



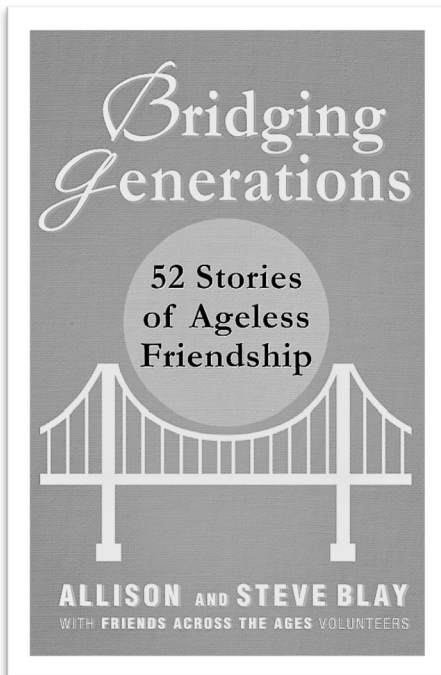
THE BRIDGE

Bridging Generations with Ageless Friendship

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Friends Across the Ages
Nursing Home Volunteer Network

Bridging Generations—Worth the Wait!



It's here! The book we have been talking and dreaming about for so long is finally a reality. When we first conceived of this project, we never would have anticipated what a journey it would be. There were times we almost gave up. But we felt we owed it to the friends featured in these pages to see this project through.



Some of our favorite tales are about the “small-town” residents we have met over the years, who taught us about sugar cane candy pulling, feed sack dresses, and the proper way to cook southern collard greens. We have also included the funniest moments from nearly a quarter century of volunteering, and there were plenty of those, intentionally or not.

The final chapter of the book, “I will remember you,” is perhaps the most challenging to read, but also possibly our favorite. In it we share a few memories of the many nursing home friends we have loved and lost. In some ways we could have written a whole book just on that subject.

It took years to compile the 52 stories—a number of which were written by volunteers (past and present). Transforming that manuscript into a finished product was even more of an adventure. But thanks to a little help from our friends—and some publishing pros—we made it. Inside this newsletter you will find a preview story as well as a table of contents.

Our hope is that this book will be—to borrow a title from one of the stories—worth the wait. Now all that remains is to share it, with the hope of inspiring others to “bridge generations with ageless friendship.” You can search for it on Amazon or visit: FriendsAcrossTheAges.org/book



President's Message

Cassie Cooper

December is upon us and it has me reflecting on the start of my personal journey with Friends Across the Ages. I remember reaching out to Allison in December of 2015, interested in a volunteer opportunity. She invited me to the annual Christmas caroling event at Signature Healthcare. As soon as I felt the enthusiasm of the other volunteers and saw the smiles on the resident's faces as they clapped to the beat of the songs, despite our amateur singing, I knew that FATA would be an organization I would want to volunteer with for a long time.

We understand that the holidays can be a delicate season for those living in nursing home facilities. Our efforts this time of year include caroling, making and delivering Christmas cards/gifts, and visiting with old and new residents to remind them that they are loved and to spread a bit of holiday cheer. We sincerely thank you all for making these efforts possible. Merry Christmas everyone – We wish you, your family, and your friends a happy and healthy 2023!

1920's Florida: Rattlesnakes and Alligators—Steve's Story

The very first time I visited the nursing home, I was introduced to a man named Hugh. Little did I know that I was beginning a twelve-year friendship that would teach me more about the real Florida than any book ever could.

Hugh was eighty-one when I met him. Our friendship centered around football games at the beginning. I used to visit him on Sundays when we could watch football together and I didn't have to try to think of anything to say to him. I remember dreading the end of football season, because I didn't know what else we were going to do together, and I felt bad just never coming to visit him anymore! But as football season ended, we found a way and continued to be friends. We watched *Jeopardy!*, talked about classic cars, and laughed at the bodybuilders on the "World's Strongest Man" competition on ESPN.

Hugh's Florida roots ran deep. In the 1920s, a young Hugh climbed in the car with his parents and headed from their home in South Carolina to Florida, where Hugh's aunt lived in the small town of Seville. He said, "We drove a Model T, which had huge wheels because of the pits in the road back then. We could only go about 30 mph and it took two days. There were no paved roads even through Georgia, and in Florida the roads were especially terrible."

Once in Florida, they took on the elements and wild-life just like everyone else: "There was a pond out back and a big gator kept creeping closer and closer to our house, Steve. He was down in the ditch right outside, so my dad got the pitchfork and took a swipe at him. That gator whipped its tail around and knocked the pitchfork right out of my dad's hands!"

Like many men his age, he served a lengthy tour of duty in Europe and North Africa during World War II. He met his wife in Italy and brought her back to America after the war (she didn't speak any English). Other than how he met his wife, he wouldn't talk about the war much, as many veterans don't. He did tell me one story about how he narrowly escaped with his life when he was at a training center in England on which a plane flying overhead dropped bombs.

After the war, Americans had more time for leisure, and football became a popular sport. Hugh could remember the name of every football player from that era. I found out that professional football players

weren't wealthy back in those days—they were just tough guys with day jobs during the week. "In the 1940s they still wore leather helmets. And not only that, but nobody had a facemask on, Steve! They were breaking their noses left and right!" he exclaimed.

Hugh never had the chance to pursue any further education, and so he got a job working at the "A&P"—a grocery store chain, for those of you that don't remember it. He worked there for twenty-six years, and although he almost never gave me advice, he once told me, "Steve, I hated that job every single day. I hated it with a passion. Whatever you do, don't ever work a job you hate like I did all those years!" He was really choked up as he told me this, and I think it was a part of his past he always regretted.

Money was always tight in those days, so Hugh took every opportunity to make a few extra bucks when he could. Ross Allen was a well-known herpetologist who founded the Reptile Institute at Silver Springs, a famous Old Florida tourist attraction near Ocala. He was a pioneer in the development of antivenom. Hugh recalls their informal business relationship:

Ross would pay me \$10 for every rattlesnake I'd bring him, but it had to be alive. One day as I was walking home through the woods, I saw a big one under a palmetto bush. I didn't have a rope, a bag, or anything, but I sure needed that \$10; that was a lot of money in those days. I was wearing my army boots, so I took the long shoelace out of one of my boots and made a noose at the end. I lowered the noose over the rattlesnake's head and pulled it tight and dragged him all the way home. There was a rusty barbed wire fence I had to get through on the way back, and my pants got caught on the fence. I was trying to set myself free, keep my shoe from falling off, and at the same time not get bit by that snake! But I made it, and when I got home, I put that snake in a bag and took him right over to get my \$10.

When he was eighty-four, Hugh moved up to Claxton, Georgia, to live with his brother-in-law, also a widower. Claxton probably isn't a town you've ever heard of. In fact, if you have heard of it, that's probably for one reason—fruitcake. Yes, Claxton is the (self-appointed) "Fruitcake Capital of the World." Two of the world's major fruitcake bakeries call

Claxton home, and the town is split like the Hatfields and the McCoys over which is the better. I won't give you my personal opinion; you'll just have to try them both.

Claxton is where the real magic all began, in a way I didn't expect. I made the three- or four-hour drive to Claxton from my hometown of Gainesville many times, and not just for the fruitcake. Every time I came up to visit, his family would treat me like their own son. They'd let me visit with Hugh, spend the night, and stay with them for as long as I wanted. And they cooked this city boy platefuls of Southern country food (I especially remember the "low country boil" and the "corn dodgers").

When I recall these encounters, the words of John Henry Newman come to mind: "God has created me for some definite purpose. I am a link in a chain, a bond of connections between persons. I have not

been created for nothing." I believe, as Newman believed, that these encounters are not "nothing," but everything, when it comes to sowing the seeds of peace and understanding among people who come from different walks of life. Our mutual love for Hugh united our families in a small but important way, and I think on both sides we were permanently changed.

Silver Springs, that Old Florida roadside attraction, was bought by the state and turned into a historic state park a few years ago. If you visit, you'll read signage telling the tales of Ross Allen, and you can even walk the "Ross Allen Boardwalk." Hugh is gone now, but if you listen closely, maybe you'll still hear him dragging that rattlesnake through the woods to get his \$10.

Whenever I go there, I know that he will always be with me in my heart.

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Acknowledgements
For more information...

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

FINANCIAL SUPPORTERS 11/21-11/22

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— \$250 AND UP

Tom & Kathleen Benton
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Anonymous from Colorado
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Holiday Celebrations and Donations

On Sunday, December 4th we held our annual *Friends Across the Ages* holiday party at Magnolia Ridge. We caroled with the residents, and followed up with a reception for our volunteers with savory and sweet refreshments. It was wonderful to be able to bring back this holiday tradition after having to find other creative ways to celebrate the past two years due to Covid restrictions.

We have a few more holiday events coming up:

- Thursday Dec. 15th, 2:30pm: Holiday Party at Parklands
- Saturday, Dec. 17th, 10am: Caroling at The Plaza of Gainesville
- Sunday, Dec. 18th, 3pm: Holiday Flute Concert at The Atrium



Please contact us at info@acrosstheages.org if you would like to join us!

Also, we welcome donations of holiday cards and/or gifts for the residents. Please contact us if interested.

Thank you for helping us bring some holiday cheer to our friends at the nursing homes!

Welcome New Volunteers!

Summer and Fall 2022

Abby Gallup—The Plaza
Christina Grannie—Parklands

Volunteer Anniversaries

Summer and Fall 2022

16 years
Heather Benton—Palm Garden

8 years
John Hobbs—Parklands

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For more information about
Friends Across the Ages, please visit our
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