living in Minneapolis someone told me about an organization called Women's Aglow and invited me to a meeting at a Lutheran church in St. Paul. So I invited a friend and we went to the meeting together. It was so inspiring, when it was over, I asked "When will you have meetings in Minneapolis. I'd like to join this kind of organization." They said "We don't have any in Minneapolis." I said, "I'll have one at my place, I'd be happy to work with you and help get one of these going because I'd like to belong to one." So we arranged to have the first meeting in Minneapolis in my apartment. We just put out the word to a few people and lo and behold the day of the meeting, the lady who was in charge of the Women's Aglow for the State of Minnesota came along with 20 other women. Three Christian men from my apartment house also came.

Before the meeting ended, we had organized our small group into a chapter of Women's Aglow and asked if anyone felt led to be an officer. Soon we had a president, a vice-president and another who would be in charge of organization. I wasn't inclined to volunteer to be an officer. God didn't tell me I should do that, so I just let it all take place. When it was all over, the woman from the State Women's Aglow organization said to me, "God didn't tell you to do anything, did He." I said "no." She said, "Well we want you to be the vice-president of the State Board of Aglow and be in charge of helping new chapters to form. We need to build this. God wants us to serve Him and specifically to help other people." After much prayer, I did feel the Lord calling me to this position.

In the next two years we formed about ten chapters. One of the new chapters was in Fargo, North Dakota. I had a friend there who organized it and we held the first meeting in a restaurant. We had so many women that we couldn't fit them all in the restaurant. They stood and looked in the windows. The owner of the restaurant kept saying, "I never had so many people. I don't know how many you got here, but you've got too many." There were over 100 women who came and wanted to be part of Women's Aglow in North Dakota.

We started new chapters all over the State of Minnesota. When we went to Duluth, we had over 100 women show up. God led a Catholic nun to be the leader of this group. They had a wonderful chapter there. Within a year we had five chapters in Minneapolis – one in Burnsville and North Minneapolis, Edina, Bloomington, and the one I had started. It was amazing how so many women were thirsty for God's Word. It was exciting to be a part of Women's Aglow.

I stayed with Women's Aglow and was on the board for two years and then the opportunity came for me to become the national sales director for the cosmetic company. That's when we moved to Los Angeles. My Women Aglow group held a going away tea for me. They all laid their hands on me and prayed for me and one of them had a prophesy for me. She said that I was going stay young and vibrant and soar like an eagle. That was in 1977 and 35 years later I was still working. I am still enthused about God and still going to church every Sunday and wearing my hat.

In Los Angeles we attended Jack Hayford's church in Van Nuys. Jack Hayford is a wonderful man. He writes songs and preaches a wonderful sermon every Sunday. It was a real privilege to go to that church, but we weren't happy in Los Angeles. So I quit the job and we moved to San Jose.

In San Jose the bra business was booming. We joined a church there and were very active members. We had a senior minister who was about 5 feet tall. The associate pastor was over 6 feet tall. These gentlemen did not have robes. So I made robes for them for Easter. The robes were full length and reversible and I also embroidered colorful designs on them. Both ministers were thrilled with their new robes and I was blessed to be able to do this for them.

When I was living in San Jose, three of my bra customers were looking for a church so I invited them to mine. They liked it so well they decided to become members and I was allowed to help baptize them. That was a thrill for me, and for them.

I am currently attending New Hope Christian Fellowship in Vacaville. Pastor Curtis Miller and his wife Debra are loving and caring people. When I was ill with pneumonia, Pastor came to see me three times when I was in the hospital. Every Sunday when he is finished with his sermon, he motions for his wife to come up to the piano and she plays while he sings. I close my eyes and can almost envision my mother playing the piano when I went to church as a child. Even at my age I am learning so much under Pastor Miller's teaching. I guess that's why they call the Bible the living Word. It really comes alive when he preaches.

I know that Jesus put me in this business and has helped me to sponsor others. In my later years, he placed me in a wonderful home where I was fed and cared for and, at the same time, was allowed to have my shop and run my business.

At 94 I called it quits. Up until then people were still coming to buy bras. They would say to me, "Oh, Chicki, I love you, I love your bra. I couldn't wear anything else. Since you put me in this bra, look at what it's done for me. I'm well and I'm healthy." It's a wonderful thing to know that Jesus cared enough to keep me well and healthy for all those years where I was able to continue helping women learn about the business and educate them on breast health and the importance of a properly fitted bra.

Jesus owned the business, I just operated it. He kept me in it for a long time. I had a customer who wanted to postdate a check because she did not have enough money in her checking account to pay for her purchases. She said "The check will be good." I pointed to my picture of Jesus sitting on my desk and told her, "If it's not, you'll have to take it up with my boss."

In the packet I prepared to give to people who were interested in the business, I had a sheet that stated:

"I want to share with all of you my daily prayer which helps me each day in all phases of my life. 'God, you know all my needs and You know all the needs of others. Please put us together to help each other, for this we will give You the thanks and the praise every day.' If you are wondering how you can get your business or life going, why not try my way. I'm living proof that it works. Chicki Downs."

I also share these comments:

“If it’s going to be, it’s up to me.”

“Remember, as I think, I am.”

“Positive or negative? Funny, isn’t it? I get to choose. My future is in my hands.”

“Where do I want to go and what do I want to be and what do I want to achieve?”

I put this page in so each one knew before they came into the business where I stood and how they could build for themselves a business on the faith that Jesus will help them and will bring them customers.

I don’t know where they all came from. I did not go out and look for them. They were out there and they would call me and make appointments and come. In less than three years I had over 700 new customers who had come from all over the area, just by what little advertising I had in the paper and by word-of-mouth, one person telling someone else because they were so pleased.

Everything I have accomplished in my life I owe to Jesus. He did it all, not me. I’m blessed that he chose me to be his instrument to help others. He has always supplies all my needs. I am not in debt. I never have to worry about anything because he gives me everything I need to keep me going and to keep me on the right path. For this I am grateful to Jesus Christ for taking care of me and wanting me and keeping me healthy enough to keep working as long as I did. I’ve survived cancer. I’ve survived heart surgery with a new pig valve in place, and still am healthy enough to get up every morning and do whatever He wants me to do. It’s a real blessing and I give Him all the praise and the glory.

Chapter 46

Here is a sampling of what others have written about me over the years. I am humbled by their kind words.

Chicki and I met over 30 years ago when she came to help train new couturiers. She has always been an energetic and positive person, willing to help whoever and wherever; a real inspiration. Between what I learned from her and from others who held training meetings, I gained the confidence I needed to fit my clients and to conduct my new business.

One day, after a number of years in the business, one of my clients said, “You must be pretty good at what you do.” My first impulse was to say, “Oh, no.” Instead I said, “Yes, I am. I have been doing this for seven years, and if I don’t know what I am doing by now there is something wrong with me.”

Having been short all my life made fitting tall ladies a special challenge. One six-foot lady looked down at me and said, “Would you like me to kneel down?” Another time, in an older home, a tall lady stood in the step-down bathroom and I stood in the hall in order to fit her. Life as a bra lady has sometimes been a challenge, but never dull.

A request to fit a lady at the women’s jail San Jose, California came to Chicki one day. She asked me to accompany her. Not knowing what size would be needed, we each carried in two suitcases filled with bras. Everything, including us, was checked. Our purses were kept at an office and we were shown to a private room. The fettered inmate was brought in by four guards, most of whom watched us the entire time. No store carried what the lady needed, but we had the correct size. The women guards had a fund they used to help out the prisoners in cases such as this. Our purses were returned to us and we were escorted off the property.

Driving into ghetto areas all over the San Francisco Bay Area was never a problem for me. God and my Guardian Angels were always right there with me. I was cautious, but never felt afraid.

Over the years, I eventually helped Chicki with her bra fitting training sessions at seminars. At other times, another lady and I would conduct training sessions.

At one point in my business, a family member asked me when I was going to get a real job. I replied that I had a real job; it just didn’t feel like a real job. As of now, I have been doing my job for over 36 years.

In order to put bra fitting information into the hands of all the couturiers, especially new recruits, Chicki and I compiled a bra manual. At the time, she had a limited knowledge in computer skills and I had none. A computer savvy neighbor came to our aid. I was good with wording, spelling, and punctuation. It took weeks to plough through it. One day Chicki said, “You are such a nitpicker.” And I said, “You knew what I was like when we started this.” We both laughed. When the project was finally completed, we were, and still are, the best of friends.

Jean Vistica

* * *

Dear Chicki,

You are so thoughtful and caring. Joy for a woman's soul. How special of you. For sure you are always thinking of other people. I miss you a lot. I will miss everyone at conference. Have you been asked to do anything yet? Or are you not going to go? You be careful. A lot of people need and love you.

How many new recruits do you have? You are one of our very best leaders and you must know how much the company loves and needs you.

Love you,
Nancy Haan

* * *

In all the years I have visited textile mills in the south, watched giant looms turn out cloths that I have chosen for all our lingerie, seems as tho our lives pass as quickly as those looms. It is almost over before we realize it. The Bible says this is the chronology of eternity. We may live to be seventy to ninety years old. That is a snap of the finger compared to eternity, we have only a few years at the most. So let's live them for our Lord. We can start living, really living, when we go home, and living them with our Heavenly Father. I am ready. Love you all.

Thank you Dear Sister, for asking me to do this. You are always in my heart. God bless you always.

Angela (Serritella)

* * *

Chaplain P. K. Roberts and the Great Associates of your September 03 team want you to know that you are special. You have touched our lives in such a powerful magnificent way. Thanks a million for sharing your many life experiences with us. Your sensitivity to women's issues transcends the color barrier. Your understanding of the principles of success will propel anyone to greatness. Your love and support to our team granted you a seat in our circle of "Great African American Women." Up to this point that was all there was, but now comes Ma Chicki Downs! Love you.

Longevity Is Yours,
P. K. Roberts

* * *

A number of years ago, I was unable to find a good brassier at a department store. My breasts had grown too large.

I heard of Chicki Downs and went to her store in San Jose, California.

She fitted me into a great bra and I have purchased them since that time.

She had a great personality and was very thoughtful to be certain I would be comfortable.

I was a fortunate woman to have found her.

Ardis Orlando

* * *

It was in the early 80's while working at "Elias Fine Fabrics" that Chicki Downs entered my life. Who was that stunning, white-haired lady, full of energy in line chatting with customers about custom fitted bras, sizes AA to K "without underwires!!!"

That very day, I was fitted for my lifetime bra and also convinced to enter the business. How wonderful to never again spend hours in department store dressing rooms trying to find the right bra. Even if you did get lucky, you soon discovered that "right bra" was soon to be discontinued.

We had many fun trips together during lingerie shows. One of those times took place in a park in Modesto. We had quite a mixed crowd of mature adults. The men were in the back row chairs, while their wives were doing the modeling. None of those outfits were “Victoria Secret” type but conservative, feminine lingerie of top quality fabric. We had borrowed a motor home where the ladies could change clothes. It was Chick’s job to send the ladies out of the motor home according to my “cheat cards.” We also had display tables of bras, panties and shapers (which I used to call girdles). The show was going great. I was describing each outfit modeled until a giant gale scattered my cards, along with the bras, panties and shapers. I panicked and said “That’s it. You will just have to see for yourself what comes out of that motor home. It was hysterical watching the men, trying so hard to help save the bras, panties and shapers. They didn’t quite know how to handle these delicate items. It was a barrel of laughs. Several men came up to me later, complimenting on the ad lib and saying I could be the next Bob Hope. We had a great sale but best of all, everyone had a great time. Thanks for being a part of my life. We had so much fun and I thank the Lord for bringing us together.

Lorraine Glathe

* * *

My Friend Chicki Downs!

Along life’s path as in a garden there are unique and very special people whose love and quality of life enrich and inspire. Chicki is one of those. Yet unlike many blossoms that appear briefly and whose beauty is temporary, Chicki’s positive attitude, commitment to others and tenacious circumventing or conquering any challenge is not temporary, but in her numerous years has endeared her to all who know and love her.

No beating around the bush, bold but kind always in her assurances to all – if you can conceive it you can do it. Never has she lost sight to always strive to live up to the standards in conduct and business to our Creator’s clearly outlined values which she reads in the Bible and makes every effort to apply.

What an example to all is her cheerful, fun loving, personality – to never throw in the towel, but, with reliance on Almighty God and His Son along with diligent personal effort to use her gift of life unselfishly and in so doing has enriched so many.

A book? Why there is no volume that can capture the lady’s rich rewarding life – but the effort to do so will be an adventure in itself!

Our love to a dear, dear lady and friend!

Muriel Guffey

* * *

Chicki

By Millie

(a new customer in 1995)

A lovely lady I have met,

Into the shop, a foot I stepped.

To buy a bra that I could wear,

So I would look nice everywhere.

An added bonus I did get

She loves my Savior, Lord, and yes,

His picture, there, for all to see

He’s owner of the shop, and we.

Delighted in the picture there we saw

That she has hanging on her wall
Of her sweet husband, gone to be
With Jesus for all eternity.

This is what we all hope to do
to go to Heaven, Lord, live with You
then we'll all be together again,
Loving and praising You, Lord. Amen.
His love shines through as you speak the Word
And flit around the shop like a bird,
A hummingbird, so beautiful to see
Busy taking care of others, and me.
So Chicki, keep selling lingerie,
Sharing the Good News every day.
God uses His people everywhere,
People that He knows do care.

* * *

Chicki as I know Her

By Joan Biesiada, Dallas, TX, August 18, 1996

Old enough to have great wisdom,
Young enough to enjoy life and be a pleasure.
A lady that leads by example, a great teacher,
She still learns new things from others.
Proud to be number one,
She lets others enjoy the spotlight.
As busy as the busiest, always on the go,
Always has time to send a thoughtful note or make a call.
Chicki is a good steward and servant,
She humbly accepts help from others too.
She loves life and lives it to the fullest every day,
She sets a good example for us
She is a caretaker to us all,
She is loved and cherished.
She always has a kind word of encouragement,
She is willing to help those in need.
God bless you Chicki,
We are lucky to have you in our life.

I love you,
I appreciate you.

* * *

Chapter 47

The following was written by my family:

My daughter, Shari Dornbach, writes:

On September 11th when the 4 hijacked airplanes struck the World Trade Center, Pentagon and rural Pennsylvania, I kept hearing the newscasters comparing it to the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. On that day, my mother was 9 months pregnant with her first child. I was born one week later and over the years have often wondered what my mother was thinking as the radio blared the news of the attack and she was sitting waiting for her first child to be born. Knowing her as I do today, I am sure she spent much of that week praying, holding fast to the knowledge that God was in control and that somehow, some way, everything would work out.

What a wonderful gift God gave me when he sent me to be the daughter of Barney and Chicki Downs. From the time I was born, I was in church every Sunday. During my childhood my parents modeled for me a deep and abiding love of Christ and faith in the Lord. Each has always been an ardent believer and active member of the churches we belonged to in the towns where we lived. When I was a teenager, my dad was the lay leader first of the Minnihaha Methodist Church and later of the whole Minneapolis District of the denomination.

Growing up, my dad often spoke of when he was a little boy on the farm in South Dakota during the depression. His mom was very ill with juvenile diabetes. She lived to sew and made quilts and somehow they managed to get a manually operated sewing machine, but Grandma's legs weren't strong enough to work the treadle that made the machine go. So my dad would climb underneath the machine and operate the treadle for her. While she sewed and he rocked the treadle back and forth, she sang to him the great hymns of faith and built in him a love and understanding of God and Christ and of worshiping through music and thus helped shape who my father became and he passed it on to me.

Looking back, there are so many times when my parents' love of the Lord and faith was so clearly demonstrated to me. My most vivid memory happened when I was 13. I knew my dad had left his job, they had sold our house, put our furniture in storage and we were moving north from Florida, but as far as I knew it was just a wonderful camping trip. What I didn't know at the time was how much of a faith journey it was for them. As we traveled north, my dad was looking for work in the cities we drove through. The last place we camped was at Lake Geneva, Wisconsin. I remember the day my dad went into Chicago and came back to the campsite in the evening with a new job to begin in Minneapolis, Minnesota right away. What I didn't know until later was that my folks were down to their last \$20. But they both knew that God had a special job for dad and a place for us to live, and all would be what God wanted for each of our lives. And that is my memory, not fear or uncertainty, but joy knowing there was a wonderful adventure just waiting for us in a new place. What a heritage that has been for me. Faith, demonstrated not only by words but, more importantly, in the way they have lived their lives, by being living examples of Mom's life verse found in Philippians' 4:6-7, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

Their unrelenting example of faith encouraged me to seek and find my way to a personal relationship with Christ, and has continued helping me along the path to where I am today.

* * *

Shari's daughter, Cheryl Bamberger, shares the following:

Born into this family ... I was in church every Sunday along with my sister, Carrie, and brothers, Rick and Bill. I can remember asking Jesus to be my Savior when I was 10, but I have really grown to have a deeper relationship with Him and trust Him with my life by watching these amazing women grow in their faith.

I could give you so many examples, but one that a lot of you see every Sunday is my Mom when she worships. She used to give her singing voice to the Lord in a brown choir robe holding her music and now she worships the Lord with every fiber in her being. She inspires me in so many ways to draw closer to God.

And then there is my Grandma. At age 94 she was still running her own business and outselling other people in her organization. But she always reminded me that her work belonged to the Lord and she has Him to thank for all of her life's blessings.

These are incredible women of faith and they have shown me through their lives what it means to walk with the Lord.

* * *

The following was written by Cheryl's son, Scott:

Last summer I decided to accept Christ into my heart and my mom said that I could pick anyone I wanted to baptize me. I picked my Grandma Shari because she always shows me how much she loves me and I can see how much she loves God.

* * *

EPILOGUE

On January 21, 2013, at the age of 94, I finally retired from the bra business. My eyesight is going and I am no longer able to service my customers. I am moving a little more slowly these days. I know every day is a gift and I thank God for each one.

I was asked if I had any regrets in my life. Without hesitation I answered “No.” Sure, there were times I made a decision that maybe wasn’t the best. Our decision to move to Florida comes to mind, but even though it seemed like a bad decision, there was, as always, a silver lining. We met some wonderful people, and it was an education and an adventure. It led to the next chapter in my life, which led to the next and the next and the next.

God has always guided me along the way and brought me through every trial and every illness and every heartache. He has blessed me with so many dear friends along the journey, from New York, to Florida, to Minnesota and finally, California.

If God hadn’t had His hand on my life, I would have died either as an infant from the flu, or at age 18 from tuberculosis, or from cancer at 35, or from heart disease at 85, or pneumonia at 92. God has His reasons for sparing my life over and over again. I hope and pray ‘til the day I die I will glorify Him in my thoughts, actions, and words.

After I’m gone, I would like to be remembered first as a good daughter, sister, wife, mother, grandmother, great-grandmother, and great-great-grandmother. I also hope I am remembered kindly as a Girl Scout and as a Girl Scout leader. During my 35 years as a leader, I assisted 109 girls achieve Curve Bar. A girl’s life between 5th and 8th grades can shape the rest of her life and I hope I helped my girls to become the best that they could be. I made every effort to honor them for their accomplishments and the things they learned under my leadership would carry them through the rest of their lives.

I also want to be remembered as a godly woman who always glorified and served God by caring for others. As The Bra Lady, I believe I was given a special opportunity to do just that. The money and the trips were an added bonus, but being able to help women achieve and be all that they could be, as well as helping them to find the proper bra was the real payoff. I believe I have saved hundreds of women’s lives throughout the United States and Canada.

When I sponsored others in the business, I didn’t leave them on their own. I spent several months teaching them about the bra and the importance of a good fit. I told them stories about the women I have helped over the years and how much their lives have been changed for the better. Sure, they liked the idea of the trips, but after the first six or eight months, they began to catch on to the business and were excited about teaching others what they had learned. They had the opportunity in this business to work as hard or as little as they liked. They could work their way up the ladder of success, or stay small. I told them they would get out of it what they put into it. This is true in every aspect of life.

I would also like to be remembered as a faithful friend, a fun, positive person, as well as a good businesswoman. I know I must have done something right because the women kept coming back to me for bras. I knew how to fit them and I trained others to do the same. If not fitted properly, it might be better not to wear a bra at all. This is why training was such a crucial part of my job over the years. I hope that the women I have trained will continue to teach others, so that one day every woman in America will be properly fitted and there will be an end to breast cancer.

AFTERWORD CHICKI'S HOME-GOING

Marian L. (Chicki) "The Bra Lady" Downs, born on January 21, 1919, went home to be with her precious Savior Jesus Christ, her beloved husband Barney, and sister Dotti Rackliffe on December 15, 2014.

Chicki had an extraordinary life that impacted thousands of lives all over the world, from her birthplace in Buffalo, New York and home bases in Yonkers and Bethpage, New York; Minneapolis and Richfield, Minnesota; San Jose and Vacaville, California. In her life, she was a devoted child of God, a housewife and mother of Sharon R. (Shari) Dornbach and Byron E. (Barry) Downs II, Girl Scout Leader and Volunteer Trainer, New Neighbors League Hostess in Minneapolis, Minnesota, Distributor for Ovations Cosmetics and for the past 50+ years provider of custom fitted bras (retired at age 93). Among her many achievements were New Neighbors League Hostess of the Year, recipient of Girl Scout Thanks Badge, Leader of Outstanding Girl Scout Troops in both New York and Minnesota, Diamond Major Status in Ovation Cosmetics and consistent ranking in the top five sellers in Figurettes, Cameo, Colesce and finally Jeunique Bra Companies.

Since moving to Vacaville, she was selected as one of Vacaville's Seniors of the Year in 2006 and Distinguished Senior of Solano County in 2007. In addition to all of that, she was 11 grand, 33 great-grand, and 9 great-great-grandchildren. Everywhere she has lived she has been very active in the churches where she held memberships. Since 1995, she joined the congregation of Central Christian Church in San Jose, and following the move to Vacaville, she belonged to Discovery Christian Church in Davis and New Hope Christian Fellowship in Vacaville, California. One of her goals in life was to travel the world and so she visited every continent by tour bus, cruise liner, plane, train, automobile and on foot. She saw most of the mountain ranges of the world, the wettest place on earth at Kauai, Hawaii, the Holy Land where she was baptized in the Jordan River (where Jesus began His ministry) and more places too numerous to list here. While living in Vacaville she was an active member of the Soroptimists and loved being part of this outstanding organization. Chicki was a very special woman and I know we will all miss her very much.

Sharon Dornbach
(Chicki's Daughter)

Chicki loved going to church. For the last one and a half years of her life she was unable to attend, so it seemed more than fitting to celebrate her life in a church service. The following was sung at her home-going ceremony:

I SEE THE LORD (by Chris Falson - Taken from Isaiah 6:1-3)

I see the Lord seated on the throne, exalted,
the train of His robe fills the temple with glory,

And the whole earth is filled,
And the whole earth is filled,
And the whole earth is filled with His glory

Holy, Holy, Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord!

PHILIPPIANS 4:4-9

“Rejoice in the Lord always, I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

(New International Version)

“Always hold onto Jesus’ hand and He will guide you wherever you go.”

Chicki



Tribute to Chicki Downs:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nij7iMxe1UA>

Co-Author's Biography

A native of Napa Valley, California, Dona Bakker has owned and operated her home-based secretarial business since 1976. She provides services to doctors, lawyers, small business owners, and individuals in the Napa area. During the course of her career, she has also typed and edited numerous books for local authors.

In 2004, Dona self-published her own memoir- *Run of the Mill - a True Life, Napa Valley Adventure*. In her book, she recounts the five-year period when she and her older brother lived with their grandparents in what was once the granary of a 100-year-old grist mill.

In addition to her first book, Dona has since co-written her first novel with her friend of 30+ years, Tami Riedeman, who resides in Sandstone, Minnesota. *The Golden Road - French Wine or Moonshine?* is a hilarious tome which takes two retired ladies on the road in a motor home they won on a game show. Tami and Dona found that writing together has strengthened their long-distance friendship. They have since completed the sequel - *The Golden Road Detour*, and plan to continue writing together in the future.

In 2008, Dona wrote *St. Helena High School - The Golden Years - Circa 1940-1972* for former educator, Ralph M. Ingols. This book chronicles the rich history and deep roots of generosity of a small Napa Valley town, as well as memories from former students and their academic, personal, civic, and professional accomplishments.

In 2014, Dona self-published a short e-book entitled *Writing and Self-Publishing – One Author's Journey*.

Over the years, Dona has served as Mother Advisor for St. Helena Rainbow, Brownie and Girl Scout Leader. She has been involved in various ministries through her church, including rest home visitation, AWANA leader (Approved Workmen Are Not Ashamed), Sunday school teacher, and Area Coordinator for the Napa Chapter of MITI (Moms In Touch International, aka Moms In Prayer, International), which is comprised of groups of moms gathering each week to pray for their children and their schools. She is also a volunteer tutor through the Adult Literacy Program at the Napa City Library.

Dona resides in the Napa Valley with her husband, Bob. They have been married for 40+ years and have two grown children.

(Dona's books are available at www.napavalleypastime.com)