



VOLUME 22  
SPRING/SUMMER  
2021

# THE BRIDGE

*Bridging Generations with Ageless Friendship*

Friends Across the Ages  
Nursing Home Volunteer Network

## Light at the End of the Tunnel

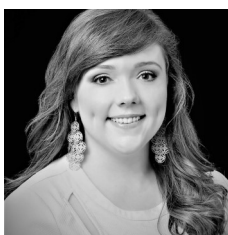
Over a year has passed in which we have not been able to regularly visit our friends in the nursing homes, due to the Covid-19 pandemic. As challenging as this pandemic has been for all of us, we know those in nursing homes have been among the hardest hit. We have done what we can to reach out to them from a distance through letters, gifts, and phone calls, but it is not the same.

However, we are happy to report that although we have not yet been able to resume our regular volunteering efforts, things are looking more and more hopeful. Nearly all of the nursing home residents and staff have had the opportunity to receive the Covid-19 vaccine if they want it. And as of April 5, all Floridians age 16 and up are eligible to receive the Covid-19 vaccine.

And more good news: on March 22, 2021, Emergency Order 21-001 was released rescinding state visitation restrictions for long-term care facilities in Florida. We are still learning what this means for us as volunteers, but we hope to have more information in the coming weeks.



In the meantime, a few of our volunteers have been able to make appointments to visit specific residents. We have still been able to do outdoor serenades every few weeks at Parklands, and even did a small poker party out on the back porch (see related story inside). We held our first in-person gathering for volunteers on May 1 (picture above). Hopefully, it won't be long before we'll be able to do much more. We miss our nursing home friends very much and we know they miss us, too.



### President's Message

Cassie Cooper

Our board members and volunteers have spent much of the last year navigating different ways to connect with residents without physically being able to visit them. Through creativity, generous donations, and dedication we were able to show our love and support to those in our local nursing homes despite being in the midst of a pandemic. While closely following all CDC and facility guidelines, some of us have recently been able to participate in in-person visits once again.

In my first visit back to the facility I visit personally, I was incredibly nervous. The unknown can be scary, and I was unsure if the residents I spent time with prior to the pandemic would still be there after all they have gone through. Thankfully, my sweet friends were still there, and just as I remember them.

Moving forward, my hope is that other volunteers will begin to step back into their regular visitations as permitted. Resident and volunteer safety supersedes all. But being able to see our friends again is a feeling I cannot describe. I am thankful.

# Parklands Parties—Then and Now

By Allison Blay

Our last visit to *Parklands Care Center* before the pandemic was March 11, 2020. Our small crew of regular volunteers showed up for our usual Wednesday visit. We held one of our regular poker parties out on the back porch. Little did we know how things were about to change, and for how long. The next day, Parklands, and all the other area nursing homes, closed to outside visitors.

For six long weeks, we had very little contact with our friends at Parklands. Then on May 1, 2020, Steve and I and our two kids received permission to do an outdoor concert on the front lawn. We had gotten the idea from our friend Allen, who had organized a series of concerts for the residents the previous year that he called “Jazz on the Green.” However when we tried this, it was hard for the residents to hear us through the windows, and we couldn’t play for the residents in the back of the building, so from then on we shifted to doing window-to-window serenades every few weeks. For about a year, this was our main way of visiting with our Parklands friends.



Finally, on April 21, 2021, we were allowed back in the building for the first time to do another little poker party on the back porch. This time it was just Steve and I, and only four residents participated, spaced far out from one another. But still—it felt oh, so good to be back, and to see our friends like Margaret (left) and Ginny (right).



The following week, on April 30th, Allen organized another “Jazz on the Green” concert, and invited Steve and I and the kids to come visit with the residents while they were outside. He booked another wonderful band to play, and had the residents all spaced out at their own tables, decorated with green table clothes, flowers, and balloons. They were served chicken tenders and fries, and little green cake pops. The staff members wore green t-shirts, and the residents all had green mardi-gras type beads to wear. One of the staff members joined the band for a number—and brought down the house with her powerful voice.



My heart was so full that day, seeing many more of our friends in person for the first time, including my buddy Audrey (pictured with me on left). Covid is not over, but it felt like a well-deserved respite, for residents and staff alike.

After a year of death and fear and isolation, life and love and joy broke through like the sun after a summer thunderstorm.

We are deeply grateful to Allen (pictured with Steve and our kids on right) for all he has done not only for the past year, but for the past decade serving the residents of Parklands. His devotion to bringing joy, laughter, and music to the residents he serves is truly inspirational. He is an unsung hero, and we feel blessed to know him.



## Volunteer Memorial: Agnes Bierbaum

*Friends Across the Ages* recently lost one of its longest running volunteers and supporters: Agnes Bierbaum. She passed away peacefully in March, at the age of 86.

Agnes began volunteering with *Friends* in March of 2001. Every Tuesday she would arrive at what was then called Alachua Nursing Center (now Parklands Care Center) with a basket of fresh-baked goodies with her to share with the residents, so she became known as the “Cookie Lady.” For the first several years, she and her husband Gene were “snowbirds” splitting their time between Florida and New York. During the months when Agnes was in New York, she would send treats of another kind: regular letters for each of the residents she visited, which made them feel so special and loved. Eventually Agnes and Gene settled in Gainesville full time, so Agnes volunteered year round. She continued until she and Gene moved once more in late 2016 to be closer to their children in Central Florida.

One of the things we admired most about Agnes was her ability to relate to people of various ages and backgrounds. She made the residents she visited feel valued and respected, and at the same time was always ready to be playful and display her wonderful sense of humor. She had a gift for getting through to even the grumpiest residents, through her never failing kindness and love.

Besides cookies, Agnes often brought other things to help with her visits with the residents. One of Agnes’ earliest friendships at the nursing home was with a (female) resident named Willie. Willie was suspicious of Agnes at first, and wondered why anyone would want to visit her. One day, Willie said, “Well, as long as you are here, read me something out of your Bible.” Agnes had to admit she did not bring a Bible with her everywhere! But after that she brought it each week and read to Willie.

Agnes became close friends with another lady named Verlene through the gift of cheesy puffs. One day, Verlene was sitting in the hall and said to Agnes “I sure would like some corn curls.” Agnes figured out she meant cheesy puffs, and brought them the next week. This became so much a trademark that one time we gave Agnes a bag of “corn curls” as a recognition for her years of volunteering (see picture right). Agnes continued to visit with Verlene every week for years until Verlene passed away.



Farm memories were another avenue of friendship for Agnes, who had grown up on a farm, just as many of the residents had. Music was still another language of love for Agnes, who played her violin/fiddle for the residents sometimes, and other times played the mountain dulcimer for them along with her husband, Gene. They would play classic songs that the residents could relate to. One of her favorite songs to play was called “Aura Lee”—an old Civil War tune that was adapted for Elvis Presley’s song “Love Me Tender.” She would ask the residents who wrote it, and when they all replied “ELVIS!” she would educate them on the song’s true history.

Besides nursing homes, Agnes volunteered in several other ways, and wrote a book about her experiences, called *Reaching Out to Others* in order to encourage others to volunteer. She also wrote some children’s stories,



some based on things she had learned from her nursing home resident friends. One in particular stands out, called “Skunk for Dinner.” This was based on a tale her friend Thomas Jones (pictured with Agnes at left) shared with her—in which he really did cook a skunk!

Agnes truly embodied the spirit of *Friends Across the Ages*. We learned so much from her, and hope to continue her legacy of friendship and love for many years to come. Special thanks to those who have made donations to *Friends* in her memory: her husband Gene Bierbaum, Shirley Brodbeck, Betty S. Green, and Christine Myers.



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## ***Friends Across the Ages***

### **Book**

The long-awaited *Friends Across the Ages* book will be out later this year! This is a collection of stories and life lessons from the past 22 years of volunteering at nursing homes. Stay tuned for details on how to get your copy!

## Volunteer Anniversaries

Winter and Spring 2021

*14 years*

Robbie Curry—Parklands

*13 years*

Kim and Andrew Mitchell—  
Signature

*6 years*

Betsy Thewes—Parklands

*5 years*

Cassie Cooper—Signature

*3 years*

Dominika Burbul—Terrace

*2 years*

Shaynice Brown-Park Meadows  
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Vernika Williams-Park Meadows

## Thank you, Lauren!

Lauren Goldstein began volunteering with us in the spring of 2019. Last year she stepped into the role of volunteer coordinator for our group at Park Meadows. Unfortunately, shortly after assuming that role, the pandemic forced us to stop visiting, but Lauren has continued to be a supportive and joyful presence in our organization. She is moving to



Michigan for a new job, and will be missed! We wish her all the best in her future endeavors.

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