



THE BRIDGE

BRIDGING GENERATIONS WITH AGELESS FRIENDSHIP

Friends Across the Ages • Nursing Home Outreach in Gainesville, Florida

Vol. 9 No. 2 Spring 2011

President's Message



JON SHINN

Our resident friends love to tell stories. Whether they are about living through the Great Depression, growing up on a farm, fighting in WWII, or any number of other topics, these stories give us a window into times, places and events that we may not have had the opportunity to experience ourselves.

Listening to stories is a great way to spend time with our friends, but it is also a great way to expand our own horizons. While there is no substitute for first-hand experience, second-hand experience passed on through intimate conversations with someone that we care about can still be a source of wisdom. By listening closely to our friends' stories and doing our best to imagine what it was like for them to live those stories, we may gain a new perspective that helps us make sense of our own lives. So the next time you are working through personal challenges or coming to terms with the global struggles that are presented in the news each day, you may want to look to the stories of your resident friends to help you put it all in perspective.



MEET KEO FOX *New Administrative Coordinator*

By Heather Geidel

When I first met Keo, I was struck by her enthusiasm, energy, confidence, and friendliness. As I continued to get to know her, these qualities only became more evident, and I also learned that she has a compassionate nature and a history of caring for and serving others.

As a licensed massage therapist and Watsu practitioner, Keo has had the opportunity to work with cancer survivors, individuals in the end stages

of life, and young children and adults who have been in a variety of musculoskeletal discomfort. Watsu is "a passive form of aquatic bodywork received while being held and completely supported by the water and one's practitioner." Keo personally discovered the benefits of Watsu

when she was injured as a competitive athlete and used Watsu to help relieve the pain. She has been a firm believer in its benefits ever since. As a practitioner, Keo has found it "very powerful to simply hold someone in your arms and gently float them, stretch them and bring them to where they need to go, be it a deep sleep or state of relaxation."

Keo's impressive background includes experience working as a teacher of deaf students in the Boston public school system. (She is fluent in American Sign Language!) Keo also has experience as a fitness instructor and manager and has taught stability ball classes, abdominal classes, water aerobics, and even country line dance!

Keo has volunteered her time in many capacities, including assisting in coordination of "Cancer Connection" meetings at the American Cancer Society, providing free chair massages for the Displaced Homemakers' Program at Santa Fe College, visiting senior community members at the Atrium, and performing pre-term infant massage at Miami Children's Hospital. She shared how special this



Keo Fox

particular experience was to her. "These babies were so tiny, their heads no bigger than my fist in some cases. It was frightening and yet awe-inspiring to know that my touch was helping them to grow and gain weight. It was an amazingly humbling experience."

Keo's kind heart and compassionate touch attest to the wonderful person that she is. A fellow volunteer at the American Cancer Society described Keo as "positive, upbeat, and good-natured." As a *Friends Across the Ages* volunteer, Keo has demonstrated that she is capable of taking initiative and has helped to promote the growth of the organization by creating a new volunteer group at Woodlands Care Center and serving as the Group Coordinator. It has been a pleasure to get to know Keo, and there is no doubt in my mind that she will be an exceptional Administrative Coordinator and an asset to *Friends Across the Ages*. With that being said, "Welcome, Keo!"

Welcome New Volunteers

✿ Gainesville Health Care Center

JOYCE JOSEPH

TONYA LOWE

TAYLOR MAY

✿ Palm Garden

COLBY LOWE

✿ Park Meadows

JASMINE WARREN

PRIYANKA JAGTAP

KIRSTI ROEHM

Oona Takano

✿ Parklands, Woodlands Care Center

KEO FOX

✿ Signature

ERIC SWANSON

Thank You, Agnes!

Friends Across the Ages would like to thank and congratulate Agnes Bierbaum for completing 10 years of volunteering with our organization. Agnes faithfully visits PARKLANDS NURSING AND REHABILITATION each Tuesday morning, bearing freshly baked cookies and other goodies. She has become so loved and recognized that the coffee hour that morning has been renamed "Coffee with Agnes" in her honor. She has also befriended many individual residents over the years, including (one of our all time favorites) the late Thomas Jones, shown in this picture with Agnes. In addition to all of this, Agnes was on the earliest steering committee that helped get *Friends* off the ground, and has been a participant in strategic planning committees for *Friends* as well. We can't thank her enough for all she has done for the residents and for this organization over the years. She is truly a model of service, love, and "bridging generations with ageless friendship." Thank you, Agnes!



Volunteer Anniversaries

✿ Park Meadows

VI ASMUTH- 6 years

JUDY WIBBELSMAN- 2 years

SHELBY DURRANCE- 1 year

✿ Parklands

AGNES BIERBAUM- 10 years

RASHIDA BASRAWALA- 2 years

CINDY GICALA- 2 years

✿ Signature Health Care

KIM MITCHELL- 3 years

ANDREW MITCHELL- 3 years

STEPHANIE CARRASCO- 2 years

JALEESA JACKSON- 1 year

ERIC VANVEELEN- 1 year

LINDA LANE- 1 year

✿ Signature, Parklands

JEAN LANSFORD- 7 years

Pioneer Network Seminars

Interested in how YOU can help nursing homes be more like home? The Pioneer Network (pioneernetwork.net) has developed a free seminar, "Changing Aging," that educates consumers in how to identify nursing homes that practice "culture change." If you would like to host or attend a seminar, please contact Carolyn Lukert at carolyn@transformingtransitions.com



The Bridge

Published quarterly by *Friends Across the Ages, Inc.*

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Friends Across the Ages Spring Festival

This year, for our annual spring event, we held a "Spring Festival" made up of six different events at various nursing homes. Here's a quick review of each event...



MONDAY—"Sunshine Group" Palm Garden held their traditional visiting and activity hour with volunteers and residents sharing refreshments and memories.



TUESDAY—"Let Your Imagination Blossom" Volunteers of Park Meadows Health and Rehab held a choral poetry reading program. Residents were active participants, sharing knowledge, opinions, feelings, and imagination.



WEDNESDAY—"Arts and Crafts Hour" The residents of Signature Health Care got crafty as they created various spring-themed projects!



THURSDAY—"Wild, Wild West" BINGO The residents of Gainesville Health Care Center celebrated spring in the Wild, Wild West as they played bingo and competed for various prizes!



FRIDAY—"Spring Break in Las Vegas" Parklands Rehab and Nursing dining room was transformed into the casino floor at the MGM Grand. Volunteers helped deal the cards or team up with residents to play poker, blackjack, craps, and other games for fun prizes and the thrill of being named "King or Queen of the High Rollers."



SATURDAY—"Celebrate Spring!" Residents teamed up with volunteers, including several families and a group of international students from the University of Florida, to decorate flower pots. It was a lively event and each resident left with a beautiful pot and a live plant to keep in their room.



The week was capped by a Volunteer Appreciation Party in the elegant courtyard at Barr Systems. Several volunteers received special recognition, including ANNA KIM--Stick-to-it Award, CAROLYN SHAFFER LUKERT--Dedication Award, FAYE COORPENDER--Spirit Award, HEATHER GEIDEL-- #1 Employee/Dedication Award, KAREN, WALTER AND LINDA MENTZ--5 year award, and AGNES BIERBAUM--10 year award.

Resident Spotlight ... Ann King

BY FAYE COORPENDER

When I called North Florida Rehabilitation and Specialty Care (NFRSC) and spoke to the Activities Director, Christina Lukasik, about befriending a resident there, Christina said that she would introduce me to Ann King, who might be a good fit for me. Little did I know at that time how providential our meeting would be. When I met Ann, her grace, her perseverance, and her intelligence struck me. I knew right away that Ann had much to teach me about life and I hoped that we could develop a friendship.

As anyone who visits a nursing home knows, those first meetings with residents can be awkward. Ann and I liked each other but getting to know each other took time. We talked about how she had come to live in a nursing home. I was astonished to learn that she had a severe stroke at age 49 during routine surgery, and that, in addition to paralyzing her right side, the stroke had taken her ability to speak, and had robbed her of the vision in her right eye. She told me of the many years that she had been bedridden at home, tenderly cared for by her devoted husband, Roy, with the help of nursing aides. She spoke of the battle to learn to speak again and to learn to use her left hand (she was right-handed) to write, to type, and to eat. In her carefully measured speech, she explained that a series of strokes in subsequent years had compromised her health so much that finally, regretfully, she and Roy decided that a nursing home was the only viable option for her continued care. She had been living at NFRSC for about eight years when we met.

Fortunately for Ann and Roy, Ann's move to the nursing home did not diminish her love of life and her desire to live life to the fullest. Ann's perseverance and her positive outlook showed in her surroundings at NFRSC. Butterflies and cats adorned the walls, and a mobile hung from the ceiling, while her bookshelves were filled to overflowing with books, both fiction and non-fiction, evidence of an active and creative intellect. The books were a testament to her passion for reading and to her long career as a librarian (UF Marston Science Library).

Ann's reading materials alternated between books mailed to her from the Alachua County Library and books that she downloaded to her Sony eReader™. In fact, my introduction to Ann is partly due to that Sony eReader™ – she needed someone who could provide some tech support and I was naïve enough to think that I could help. As it turns out, neither Ann nor I ever became accomplished in using the eReader™ but our attempts to dominate the digital reader brought us close together. Despite our tenacity, issues with the eReader™ went unresolved. It was a bittersweet day when Ann said, "I give up!" and I wholeheartedly affirmed her decision. Relieved of the burden of technology, we celebrated books – paperback and hardcover, but most of all, we thanked God for indispensable public librarians who mail books to homebound patrons!

From that day forward, it was smooth sailing for Ann and me. Before then, so many of our visits had been consumed with technological difficulties that we hadn't done much real sharing, and now we had time to chat and enjoy each other's company. Sometimes I would sit on the bed beside Ann's wheelchair sewing name labels into her clothes as we chatted, other days Ann would have me organizing her books, or helping her with her mail. As I arrived, Ann would ask, "How long will you be staying today?" If my reply was, "just one hour," Ann would retort, "Well, don't plan on sitting. I'm putting you to work!" I enjoyed our comfortable arrangement; helping Ann made me feel needed, and I knew that Ann appreciated my help. In fact, Ann's

gracious, softly spoken "Thank you. Thank you very much," was repeated several times during each of my visits. And I was not the only recipient of that gratitude. As nurses' aides, nurses, housekeeping staff, or administrative staff came into the room to provide any service, no matter how small, Ann would acknowledge their presence and offer her heartfelt thanks.

Ann's example of gratitude was an inspiration to me. She weathered so many difficulties in her 69 years of life, but she never felt sorry for herself or took the small things in life for granted. Indeed, Ann approached hardships with a sense of humor. I recall with a smile the mail order purchases that she made shortly before her death: two t-shirts, one that said, "If things get any worse, I'll have to ask you to stop helping me" – which she assured me did not pertain to my help, and another shirt that said "Meet the Beetles" which she planned to wear the next time her good friend, Dr. Thomas Walker (UF Entomologist) came to visit.

This wonderful woman with the wry sense of humor gifted me with her friendship. I believe that God had a hand in bringing Ann and me together, and I am certain that it was divine intervention that sent me to visit Ann on the evening of Wednesday, January 26th. My visit that afternoon surprised her because I always visited on Fridays, but I explained to her that I would be out of town on the coming weekend and had stopped in that day so that we wouldn't miss our weekly time together. That evening was different from all my previous visits, Ann wasn't feeling well, not her chipper self, so when she asked me to tell her about how my husband and I met and I warned her that it would be a long story, she assured me that she had time, and she settled in to listen. I was keenly aware of how close we had grown as I observed her careful attention to my story followed by her thanking me very lovingly for sharing with her what she called my "beautiful story." Ann's affirmation was important to me; I left the nursing home that night counting many blessings, among them, my husband and my good friend, Ann.

That Wednesday marks the last time that Ann and I shared time with one another. When I returned to the nursing home a week later, I learned that on the Friday after my last visit with her she had had another stroke and had slipped into a coma. Had I not visited when I had, I would have missed our remarkable last time together. Ann's final days were spent at the E.T. York Hospice Care Center, and it was there that I finally met her husband of 40 years, Dr. Roy King. Upon meeting Roy, I understood Ann a little better. She had had a husband who dearly loved her and she had lived in the light of his love. An affectionate and faithful husband, Roy had helped Ann to live her life to the fullest, and I know that he would say that Ann did the same for him. Roy was at her side when she died on Valentine's Day, a few weeks after her debilitating stroke.

I am privileged to have had Ann as a friend, and to now call Roy my friend. Although my friends Ann and Roy are unique individuals, the rich experience that is gained when making a friend in the nursing home is not unique. It happens time and time again when we open our hearts to another. I thank *Friends Across the Ages* for providing training and support to me so that I had the opportunity to get to know Ann, who made my life richer by befriending me.

