

MS. SENIOR MICHIGAN 2008

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We all have life stories. My story is probably much like yours, woven throughout with blessings and heartaches. As our life's story changes, we write new chapters reflecting our joys and sorrows as we "do" life. I was the youngest of seven children, born and raised in the Thumb Area of Michigan. For many years, my mother worked as a schoolteacher in one-room schoolhouses. My father was a factory worker.

My life has been very full for as long as I can remember. In fact, my career outside the home began the day I graduated high school. Except for the brief intervals associated with giving birth to five children, my career continues today as I manage two small companies from my home office and serve the community and church in our hometown.

Today, our combined family portrait includes seven children and their spouses, nineteen grandchildren, a great grandbaby and my husband's mother who will soon celebrate her 95th birthday. Counting our daughter who watches over us from Heaven, we proudly claim thirty-seven family members. We are so blessed!

Aside from the unparalleled joy of my family, I have been privileged to serve in senior management positions for organizations which ultimately changed the face of healthcare in Michigan and across the U.S.

In 1975 I was selected by the Chairman of the Department of family Medicine at Wayne State University to be the Administrator for the first private family practice clinic - created to serve as the training model for the Residents of the First Family Practice Residency Program at WSU. I was the first Clinic Administrator hired by the university without a degree. As the first employee, I had the distinct privilege of recruiting the support staff and developing the policies and procedures for the day-to-day operations of the clinic.

In 1981 I was recruited by a physician to serve as Vice President of Operations for a small prescription drug benefit company. I was the first employee of the company and had the incredible opportunity of developing and managing the first prescription drug PPO in the State of Michigan. This company was the first to serve the Ford and Chrysler UAW members in a prescription drug benefit program, competing and ultimately securing the business from Blue Cross Blue Shield which was the only program available at the time. Under my direction, the company became a multi-million dollar company and ultimately grew to be a publicly-traded corporation.

While these two "firsts" stand tall among my career achievements, they pale in comparison to my accomplishments since leaving the corporate world. These I consider the most meaningful.

After fighting (and tragically losing) my mother's battle with Alzheimer's in 1995, I was inspired to launch what is know today as "The Muttsy Mission for Alzheimer's." I will never forget watching a wheelchair-bound woman with Alzheimer's hold a stuffed dog on her lap, petting its fur until flat and worn. That image riveted in my mind and inspired me to create this incredibly rewarding program that has now brought comfort to over 2,000 victims of this dreaded disease. Having the opportunity to personally place large, beautiful, stuffed dogs named Muttsy (made by Gund) in the arms and on the laps of those with Alzheimer's (along with a warm hug and an "I Love You") has been unforgettable and



Life-changing for me. I wouldn't trade the most important job in my entire career for the smiles on faces that hadn't smiled and sparkle in eyes that hadn't sparkled for a very long time. I composed, arranged and recorded a special tribute to this incredible woman whose prayers continue to guide and inspire my life. The song is called, "If You Know How To Pray."

In 1999 I wrote a tribute for the Columbine tragedy called, "memorandum to Littleton from God." This poem captured the attention of thousand of visitors from many different countries to the webpage and, as a result, several events followed:

A member of the SWAT Team made copies of the poem and placed them on the crosses of the students who had been killed. The tribute was also distributed at the memorial.

I was invited to attend the Columbine High School where I signed poems and collected warm hugs from countless students and family members. What an unforgettable day!

The most humbling experience of my life occurred as I walked up the hill where the crosses had been. I bowed in silence and wept with an overwhelming sadness.

As in the case with all our Life's Books, all chapters are not filled with stories of great successes and happiness. Such is the chapter that would become the saddest one in my book to date. It would be written with tears streaming down my face as I remember the phone call that would relay the unparalleled horror of learning our daughter's life had been cut short because of an auto accident. The chapter is short - and still unfinished - for words elude me to describe the deep pain that continues to wander in and out of the back roads of my mind unannounced. I love her and miss her more than I ever thought possible. Born out of my search for answered and desperate desire for some peace is the memorial tribute I composed, arranged and recorded for her in 2006, "Perfect Rest."

And now I am about to write an exciting, fun-filled chapter about my life as Ms. Senior Michigan and my pursuit of the Ms. Senior America title. I can't wait!

Like you, I have climbed some great mountains and walked through some deep valleys. Even though I have no idea what the remaining chapters in my Life's Book will look like as the story unfolds, I'm okay with that. They are held in hands much more powerful and trustworthy than my own.