

PRIME

SENIOR SHOWCASE | SATURDAY, DECEMBER 19, 2020

STEELE LOOKS BACK ON ADVENTURES



KEEPING THE KING'S
MEMORY ALIVE

KRUEGERS TRAVEL
THE WORLD

FREMONT TRIBUNE

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Fan of animals, celebs

Woman looks back upon adventures, fulfilled life and contentment

TAMMY REAL-MCKEIGHAN
News Editor

As a child, Michelle Steele really did try to run away with the circus.

Her parents had taken her to a Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus where she saw animal trainer Gunther Gebel-Williams. Steele told her parents she was going to the bathroom.

Instead, she walked through a curtain past dancing girls and clowns, one of whom asked where she was going.

"I'm going with Gunther, because I love him," the girl said.

The clown chuckled, adding, "I think you'd better find your mom and dad."

Steele's mother — frantic by then trying to find her daughter — found the child. Steele returned to her parents, but never lost her admiration for the animal trainer.

A longtime fan of animals and of entertainers, including Elvis and Alan Jackson, the Hooper resident has had opportunities to work with animals and meet celebrities.

And at 61, Steele said she's fulfilled her life's dreams and found contentment.

Steele, who was born and grew up in Fremont, was very young when she developed a love of animals.

"I always had a pet and the pet was always my best friend," she said. "My parents always made sure I had an animal."

After graduating from Fremont High School, Steele said she worked for her dad who had a mechanic shop and gas station. She then got a job as a secretary for the Dodge County Sheriff's Office and said she took whatever training classes were available. She became involved in jailing and transporting female prisoners.

Steele later worked at the Dodge County Head Start in Fremont.

In the meantime, she learned more about Gebel-Williams, who became renowned as a trainer of elephants and tigers. She watched him work with animals when the circus came to Nebraska.

Steele said she'd go to train stations in Omaha or Lincoln and wait for the circus to come in.

"I would watch Gunther unload the animals and I would walk along the parade route with him and I'd watch as they'd line the elephants up and give them water and feed them. I would hang out at the doors of whatever auditorium they were performing at," she said.

She became familiar with a guy who handled the parade route. One day, he gave her a tour and introduced her to Gebel-Williams' personal manager.

Steele would get to meet Gebel-Williams. She told him how much she respected and had

followed him for years. She said it would be an honor to clean his animals' cages or do any work for him.

"He was amazed and he was so humble," she said. "When he was in Lincoln or Omaha or anywhere around, he welcomed me into the circus and let me help him."

Steele said she saw, firsthand, how Gebel-Williams treated the animals.

"He treated his animals with love," she said. "He never abused his animals. I watched him. If an animal didn't want to do an act or a trick, he didn't make them. He let them stay in their cage and he'd get another tiger out."

She'd help feed elephants.

"Elephants are very, very affectionate," she said. "He had one elephant that was so attached to him that if you got close to him while he was near that particular elephant, she would bat you away — if you were a female. Males would come up by him and she was fine, but if you were a female, she was very jealous."

She enjoyed feeding the elephants.

"I'd feed the elephant a peanut and the flap on the end of his nose would pick up that little tiny peanut and he would eat it and that would just amaze me," she said.

Steele enjoyed her opportunities with the circus for about three years.

Years later, she



COURTESY PHOTO

Michelle Steele of Hooper is shown with Tim E. Hendry, an Elvis Tribute Artist (ETA). The area woman is an Elvis fan.

was deeply affected when Gebel-Williams died in 2001 of a brain tumor. He was 66.

"It was one of the hardest deaths I've ever had to deal with," she said.

But before then, her love of animals would lead to other adventures. She moved to Lincoln, where she worked in a bank. She also did volunteer work at Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo, starting in the late 1980s.

She and other volunteers gave tours and helped with children's classes. She remembers "Teddy Bear Day." Children brought teddy bears.

"We'd fix up their teddy bears like it was a regular surgery," she said. "We'd sew on their eyes and the staff would wear medical outfits."

Steele would drive from Lincoln to Omaha nightly. On Friday nights, she'd ride as a volunteer with Zoo Security until the early morning hours and then drive home. She'd be back at the zoo on Saturday morning and then do the same on Sunday.

"I loved the animals so much," she said. "I just wanted to be around animals. That's where my happy place was and that's where I felt the most at peace."

She'd also find enjoyment through music and become a big fan of Elvis and, later, Alan Jackson.

Steele, who's also loved the King of Rock and Roll since she was a child, said she got to see him at his last Omaha concert in June 1977. He died that August.



Michelle Steele is shown riding on an elephant as part of a Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus parade.

COURTESY PHOTO, GARY BOGDON

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Traveling the world

Kruegers visit many nations, teach, learn in faraway locations

TAMMY REAL-MCKEIGHAN
News Editor

Sieg and Brenda Krueger didn't plan to end up in a South Korean police car.

They'd attended a concert in the capital city of Seoul. Afterward, other concertgoers told the Kruegers to walk to the subway to get back to where they were staying.

But they got lost.

They were in a parking lot under an overpass, when a police car came by. The Kruegers told police where they were trying to go.

Police put the couple in the car and drove with red-flashing lights to the subway entrance.

"I don't think you could call it a police escort, because we were in the car," Brenda said. "We got an unusual ride."

Actually, they've had a unique ride through life in general. They've taught in Nigeria, India and Slovakia. They've learned to travel economically and, thus far, have been in 60 countries around the world and in all 50 United States.

And they're not done yet.

Now, 83 and 81 respectively, Sieg and Brenda await more adventures once the COVID-19 pandemic has subsided.

The Fremonters' lives began quietly. He rode on horseback to a one-room school in North Dakota, 80 miles from the Canadian border. At 13, he got a special permit to drive to school, later graduating in 1954.

She grew up about 12 miles northwest of Fremont and rode a bike to a one-room school, graduating in 1957 from Hooper High School.

Both were active in their churches and met at Dana College in Blair, where he was taught speech and theater and she was a non-traditional student, returning to complete her teaching degree.

He cast her in a play and they started dating after the show ended.

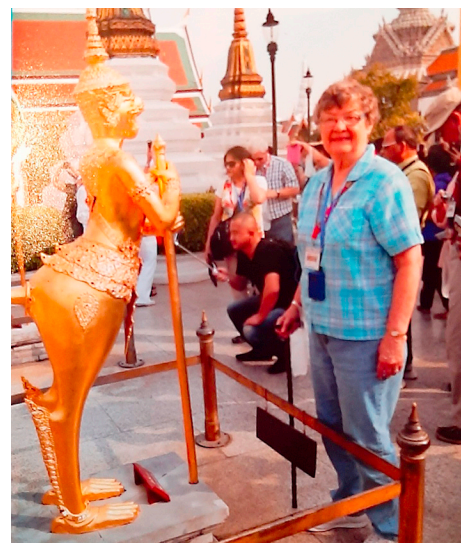
"She had the most wonderful smile," he said.

"He took me places," she said, smiling. "We went to the Omaha Playhouse and a ballet and a hockey game."

To see if she liked him not just because



Sieg Krueger stands near the Great Sphinx of Giza in Egypt.



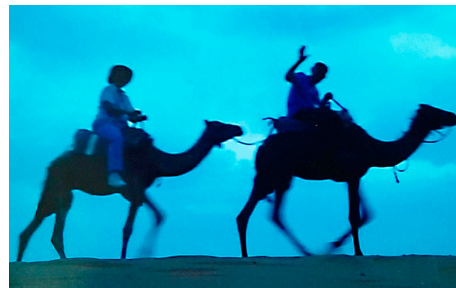
Brenda Krueger of Fremont pauses for a photo near a statue in Thailand.

he took her places, he invited her to fly a kite with him.

She went.

They married in August 1962 and later joined the Peace Corps, arriving in Nigeria in January 1964. They taught in a women's teacher-training college, but the British principal wasn't too happy about having American teachers.

She assigned Brenda to teach games she'd never heard of in a physical education class. But she passed the principal's test and went



Brenda and Sieg Krueger of Fremont take a camel ride in Morocco in 2017.



Sieg Krueger looks over some flowers while in India.



Brenda Krueger dances with a professional dancer in South Korea.



TAMMY REAL-MCKEIGHAN, FREMONT TRIBUNE

Sieg and Brenda Krueger of Fremont stand in front of some gourds from their Peace Corps days in Nigeria.



COURTESY PHOTOS

Brenda Krueger is shown with Nigerians during the time she and her husband, Sieg, were in the Peace Corps.



Sieg and Brenda Krueger get ready for a buggy ride in Egypt to see some ruins.



Sieg Krueger is shown on a horse when he and his wife, Brenda, were in the Peace Corps in Nigeria. The Fremonters since have enjoyed many travels.

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PRIME | SPONSORED IN PART BY NYE HEALTH SERVICES

Making contributions

For Silva, fruitful retirement includes ministry, hobbies

TAMMY REAL-MCKEIGHAN
News Editor

After he retired the first time, Tom Silva helped his mother-in-law who had Alzheimer's disease.

He'd take her to Mass at St. Patrick's Catholic Church in Fremont.

"She had a rock-solid faith in God and even though she no longer knew the people around her, no longer knew she was living in Fremont—or much at all—she still had incredible faith," Silva said.

A church deacon, Bob Chapman, saw Silva bringing his mother-in-law, Ruth Lauer, to church. He noticed how Silva walked with and listened to Lauer.

Chapman told Silva that he should become a deacon in the Catholic Church.

"I laughed," Silva recalled. "I thought I was too sinful to do that."

But years later, Silva is a deacon at St. Patrick's.

He's been active in the church's ministry to the Hispanic community. His multi-faceted work as a deacon has included taking Holy Communion to people in the hospital. He's taken Holy Communion to Catholics at Dunklau Gardens and anticipates that once the COVID-related quarantine is lifted he'll return.

Now retired for a second time, Silva has stayed busy with other projects—which include restoring the 1901 house where he lives with his wife, Dr. Karen Lauer-Silva, an OBGYN doctor in Fremont.

He goes fishing and canoeing in the Black Hills, a couple times a year.

Back home in Fremont, he drives area backroads looking for landscapes to sketch.

Silva is not one to sit around. Years ago, he noticed that people, who didn't stay active after they retired, didn't tend to live long.

"But if you retired to pursue interests and to stay active in your community and your church, then it's almost like you had something to live for and so you would contribute to the community and to your family and to yourself and your life would be of higher quality and last longer," Silva said.



COURTESY PHOTO

Tom Silva is shown with with, Dr. Karen Lauer-Silva during a reception after he was ordained as a Catholic church deacon. Silva serves St. Patrick's Catholic Church in Fremont.

Silva's trek into the interests that contribute to his quality of life began long before he retired.

Born into the Catholic Church, Silva said he lost interest in religion as a teen and quit attending.

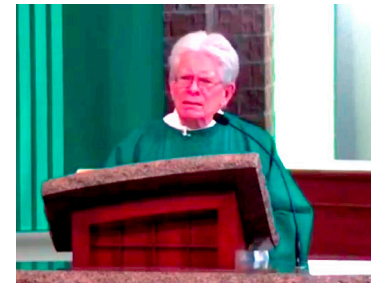
"But my life was so meager and so black that I started to think about what my parents had that made their life work and I knew it was the church so I came back," he said.

By then, Silva was in his 40s.

Sitting in the back of the church, Silva told God that he'd come to Mass late and leave early and he wouldn't sing or say any prayers unless he already knew them.



Deacon Tom Silva, left, is shown at Mass with the Rev. Walter Nolte, senior pastor of St. Patrick's Catholic Church in Fremont.



RADER PHOTOGRAPHY

Deacon Tom Silva gives the homily during a Mass at St. Patrick's Catholic Church in Fremont.



COURTESY PHOTO

Fremonter Tom Silva shows fish he caught during a vacation in the Black Hills in South Dakota.



TAMMY REAL-MCKEIGHAN, FREMONT TRIBUNE

Fremonter Tom Silva is retired, but stays busy between work at his church and restoration of the 1901 house he shares with his wife, Dr. Karen Lauer-Silva.

It was a small step, but one that led to more. "I believe that when you seek God to be a part of your life on any level, he is so gentle with you and inviting," Silva said.

His journey wasn't always smooth or comfortable.

"But the blessings I was getting and the change in my life that I occurred because I had brought God back into my life were so positive that I found it hard to constrain him from coming in more fully," Silva said.

Silva retired as a college professor roughly 18 years ago. He and his family moved to Fremont.

He'd work at Valmont as a chief mail clerk for 10 years.

Silva studied for four years to become a deacon in the Catholic Church and in October 2010 was ordained.

An associate priest got Silva involved in Hispanic ministry.

At first, Silva didn't know how well that would work, because he didn't speak Spanish.

But he began attending — even though he felt unqualified — and found acceptance.

"The Hispanic community is so open and so warm and so forgiving of mistakes and embraced me so totally that I felt very, very comfortable and I became a member of

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Living a very full life

Fremont woman keeps busy helping others at Friendship center

TAMMY REAL-MCKEIGHAN
News Editor

In her backyard, Laura Ueberrhein keeps a piece of her past and a reminder of a close call.

The Fremont woman was about 12 years old when she planned to use the dump rake on her family's dairy farm near Wahoo. The old-time equipment has a seat and a rake mounted on two wheels and is used to gather dry hay into piles.

One summer afternoon, Ueberrhein was on the seat and the family's horse, Danny Boy, was ready to pull the rake.

Not everything went as planned.

"He got spooked and he and I went roaring down the lane and I went off," she said.

Somehow, she wasn't injured.

"It was a miracle," she said. "I may have had scratches, but that was it."

Now 75, Ueberrhein smiles as she recalls that and other memories of the very full life she's lived. She's also among staffers at the Fremont Friendship Center, who work to enhance the quality of life for area residents ages 65 and older.

And that's involved some outside-of-the-box thinking amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ueberrhein was the oldest of her four siblings. Her parents, Paul and Dorothy Rood, had the farm.

Ueberrhein graduated from Wahoo High School in 1963 and went to Nebraska Wesleyan. She was in college when President John F. Kennedy was assassinated.

Like much of the nation, Ueberrhein was shocked when she heard the news that Kennedy had been shot. She ran down to a family room in her dormitory to see television broadcasts.

"It was scary," she said. "It was unbelievable."

She'd have better memories—like when American astronaut Neil Armstrong became the first man to walk on the moon.

She met her future husband,



TAMMY REAL-MCKEIGHAN PHOTOS, FREMONT TRIBUNE

Laura Ueberrhein of Fremont shows one of the pieces of elephant artwork in her home. The local woman says busy with activities and enjoys her collection.

Bob, in the dairy barn during the Saunders County Fair in Wahoo. He'd grown up on a farm, too, and was showing a beef animal.

The Ueberrheins married in December 1965. They'd have two children, Kirk, who lives in Fremont, and Dawn Sukovaty, who lives in Wilber.

In 1967, Laura Ueberrhein began teaching second grade on a temporary certificate in Grand Island, because she didn't yet have her degree.

"I spent nights and summers getting my degree," she said.

She began teaching art to students in first through 12th grades in Henderson in the early 1970s. She did that until about 1974. She tried substitute teaching.

"That wasn't for me," she said.

The Ueberrheins moved to Loveland, Colorado, where they lived for several years, before returning to Nebraska so their children could be closer to their grandparents. The Ueberrheins lived in Mead and she worked for the Wahoo Newspaper.

There, she typed stories and assembled fair books.

In 1984, she began working in the composing department at the

Fremont Tribune. One of her jobs involved cutting out and pasting stories and photos onto newspaper-size sheets of paper. Other workers transferred images of those pages onto metal plates for the presses.

Ueberrhein also did computer work, preparing typed words for advertisements. As technological processes advanced, she and her co-workers built entire ads via computer.

She was at work when the Challenger space shuttle exploded in 1986 and when terrorists slammed planes into the Twin Towers in 2001. She remembers watching news accounts of the attacks on a small black and white television in the composing department.

She'd work at the Tribune for 30 years before retiring. Her spouse worked with low-income housing in Hooper before he retired.

After his retirement, he needed some socialization, she said.

"We saw in the paper that the Fremont Friendship Center was having line dance classes so we started attending," she said. "We did line dance classes and we played cards and all the activities."



Fremont Friendship staffers Norma Hagerty, left, and Laura Ueberrhein, sack up a hot meal as part of the Grab and Go Meals program offered via the Eastern Nebraska Office on Aging.



Laura Ueberrhein and her dog, Oscar, enjoy a quiet moment on the couch in her Fremont home.

About three years ago, she began working part time at the center. She calls numbers and distributes bingo prizes. She serves as a referee for chair volleyball and, sometimes, plays.

She's part of a team. Laurie Harms is the center manager. Marvin Steffens Meier is assistant manager and Ueberrhein and Norma Hagerty are recreation assistants.

The team had to get creative when the city temporarily closed the center in March.

Since many seniors don't have computers, center staffers had them play bingo via a conference call.

They could have up to 25 seniors on a conference call.

"It was so fun to hear each other's voices and the chatter that was going on. They missed each other, Ueberrhein said.

After bingo, the team bagged Grab and Go meals, distributed in a drive-thru fashion.

These days, mask-wearing seniors come to the center at 9:45 a.m., and observe social distancing.

"We take their temperature and record it," Ueberrhein said.

Four seniors are seated to a table. They eat and play bingo and other games. They wear gloves if playing chair volleyball.

Each Wednesday, they're treated to live entertainment in the main arena of Christensen Field.

Ueberrhein, whose husband died in 2016, keeps busy at the Friendship Center.

At home, she enjoys her collection of elephant figurines and artwork, something she started years ago. It began when she got one after her great-grandmother—who had a collection—died and left them to her descendants. Ueberrhein then began getting them as gifts.

She appreciates the large mammals.

"Elephants are very family oriented and they all work together to make sure the little ones are safe," she said.

Ueberrhein also enjoys her dogs Oscar and Lizzy.

And she likes different kinds of music, including the Statler Brothers and Glenn Miller.

She has a simple philosophy. "Keep busy," she said. "Take one day at a time."

Good advice from someone who's had a busy life—including one wild ride on a dump rake.

Steele

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“From the first time I saw him on TV or heard his songs, I fell in love with him,” she said. “When I was little, I used to pile up the encyclopedias in front of the TV and get the little 8-millimeter camera out and videotape all of his performances on TV so I could watch them over and over.”

Why the continued fascination?

“I think that he is not only the best-looking man that God ever created, there’s never going to be another voice as beautiful and as great as his voice was,” she said.

Now, she follows Elvis Tribute Artists — ETAs — traveling to Iowa, Kansas, Oklahoma, Arizona and California to see them perform and bring his presence to life on the stage. She has posters, plates and a variety of other Elvis memorabilia.

Steele’s also a big fan of Jackson and won the opportunity to eat breakfast with the down-to-earth country star and his family in the early 1990s.

She was nervous at first.

“It wasn’t long and I just felt so at home and he was so relaxed,” she said. “I felt like I was at a friend’s house.”

Steele eventually moved back to Fremont. She’s been working part time at Red’s Welding and Supply in Hooper. About six months ago, she started selling Papparazzi Jewelry over the Internet.

She’s enjoyed taking cruises with her best friend, Diana Blumer of Omaha. COVID-19 has halted the women’s travels for now, but she hopes for more opportunities ahead.

She is a contented soul.

“I’ve gotten to do everything I’ve ever wanted to do in my life,” Steele said. “My life is totally fulfilled. My life is so filled with my (Fremont Alliance) church and my family and my friends. I’m very, very grateful. I have had a very adventurous life. I’m very content and very happy.”

Krueger

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on to teach a variety of subjects, while he taught mostly English and literature.

They returned to the United States, living in Wisconsin, New York and Missouri. He went to graduate school, then taught in colleges and she in elementary schools.

Their son, David, was born in 1966, and son, Karl, in 1969.

In 1979, the Kruegers moved to Blair, where he taught at Dana and she at Blair Community Schools.

Both taught 20 years.

But during the 1992-93 school year, he taught English at Chonbuk University in Jeon-Ju, South Korea. She taught his English lab.

She also worked with an American boy so he’d be ready for second grade when his family returned to the U.S., and Korean children whose family planned to go to Washington State.

Sieg helped Korean pastors improve their English. Brenda taught a children’s Sunday school, starting with four students and ending up with 26.

An organization in Seoul offered weekend trips.

“We got to see a lot of the country,” she said. “I had a friend who would take me hiking in the mountains, usually to Buddhist temples

because they’re in pretty places.”

After retiring, they sold their acreage and moved into Fremont.

Their adventures weren’t over.

They’d applied for short-term teaching through the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

In January 2001, they went to Dumka, India, for three months to help pastors improve their English.

But when they arrived at the church headquarters, the principal of a K-10th grade school thought they’d start teaching students there the next day.

So they taught students. And when the kids went on break, they worked with pastors.

They returned home and in August 2001 went to Slovakia to teach English for two school years.

They were in Slovakia during the 9-11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center. It was a confusing time.

A TV broadcast was in English, but they couldn’t hear it because of the Slovak translation.

In 2003, they returned to Fremont and started traveling.

Since they’d seen many European countries during their time in Slovakia, they opted to visit other places.

They’ve been to Peru, Thailand, Morocco, Egypt, Tunisia, Croatia, Argentina and Chile. They’ve taken Caribbean cruises.

“We do it economically,” she

said. “We don’t spend money on much of anything else. We live a simple life.”

One of Sieg’s favorite places to visit was Machu Picchu, an Incan citadel built in the 1400s in the Andes Mountains of Peru. He liked seeing how the skilled craftsmen cut and put together stones of different sizes to create the structure.

“To think this had been done centuries ago is mindboggling,” he said.

One of Brenda’s favorite places is Morocco, because they spent a night in a tent on the Sahara Desert and rode camels over the sand dunes.

Staying on a camel can be interesting.

“The camel is sitting down and you get on and then the camel raises its back legs and you feel like you’re going to fall forward,” she said.

Then the camel gets up on its front legs and people nearby help tourists stay on the animal.

The ride is smooth.

“You just kind of rock,” she said.

The Kruegers have enjoyed traveling, seeing new things and meeting new people.

“There are wonderful people all over the world that we’ve run into and that’s the reason it’s such a joy for me to travel,” Sieg Krueger said. “The people that we’ve met were so concerned, conscious of us being in a different culture far

from home, and they were very understanding of that and very much wanting us to feel comfortable and at home and to appreciate and enjoy their country.”

He noted something else.

“People are very proud of their country and they’re so happy when you can compliment their country,” he said.

The Kruegers returned in February from seeing the pyramids and the Valley of the Kings in Egypt. They spent four days on a riverboat on the Nile.

“We saw a lot of ruins and Sieg loves ruins,” she said.

Someday, they’d like to see Iceland.

In the meantime, the Kruegers may watch a travel show in which someone visits a place like St. Mark’s square in Venice. It’s not quite the same as being there.

“It’s all very nice to see this guy walking down the street in St. Mark’s Square, but you aren’t surrounded by those buildings, you don’t have the smells, you don’t have the sounds, the textures of the place,” he said. “Watching travel on TV, as far as I’m concerned, is a very poor second best, but sometimes it’s nice to watch because you put yourself back into those places. I enjoy watching those shows and seeing the places I’ve been, but I think that’s because I have so much more in my memory that I can add.”

Silva

From 4

that community,” he said. “Whatever the priests asked me to do as a deacon to serve the Hispanic community, I said ‘yes’ to.”

He’s functioned as the Hispanic deacon at Masses. He has taught Hispanic Catholics to be altar servers. He has facilitated the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA) for Spanish and English speakers who want to become church members.

He baptizes and is a witness at weddings for Anglos and Hispanics. He assists at Quinceañeras, when they have a Mass. A Quinceañera is the celebration of a girl’s 15th birthday, marking her

passage from girlhood to womanhood.

Silva serves as deacon and stands with the priest when the girl is blessed.

“Afterward, I go to the homes and I dance and I eat and, sometimes, I sing,” he said.

Silva has participated in artistic endeavors at this church as well.

About three years ago, a priest at St. Patrick’s purchased an image of The Shroud of Turin, a piece of linen bearing the negative image of a man. Some believe the cloth depicts Jesus and is the burial shroud in which Christ was wrapped after his crucifixion.

Silva and other volunteers built a structure that looked like the interior of a cave. There were dim lights and Gregorian chant music.

At the end of the cave was the illuminated image of the shroud.

The cave was open to viewing during Holy Week and for a few weeks after Easter.

Silva’s pastor has encouraged and given him opportunities to study the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Silva ponders his faith and church involvement.

“I think that at any age, God is calling us to be a participant instead of a spectator,” he said. “That’s why I’m active in the church.”

Outside of the church, he’s involved in other activities.

He just returned from a vacation to the Black Hills of South Dakota, where he was born and raised. He goes back to see relatives and friends and goes fishing

and canoeing. He sometimes uses a canoe he built about 35 years ago.

In the Fremont, he does drawing and sketching. He visits friends.

Because he’s retired, he handles tasks such as shopping, mailing packages and taking cars in for oil changes. He cooks most of the meals. He and his wife eat at 7 p.m. and he heads to bed by 8:30 p.m.

He’s up early in the morning to pray and he heads to the church where he serves as a deacon at the 6:30 a.m. Mass.

The Silvas have three children and a grandchild and the couple is blessed with good health.

With another busy day on the horizon, Silva notes this:

“I’m very content with my life right now.”

Keeping a memory alive

TAMMY REAL-MCKEIGHAN
News Editor

Walk into Bob Marsh's house and you'll have no trouble guessing the name of his favorite musician.

It's the house of all things Elvis.

Elvis plates fill the walls like colorful polka dots. There are Elvis pictures, posters and puzzles, cups, coasters and comic books.

Man's recalls how he started collecting Elvis memorabilia

Tonight" and a red Sesame Street Elmo — decked out in a sparkly white Elvis-style jumpsuit — sings "Blue Suede Shoes."

Elvis dolls and bobbleheads are reminiscent of an earlier era.

And there's the purple bowling ball with the photo of a young Elvis and his signature.



TAMMY REAL-MCKEIGHAN, FREMONT TRIBUNE

Bob Marsh of Fremont stands near just some of the Elvis memorabilia in his house. He holds a purple bowling ball with a photograph of a young Elvis and the singer's signature.

One of Marsh's prize possessions is a print of artist Thomas Kincaid's snowy scene of Graceland — the King's home — at Christmas.

Marsh's trek into Elvis fandom began years ago when he was a teenager.

He remembers seeing Elvis Presley on the popular Milton Berle and Ed Sullivan television shows.

History would record that critics panned

Elvis' performances.

But teenagers like Marsh loved his music and bought his records.

"I had a record player and my mom and dad started yelling at me to turn it down," the Fremont man said.

Marsh, now 73, said he remembers skating with girls at the local roller rink while Elvis tunes played. Elvis songs played on the sound system of a store where he later worked.

"Elvis was an idol to me," Marsh said. "I liked his clothes and the way he combed his hair."

Marsh was married and had a son, Chris, when he got tickets to an Elvis concert in Omaha.

But Marsh was badly injured in a car accident.

At the time, his dad was helping him tow a car. The men had stopped the vehicles and Marsh was working with the chain in between the two when a third vehicle hit the back end of the second car.

Both of Marsh's legs were broken.

He didn't get to go to the concert.

Time passed.

Marsh and his wife had a second son, Russ.

And Marsh continued to be an Elvis fan.

Besides memorabilia, Marsh has Elvis records, cassettes and CDs. His favorite songs

include "Can't Help Falling in Love" and "Are You Lonesome Tonight?"

Perhaps his all-time favorite is "My Way," which tells of a man looking back on a life full of good and bad, who at the end, says he's lived life as he wanted.

"It kind of represents all of us in a way," Marsh said.

Marsh is also a fan of Presley's gospel songs and believes the singer's more recent songs are better than his earlier ones.

"They have more meaning to them," he said.

In August 1977, Marsh and countless numbers of other fans were shocked when Elvis died. Marsh began collecting more Elvis memorabilia.

Marsh has met award-winning Lincoln entertainer Bill Chrastil, who performs Elvis tributes.

He proudly displays a photo of himself with the entertainer.

These days, Marsh knows he's not alone when it comes to appreciating Elvis.

"You mention Elvis and it seems like everybody my age has a memory of Elvis and they remember where they were when they learned he died," Marsh said.

He enjoys keeping the singer's memory alive.

"I like his music," Marsh said. "I listen to his records all the time. It makes me relax."

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Forever heroes, friends

Writer recalls work in sharing stories of World War II vets

TAMMY REAL-MCKEIGHAN
News Editor

It started with a cap.

Joyce Winfield was having coffee in Arby's with fellow writers Cheryl Paden and Nancy Wagner after Veterans Day in 2015. They'd been gathering regularly to support each other's writing endeavors.

"I'm in a slump," Winfield told the other women. "Nothing is of interest to me to write."

Then as Winfield stood to get a second cup of coffee, she saw an older couple in a booth. The man wore a cap that read: "World War II, Korea, Vietnam veteran." Winfield thanked the man for his military service and learned the couple was from Uehling.

She went home, but couldn't get the man's cap out of her mind.

"That man has a story to tell," Winfield told her husband, Doug, also a Vietnam veteran.

She wanted to write the man's story.

Almost five years later, the Fremont woman still marvels at how seeing a cap would launch her on a writing project that became the book: "Forever Heroes: A Collection of World War II Stories from Nebraska Veterans."

The book features the stories of 21 veterans, including two women.

Through her writing, Winfield would meet veterans, who'd become like family, and enjoy the privilege of recording their stories for future generations.

Winfield credits her dad, Bert Gissler, for fostering her love of reading by taking her to Osceola Public Library, where she checked out Nancy Drew and Hardy Boys mysteries.

She became editor of the Osceola High School newspaper.

Winfield planned to major in business when she came to what's now Midland University in the fall of 1970.

But she took a "Writing for Media" class from Professor Marilyn Peterson, who encouraged her to write for The Midland newspaper.

"She became a wonderful mentor to me," Winfield said of Peterson. "I still have a strong relationship with her."

Winfield became a reporter and enjoyed the newspaper staff's camaraderie. She later assumed more leadership roles.

She graduated in 1974 with majors in journalism and secondary education.

Winfield earned a master of arts in communication degree in 1982 from the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

She earned a Ph. D in mass communication

from the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis in 1989.

While working on her Ph. D, was awarded a Foreign Language Area Studies scholarship and lived in Sweden for a year.

Winfield taught at Midland during the 1989-90 school year.

She and Doug married in 1990 and moved to Minnesota, where she taught journalism and English at Cambridge Community College.

The Winfields' home was on Lake Rush and she loved living in Minnesota.

She'd taught there seven years when her mother, Velma, was diagnosed with cancer.

"We could always move back to Minnesota, but you only have one set of parents," Winfield said.

The Winfields moved to Fremont, where she became chair of Midland's journalism department. She enjoyed working with students and after many graduated and got jobs, they'd call or email Winfield with their thanks.

"It's such a rewarding thing to know that you had something to do with their success," she said.

She resigned in 2007 and launched her own business, "Writing Resources," focusing on writing, editing and proofreading.

Eight years later, Winfield was in Arby's when she saw the man with the cap.

She didn't get his name.

The next morning, Winfield met writer, photographer and world traveler Dean Jacobs of Fremont for coffee.

Both wondered how hard it would be to find a veteran of three wars in Uehling.

She'd find out.

The Winfields went to a convenience store in Uehling, where three men were drinking coffee. She asked if they knew a three-war veteran.

They did.

His name is Alvin Cooper.

Another man had the Winfields follow him to the Coopers' home. She set up a time to interview Cooper.

She only planned to write Cooper's story, but fellow writers encouraged Winfield to interview and tell more veterans' stories.

Winfield began seeking veterans. She interviewed her first, Emory Johnson, in January 2016.

As she interviewed veterans, she'd hear stories their own children hadn't heard.

"Since leaving teaching, meeting these heroes was the most exhilarating, emotional time for me," Winfield said. "I would sit at the dining room table and type and I'd have tears in my eyes. What

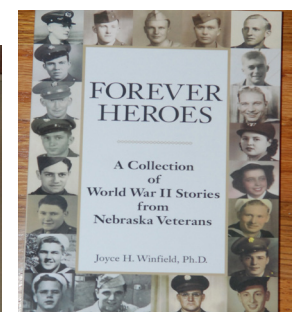


TAMMY REAL-MCKEIGHAN PHOTOS, FREMONT TRIBUNE

Fremonter Joyce Winfield stands near a poster which shows the cover of her book: "Forever Heroes: A Collection of World War II Stories from Nebraska Veterans." The book came out in 2016.



Author Joyce Winfield of Fremont credits her dad, Bert Gissler, with encouraging her love of reading by taking her to the Osceola library. Gissler was an end for the Nebraska Cornhuskers from 1941-44.



Joyce Winfield's book, "Forever Heroes: A Collection of World War II Stories from Nebraska Veterans," came out in 2016. Winfield formed warm bonds with the veterans and their families.

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PRIME | SPONSORED IN PART BY NYE HEALTH SERVICES

Serving his nation

Man was awarded two Distinguished Flying Crosses during Vietnam

TAMMY REAL-MCKEIGHAN
News Editor

For years, Jerry Knoell didn't talk about his military service in Vietnam.

So few people knew the U.S. Air Force sergeant had earned two Distinguished Flying Crosses and five Air Medals.

Knoell hasn't been one to recount the close calls or the loss of a good friend.

The first time he was ever thanked for his service was when his oldest granddaughter, Madison Rall of Omaha, took him to a Veteran's Day school breakfast when she was in kindergarten.

"She gave me a little lapel flag," said Knoell, who lives in Fremont. "That was the first I was ever recognized as a Vietnam veteran. That was very nice."

Since then, all of his 14 grandchildren have invited him to veterans' events, designed to provide recognition to those who've faithfully served their nation.

Knoell was born and grew up in Fremont. He graduated from Fremont High School in 1967 and went into the Air Force the next year.

He was trained to load aircraft so they weren't too nose- or tail-heavy.

He'd load and fly aboard planes with all sorts of food, supplies, passengers, wounded and deceased military personnel in Southeast Asia. Later in his career, he was involved in hauling a nuclear bomb in Europe.

Knoell would go to CCK Air Base in Taiwan.

From there, he'd fly shuttles aboard a C-130 military aircraft in Vietnam for 15 to 18 days at a time and then return to Taiwan for about a week.

On Nov. 7, 1969, the young sergeant and crew flew into Katum Airfield in Vietnam for an emergency evacuation of a combat unit amid intense ground fire.

There were rockets and mortars.

The aircraft was noisy and Knoell could hear the ground fire, but concentrated on getting the plane loaded and leaving. A vehicle was driven into the aircraft.

Then some American soldiers approached the plane.

"Six or seven or eight guys came up and said, 'We're the last guys walking. Can we get out? Can we get a ride?'" Knoell recalled. "I didn't tell the pilot. I just said, 'Yeah, get on' and once the load was secure,



TAMMY REAL-MCKEIGHAN PHOTOS, FREMONT TRIBUNE

Nancy and Jerry Knoell are shown in their home in Fremont. They enjoy their grandchildren and hope to do more traveling in the future.

I told the pilot, 'We're ready to go' and we took off."

A citation accompanying the Distinguished Flying Cross awarded to Knoell said the crew had the support of a forward air controller, fighter and helicopter gunship due to the intense ground fire.

Two aircraft were shot down.

It commended the then-19-year-old Knoell for "professional competence, aerial skill and devotion to duty."

After 15 months, Knoell rotated back to the United States and was stationed at Pope Air Force Base in North Carolina and was assigned to a unit flying in Europe. He saw many countries including Germany, Spain, Greece, Italy and Turkey. He saw North Africa and islands in the Mediterranean Sea.

While there, he was involved in the transport of a disarmed nuclear bomb.

He is unassuming in describing his role.

"It was just another mission — something you load and off-load. There was a courier with it — a guy rode along with it. I just moved it from one base to another," he said.

Knoell extended his enlistment and re-

turned to Taiwan and continued shuttle missions. This time, he and the crew flew out of Cam Ranh Bay and Tan Son Nhut air bases in Vietnam.

By then, it was 1971.

Knoell had some pleasant flights like when he went to Kathmandu, Nepal for a week. On that flight, his plane carried supplies for the aircraft that American Vice President Spiro Agnew was aboard. Knoell attended a vice-presidential dinner in Kathmandu.

He also was in the backup plane for a Bob Hope USO show. He got autographs from girls in the show.

Other flights weren't so pleasant.

In 1972, Knoell was a staff sergeant aboard a C-130 loadmaster for the 6th Aerial Port Squadron at An Loc, Vietnam.

He was involved in airdrops three times in late April and early May. Three aircraft went out each time.

The citation for the second Distinguished Flying Cross that Knoell earned described the April 28th mission as a nighttime, low-level emergency airdrop of critically needed ammunition and supplies. The drop was



This is one of the Distinguished Flying Crosses that Jerry Knoell earned during his service in Vietnam.

made to a "besieged concentration of allied forces in a heavily defended hostile area."

Knoell remembers the anti-aircraft fire. There was a lot of it.

"You go in, tree-top level," he said. "You raise up to 650 feet over the drop zone and airdrop the cargo. It was about three football fields — the size that we had to hit."

The citation describes Knoell's skill and bravery.

"With complete disregard for his own personal safety, in spite of heavy anti-aircraft fire and intense automatic weapons activity, sergeant Knoell performed his aircrew duties with exact precision, resulting in a completely successful mission," the citation states.

One of the three aircraft on the mission was shot down.

Two days later — on May 1 — Knoell and a crew made another airdrop again at night. Three aircraft went out and all came back.

On May 3, three aircraft made another airdrop. Two aircraft, including Knoell's, returned.

Please see **KNOELL**, Page 11

PRIME | SPONSORED IN PART BY NYE HEALTH SERVICES

Through life's seasons

Fremont reflects on community service, farming and family

TAMMY REAL-MCKEIGHAN
News Editor

Alan Thomsen remembers 1964 as a sad year for his family.

It was the year he and his wife, Lorene, lost their 4-year-old daughter, Linda, to leukemia. Lorene's dad, William, died that year as well.

And the Thomsens' crops were hailed out.

Like many hardy Nebraskans, they persevered.

Now 84, Thomsen has persisted through a host of life's seasons and smiles about being able to overcome the shyness of his early years.

It's hard to imagine the articulate man with a sharp memory was ever shy.

He credits others for helping him.

"Eighty percent of it was not my doing," he said. "Somebody else gave me the idea or the push to say, 'You can do this,' and had faith in me to get it done."

What he's achieved is a lifetime of community service in various arenas. From choirs to boards to veterans' groups, Thomsen has led an active life and plans to keep going.

Thomsen grew up on a farm, northwest of Fremont. Two older brothers died at birth. A sister died of leukemia at 16.

His parents, Elmer and Mona, sacrificed to buy him an accordion. He played with the Fritz Poppe Accordion Band and later taught lessons.

In 1953, he graduated from Hooper High School.

"I toyed with the idea of going to Dana College, but I had a younger brother (Lowell) and he got all the brains in the family and I decided that I should think about being a farmer," he said, smiling.

But before becoming a farmer, Thomsen and some classmates volunteered to be in the military. He entered the U.S. Army in October 1954.

He was sent to clerk-typist school and then to Hammelburg, Germany, where he



TAMMY REAL-MCKEIGHAN PHOTOS, FREMONT TRIBUNE

Alan Thomsen of Fremont pauses to reflect on a busy life that's been full of community service.

was a Jeep driver for the battalion supply officer and typed requisitions for supplies.

Thomsen's unit served on the border between East and West Germany.

It was the time of the Cold War and tensions were high between the West and the Soviet Union.

East Germans were still trying to escape from the Communist regime and most were killed as they tried to slip into West Germany.

Thomsen turned 19 years old shortly after arriving in Germany and wasn't afraid while there.

But after returning home and reading more about the history of that area, he realized how dangerous the situation was.

Thomsen became a company clerk while in Germany. At one point, Thomsen hoped his fiancée, Lorene Ruether, would be able to visit Germany and meet her grandparents.

That didn't happen.

Lorene would have had to travel via ship

and her dad didn't think that was a place for a young woman.

Thomsen came home in 1956. He and Lorene married in 1957 and started farming soybeans, corn and milo.

They'd have three daughters, Diane Harpster, Linda, and Gayle Jessen.

His involvement in community service began early.

Thomsen has been singing in church choirs for 73 years—first at Bluffs Trinity in rural Fremont, then Redeemer Lutheran in Hooper and, most recently, Fremont's First Lutheran.

After his marriage, he was elected and served numerous years on the Maple Township board.

His township board tenure was about over when he was elected to the District 88 School Board.

Thomsen won the election against Uehling resident Fred Olson by just six or seven votes.

He asked if Olson wanted a recount.



COURTESY PHOTO

Alan Thomsen is shown in this photo taken when he was in the military.



Alan Thomsen, right, of Fremont is shown with his grandson, Mark Harpster, on Saturday afternoon.

Olson didn't, instead saying he was glad Thomsen was elected. Thomsen served for about 10 years.

Thomsen got involved in farming organizations, too.

He served on the board of the Nebraska Farm Business Association, which worked to help farmers improve their skills.

Following in his dad's footsteps, he was elected to the board of directors for Farmers Mutual Insurance for Dodge County and became an agent.

As a farmer, Thomsen's days could grow very long. If he was irrigating, he'd get up at 4 a.m. and shut the irrigation off at 11 p.m.

He ponders those days.

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Thomsen

From 10

“You’d be surprised the noises you hear when you’re along Maple Creek and you’re out there changing the water and you hear these screeches and I think it was probably bobcats,” he said. “I never ran into any of those animals, but I sure heard them.”

Thomsen’s work with veterans groups began in the late 1960s when he joined the Veterans of Foreign Wars post at Nicker-son.

He served as part of the color guard at several funerals.

Thomsen pulls a card from his wallet just to double-check that he’s been an American Legion member for 33 years.

He served on the Bluffs Cemetery board and put little American flags by veterans’ graves for decades. There are 32 graves there now.

Thomsen’s other involvement has included terms on the church councils of Bluffs Trinity and Redeemer Lutheran churches. He’s been a member of the Eagles Club in Fremont, where he served on steak night, and later sold light bulbs as part of the former Lions Club in Hooper.

Why become part of so many clubs?

“It was an opportunity to learn and meet people after I got over my initial 20-some years of being rather shy,” he said.

Thomsen said he had people to help with farming so he could be in the groups—and he learned a lot.

Looking back, Thomsen remembers sad and good times.

He recalls when his father-in-law died in early 1964 and little Linda said, “I hope when I die and go to heaven, I see grandpa there.”

The Thomsens would face other difficulties.

Thomsen said Lorene was diagnosed in the 1970s with agoraphobia, which he describes as a tendency to want to avoid other people. Clinically speaking, it’s defined as a fear of entering crowded places or of leaving one’s home.

The Thomsens went to a specialist in Colorado Springs, Colorado, where Lorene learned to manage the condition and confront her fears head-on.

Although she never got to meet her German grandparents, Lorene wanted to go to Germany to see other family members. So with help from her husband and others, she worked to be around an airport and crowds.

“That helped tremendously,” he said, adding that she eventually made the trip.

She later directed kids who hoed corn out of soybean fields on the farm. Thomsen said he believes his wife, now 85, has done quite well.

In addition, the Thomsens have both survived cancer and COVID-19. He had a mild stroke last year.

What advice does he have for people going through tough times?

“They’re going to come from time to time and we’d better be prepared to work our way through it and I think that’s where your church has an awful lot of support for your state of mind,” he said.

These days, he’s looking toward the future. The Thomsens plan to move to Nye Square.

He looks forward to singing in the church choir again when the COVID pandemic subsides and he’s still part of the veterans’ organizations.

“I’m going to keep on doing what I’m doing for as long as I can—meet new people and enjoy the people I meet,” he said.

Winfield

From 8

they saw. What they endured. It just proves that war is hell.”

Winfield wanted to finish the book by Veterans Day 2016. That December marked the 75th anniversary of the bombing of Pearl Harbor, which brought the United States into World War II.

Winfield pushed herself hard to complete the book by Veterans Day.

“Forever Heroes” was the only title she ever considered.

“That’s what all veterans are,” she said.

After the book came out in November 2016, Winfield had speaking engagements. She had 10 veterans come to one at Bergan High School.

She told students that they might read about the Battle of the Bulge in a history book, but Dale Milligan — one of the “Forever Heroes” — was a machine gunner in that battle.

After the program, students walked single file and shook each of the veteran’s hands.

Winfield would have another speaking engagement, but not before she’d face a battle of her own.

May Museum would host a reception for all the veterans in December.

The day before the reception, Winfield learned she had breast cancer.

“If I hadn’t pushed myself, if the book didn’t come out when it did, it still wouldn’t be out, so it was a God thing. God gave me the strength to keep going, to get it done,” she said.

On Jan. 4, 2017, she had a lumpectomy. She’d learn the cancer hadn’t spread. She’d have 20 radiation treatments, but didn’t need chemotherapy.

In the fall of 2018, she contracted a rare form of pneumonia. She had extreme fatigue and a dry cough.

“I sat, literally, on the sofa for three months,” she said. “I couldn’t go anywhere. I felt horrible. One week, I saw four different doctors.”

Three months of steroids

would help.

In November 2019, she had shoulder surgery.

These days, Winfield is enjoying good health.

She appreciates her husband’s support.

“I am so fortunate to have had Doug by my side during these health challenges and I’m so fortunate to have Doug by my side now when I am healthy,” she said.

Winfield also appreciates the connections she’s made with the veterans.

“I remember writing in each of the veterans’ personal copy of the book that when I first met them, they were my ‘Forever Heroes.’ Now, I consider them my ‘Forever Friends,’” she said.

The bond is special.

“I love them all,” she said.

“They feel like family. They could all be my dad. They’re of that era. Their kids could be my siblings.”

The roughest part has been losing the veterans. Men and women, who were in their early 20s in the 1940s, are in their 90s now.

And only six of the 21 she interviewed are still alive.

Each loss has been tough.

Winfield is glad she’s been able to record their stories.

“I really believe that people need to know more about these veterans than just what you may read in a history book,” she said. “Those are not personal stories. These men and women had their job to do and to hear them relay what they did, how and when they did it, it’s so much more meaningful. And to think I know these people now. That, to me, just takes it up a higher level.”

Winfield can’t visit the veterans due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but she knows they’re doing OK.

“One of the told me, ‘Joyce, I lived through World War II and I’ll live through this,’” Winfield said.

Keene Memorial Library has a copy of Winfield’s book. Readers interested in buying a copy may call her at 402-727-7098.

Knoell

From 9

But the aircraft carrying his good friend, Joe Hopper of Kentucky, didn’t make it back.

Knoell grows quiet when talking about his friend.

“He was a good guy,” Knoell said.

Even after an aircraft was shot down on the first night, Knoell thought about the possibility that he might not come back.

“Somebody’s number is going to come up, but lucky — mine didn’t,” he said.

Knoell spent the rest of his tour doing shuttle missions. He completed his service in October 1972. He came home and later began working in the masonry business with Roger Chisholm. He did construction work and poured concrete.

He married and he and his wife, Diane, had three children, Stacy, Jeremy and Chris. The children were ages 7 and 5 years old and about 17 months when their mom died in a car accident.

Knoell credits family with helping him.

Years later, his daughter was a junior in high school and a young man named Thad Gossett was a senior when they took Knoell and his future wife, Nancy Gossett, out on a blind date. She had been divorced with three children for 18 years.

Jerry and Nancy dated for about six years before marrying in 1998.

Nancy said her husband doesn’t talk much about his war experiences.

“So when Madison invited him (to the Veterans breakfast), it was special,” she said. “Now, all of the grandchildren have invited him to different events for Veteran’s Day.”

The Knoells love all their grandchildren. The youngest, Jace Knoell, has faced his own battles.

He was a baby when diagnosed in September 2013 with neuroblastoma, a type of cancer that occurs in young children.

Now 8 years old, Jace is battling a second bout of cancer and a sixth round of chemotherapy is scheduled.

The boy is a third-grader at Bergan Elementary School.

“They’re pretty good buds,” Nancy said of Jace and his grandpa.

Jerry, Jeremy and Jace hunt and fish together.

Knoell retired about three years ago. Now, 71 years old, he enjoys working on a cabin on an island in the Platte River.

In January, the Knoells plan to go to Portland, Texas, and spend six weeks with Thad. It’s a trip they’ve enjoyed for the last few years.

“It is nice,” Knoell said.

Although COVID-19 has been halting many people’s travel plans, the Knoells eventually would like to do more traveling — even though Jerry has been to many places.

“I’ve been a long ways east and a long ways west,” he said. “If anything, I wouldn’t mind seeing Alaska.”



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