



VOLUME 23
FALL 2021/
WINTER 2022

THE BRIDGE

Bridging Generations with Ageless Friendship

Friends Across the Ages
Nursing Home Volunteer Network

We're Back!

March 11, 2020 was the date of our last regular visit with a group of volunteers inside one of the nursing homes we serve. We played poker with the residents of Parklands that morning—and although there was more hand sanitizer around than usual, things were mostly the same as they had always been.

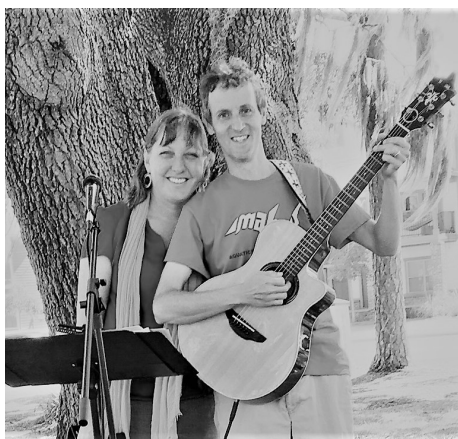


The next day, everything changed; all the nursing homes shut down to visitors. However, over a year and a half later, after a little back and forth, we are starting to be allowed back in the facilities on a more regular basis. During November, our group at Parklands was able to visit every Wednesday, starting with a poker game on the porch...just like old times.

Steve teamed up with our resident friend Elsie, who has not changed a bit. True to form, they weren't winning anything, but they led the pack in their level of cutting up and trash talking. Everyone was roaring with laughter, and for a brief shining moment, if it were not for the surgical masks, we almost imagined that the pandemic had never happened. There we were with our old friends, playing Wednesday morning poker as we have for years.

One of the biggest gifts is to be able to walk down the halls of the nursing home again! For a few months now, we have been allowed limited porch visits, but to actually walk around and stop by rooms has been a real treat. Is that someone we recognize? Yes, I think that's Helen! And there is Brenda, right where she was before... she has not forgotten us.

Moving forward, we have a few caroling events planned for December and will be distributing 200-300 gifts and cards to several facilities. We have begun interviewing new volunteers, and, if all goes well, will be reopening our one-to-one friendly visitation program in January. Flexibility will be the name of the game as we adjust to new procedures, and possibly deal with periodic shut downs if Covid comes back into any of the facilities.



But we are feeling hopeful, and determined. It is clear that now, more than ever, we are needed. As another resident friend named Margaret put it, "I'm just so glad to see you. I have been so lonely for so long, I forgot what it feels like to not be lonely."

We are glad to be back to alleviate loneliness, and share smiles and hugs with our nursing home friends once more. We have missed them so much!

Friends Across the Ages Book

Throughout the pandemic, we have been working on putting together a book of the best stories from the past 23 years of *Friends Across the Ages*. The process of getting it published has taken longer than we anticipated, but we are proud to announce it will be available soon.

With over fifty stories of friendship—heartwarming, poignant, humorous, instructive, and inspiring—this book is arranged into ten chapters, each highlighting a different “building block” of friendship. The reader will witness the healing power of communication, music, laughter, celebrating, and just being present with someone.

Below, you will find a sneak preview—one of the shorter stories from the book—from a chapter about the importance of celebrating with our friends. We hope you enjoy it!

Worth the Wait

By Allison Blay

*An excerpt from the forthcoming
Friends Across the Ages book*

“My birthday is February the 5th, 19 and 19,” Annie Mae would often inform us, and then laugh with that engaging, playful chuckle of hers. I’ve talked about Annie Mae before, but it’s worth describing her again: a tiny lady twisted with arthritis and confined to her child-sized wheelchair, she always had a flash of color about her. She usually wore a rainbow or scarlet knit cap and a sunshine-yellow or magenta sweater, the long elegant fingernails on her twisted hands painted fuchsia, fire engine red, or sparkling sea-foam blue. Growing up in small-town Florida, times were tough, and for 79 years, she had never had a birthday party. So as her 80th birthday approached, we conspired to give her one.

Annie Mae Townsend had never married, and her brothers and parents were buried in the old family Townsend cemetery out in Campville. But she had cousins aplenty, and many of them came out that day: Townsends from Cross Creek, Hawthorne, Micanopy, Grove Park...tiny cracker communities south and east of us. Steve and I had met only one or two of the Townsend cousins before, but most of them had heard of us: a couple of young volunteers at the nursing home who had become very close to Annie Mae. They accepted us as part of the family.

We all filed out to the little backyard behind the facility. February in Florida can be the most beautiful time of the year when it wants to be, and that day it cooperated—cool but not cold, with a clear, rosy sunset sky complementing the pink balloons we had

brought. We pushed Annie Mae up to the end of the rough wooden picnic table and started passing her pieces of fried chicken on paper plates. Annie Mae, who weighed maybe 80 pounds, usually ate like a bird, picking at her dinner and trying a bite or two. But today was different.

“You want another piece, Annie Mae?”

“Yep.”

“Another one?”

“Sure do.”

“You got room for one more?”

“Mm-hmm.” And the mischievous chuckle bubbled forth again.

One hefty helping of potato salad, two buttery biscuits and three cups of saccharine sweet tea later, she was finally ready for the pink-frosted chocolate cake. We all gathered round and sang to her and then helped her blow out all 80 candles. She looked up at us with her sweet smile, content at last. It had been worth the wait.



Annie Mae Townsend in 2001

Congratulations, Vi!



On November 12th and 13th, a play called *Stirring the Leaves* was performed for the bicentennial of the small town of Micanopy, located just south of Gainesville. It was written and directed by M. Violet Asmuth, Ph. D., age 92.

Vi has been an important part of the *Friends Across the Ages* family since about 2004. She volunteered with us for many years and served on our board of directors and as a volunteer coordinator. She retired from those positions some time ago, but since then, she has come back to

help us with some special events.

Stirring the Leaves is a collection of historical fiction scenes based on true events during the 200 years of Micanopy's history. It was produced by the Micanopy Historical Society, and performed in the Thrasher Warehouse behind the Micanopy Historical Museum. It weaves together scenes from Micanopy's history in a creative way that is sensitive to all the people who have lived in that area, beginning with the Timucuan people, then the Spanish explorers, the Seminole people, and later both black and white settlers.

Vi has long been an inspiration to us—one of those people who cause us to say "I'd like to be like her when I grow up!" Watching her play only reinforced this, and demonstrated that at 92, one can live with creativity, energy and vitality, and offer something precious to the next generation.

WE WOULD LIKE TO THANK AND RECOGNIZE THESE SPECIAL "FRIENDS OF *FRIENDS*"

FINANCIAL SUPPORTERS 12/20-11/21

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— \$250 AND UP

Tom & Kathleen Benton
Dennis & Joan Blay
Anonymous from Colorado
Francois & Susan Burianek
John & Anne Curtis
— in memory of Chloe
Erin & Thomas Desmarais
Daniel & Virginia Eckert
Monet & Jeff Fitzsimmons
Nancy & Gary Meffe
Erika & Kyle Robinson
Sharon & Tom Stebbins
Benjamin Walker
Ken & Susan Wilder

Marianne & Michael Hawkins

Linda Johnson—in memory of
Annie Mae Townsend

Sandy Laipis
Huy & Anna Pham
Ann & Bill Preston
Duffy Ronayne
Allison & Jason Shinn
Ayola Singh-Kreitz
Leah Spellman
Betsy Thewes
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PATRONS — \$100 AND UP

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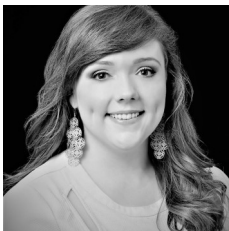
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IN MEMORY OF

AGNES BIERBAUM

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President's Message

Cassie Cooper

The end of every year often inspires us to reflect on past accomplishments and future goals. Today, as I reflect on the hardships that many of us, including nursing home residents, staff, and volunteers have overcome, I feel encouraged knowing that despite tragic circumstances, the world is still full of individuals ready to show up and do good. My hope is that all of you feel encouraged as well, knowing that your astounding efforts during the midst of a pandemic did not go unnoticed.

As this year comes to an end, *Friends Across the Ages* is hard at work prepping for a new year full of new beginnings and new volunteers. We want to sincerely thank our donors, volunteers, and friends for their continued support and involvement. Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays to you all!

Welcome, Piper!

A big welcome to our newest little "Friend Across the Ages"—Piper, born in September. She plans to volunteer with her parents, board members Heather and John Benton. Heather first began volunteering with *Friends Across the Ages* when she was a college student, back in September of 2006. She has continued to be actively involved in *Friends* for the past 15 years, and currently serves as our board secretary. Her husband, John Benton has been a member of our board for the past couple of years as well. We feel so blessed to have Heather, John and Piper as part of our *Friends Across the Ages* family!



This brings the total number of members of our "Friends Junior Board" to five. Other members are Frances Mitchell (1.5), Will Mitchell (6), Annie Blay (12), and Peter Blay (almost 16). Heather used to babysit Peter and Annie when they were small; it's amazing that now they are old enough to help babysit the younger children!

It is a privilege to be able to share this journey with our children, and one of the things we have most been looking forward to as the nursing homes reopen is bringing our children back into the facilities to visit with our friends. With their help, we are truly able to "bridge generations with ageless friendship"—all the generations.

December Activities

Sunday, Dec. 5th, 2pm: *Friends Across the Ages* Holiday Party

Share holiday cheer and make gifts and cards for our nursing home friends! For details contact info@acrosstheages.org

Sunday, Dec. 19th, 2pm:
Caroling at North Florida Rehab

Sunday, Dec. 20th, 2pm:
Caroling at Plaza Health and Rehab

Wednesday, Dec. 22nd, 10am:
Caroling at Parklands Care Center

We will be distributing over 300 gifts and cards to nursing homes. There are many ways to help! For details contact info@acrosstheages.org

Volunteer Anniversaries

Summer and Fall 2021

15 years

Donna, Kyle, and Chase
Moore—NFRSC
Heather Benton—NFRSC

7 years

John Hobbs—Parklands
Paul Volpe—NFRSC

3 years

Sharon Stebbins—NFRSC
Janet Wise—Parklands

2 years

Jim Wright—Parklands

Board of Directors

Cassie Cooper—President
John Hobbs—Vice President
Heather Benton—Secretary
Steve Blay—Treasurer
Allison Blay—Network Facilitator

John Benton Andrew Mitchell
Robbie Curry Kim Mitchell
George Hamilton



For more information about
Friends Across the Ages, please visit our website:
FriendsAcrosstheAges.org
or contact us at: info@acrosstheages.org