



THE BRIDGE

BRIDGING GENERATIONS WITH AGELESS FRIENDSHIP

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

Vol. 6 No. 1 Winter 2008



STEVE & ALLISON BLAY

Directors' Message

Web Site Improvements

Thanks to a small technology grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and some generosity on the part of Jon and Jeremy Shinn (our web designers), the FATA web site will soon take on some new features.

The most important feature will be an online discussion board, what some would call a "web forum". Since our volunteers are spread out at many different nursing homes, this will give them a chance to share their favorite moments, and to discuss questions or concerns they may have. Becoming a good nursing home volunteer often involves a lot of advice from others who have been there before. We hope this discussion board will facilitate that.

Eventually, we are hoping that other nursing home volunteers from around the world will join in on the discussion, and the true power of the world wide web will be realized. Of course, discussion boards only work if plenty of people participate -- so watch for these changes to be up shortly after the holidays and prepare to join in!

Lucinda Jackson, a resident of North Florida Rehab and Specialty Care, and Baby Amelia share a smile during a playgroup Halloween visit.

"Our Vision' Turns 5"

In early 2003, a small group of dedicated volunteers, board members, and supporters of *Friends Across the Ages* met to work on a strategic planning process for the organization. We were fairly newly incorporated, thanks to our merger with the Nursing Home Volunteer Auxiliary (an offshoot of the Gainesville Woman's Club), and needed to dream a little about what our future would be as the organization became more formal and established. We used a method called "Appreciative Inquiry" which focuses on identifying the positive aspects of the organization and thinking concretely about how to build on them.

The result of that process was a document called "Our Vision." And "Our Vision" is about to turn 5! It is amazing to think about all that has happened in the past five years, and how *Friends Across the Ages* has grown and changed. Our board has increased in size and, more importantly, has become better established. We received some major grants—one from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and one from the United Way—which enabled us to lay a more solid foundation for the organization so that it can continue in the years to come. Our pool of volunteers has increased, and again, more importantly, has become better established, with a significant portion of volunteers who have been around for many years now. Many things we dreamed about in "Our Vision" came to pass. Some didn't. But overall, we feel very blessed and happy to be where we are today, and to have realized some of our dreams.

It is time to dream again. This January and February, the *Friends Across the Ages* Board of Directors will be doing another strategic planning process. Strategic planning may sound like a rather dry term, but the way we see it is "concrete dreaming." Is this something that appeals to you? Would you like to help us dream about how best to "Bridge generations with ageless friendship" for the next five years? If so, just let us know! We will need the ideas and energy of every volunteer and supporter to carry us through the next five years.



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Resident Spotlight...Meet Bob O'Brien

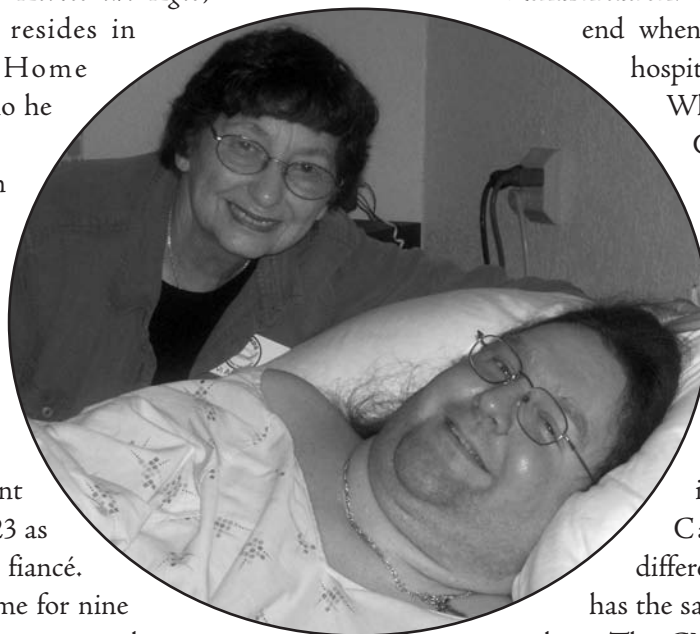
BY VI ASMUTH

We picture *Friends Across the Ages* volunteers as young people who care about older people. In my case, I visit Bob O'Brien who is a quadriplegic and is younger than two of my children. So it still is *Friends Across the Ages*, but older to younger. Bob resides in Park Meadows Nursing Home and he inspires all those who he touches with his presence.

Robert O'Brien was born on May 16, 1961 in Stanford, Connecticut. He grew up in nearby Darien. After high school, Bob worked as an electrician and had the opportunity to help build many gorgeous homes.

A life changing car accident happened when he was only 23 as he was driving to pick up his fiancé. Gaylord Hospital was his home for nine months on a respirator and seven months on the spinal cord floor.

When released from the hospital, Bob displayed his independence by living for twelve years in a trailer in Westport, Connecticut. Using an electric chair he could attend sport and music events. However, he did require hired help to care for his everyday personal needs and it became difficult to retain responsible employees.



The next step for Bob was a move to Jacksonville to be near his family: Mom, Dad, and sister, Linda. That stay lasted for two and a half years in First Coast Nursing and Rehabilitation. Using his electric chair came to an

end when pneumonia placed Bob in the hospital and he developed bed sores.

When Linda married and moved to Gainesville, Bob moved and became a resident of Park Meadows. His parents' health declined and they were placed in the room next door. The family being together was short-lived as Bob's mother died this fall and his Dad has been moved to a VA facility in Daytona.

Can a quadriplegic make a difference in this world? Bob always has the same kind and loving spirit toward others. The CNAs often take a break in Bob's room just to have moments of no stress and good humor. The Eucharistic minister, Mary Jane, who visits Bob states, "He is an inspiration to me." Bob will soon be able to use a chair again – a fancy new one – and he has a goal of doing peer counseling. Like other *Friends* volunteers, I signed up for a 12 week stint, but I have visited MY FRIEND BOB for three years in January. Bob says, "Friendly people from *Friends* keep me going." Do not believe it! Bob keeps us going.

We would like to thank and recognize these special "Friends of *Friends*."
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