



Vinson Hall Retirement Community

CAMPUS NEWS & VIEWS

Summer 2025

CEO Corner

Shaping the Future

I hope you all are doing your best to stay cool during these last few weeks of summer. This is my second CEO Corner in *Campus News & Views*, so I thought it would be helpful to reflect on a few of the accomplishments we have made over the past few months. We were thrilled to welcome our new Chief Operating Officer, Ken Connelly, to the team. With Ken's extensive experience in senior living, he was able to quickly gain the trust and respect of senior leadership and make a positive impact on residents' quality of life. This summer, we also finalized and rolled out a new logo for Vinson Hall. The new logo reflects our community's spirit, values and vision for the future, while also honoring the character and history that make our community unique. So as the summer winds to a close and we head toward the fall, which is my favorite time of the year, the momentum of these summer accomplishments propels us into position for our plans on the short and long-term future of Vinson Hall.

First, we are excited to start the renovations of the Vinson Hall building, which is part of the CARE (Community Area Refresh and Enhancement) project that is led by Ken and the Operations team and slated to be finished in early 2026. We are looking forward to walking the refreshed hallways on our way to a newly renovated dining room, or having a hot cup of coffee in the revitalized front lobby area while we welcome family and friends to our community.

At the same time, we are eager to continue the progress on the long-term campus redevelopment Master Plan.

With the Board of Trustees recent approval, we have been moving forward this summer to create and review preliminary schematic designs with many Vinson Hall stakeholders, including the Resident Strategy Committee and each of the VHRA committee chairs. CFO and Rick Mazza, Executive Vice President of Business Planning & Development, has worked tirelessly with residents, senior leaders and contractors to gather information and begin to firm up the plans that will help shape the future of Vinson Hall. These designs will not be finalized until December, when the Board of Trustees will review them and decide whether to move forward to the next stage in campus redevelopment.

We recognize the work ahead will be hard, but guided by the values of friendship, dignity, and security that anchor Vinson Hall, we are confident that our community will thrive. We look forward with eager anticipation to what lies ahead for the future of Vinson Hall!❖



CEO Rob Roe (left), with NMCGRF Board Treasurer Scott Slocum at the Annual Membership Meeting in May.

— Rob Roe, President and CEO

Summer Days at Vinson Hall

It's summer once again at Vinson Hall and we are facing this year's heat, humidity and thunderstorms with our usual aplomb. Our community is abuzz with upcoming renovations of the common area spaces, along with plans for campus expansions further down the road – all while embracing our new logo. But none of these activities is getting in the way of our community spirit! We held our annual Spring Art Show over two days in May, featuring more than 300 works of art by 40 residents. A few weeks later, we laughed out loud as we watched the Vinson Hall Players perform their farce "Suite Surrender." On June 23 we gathered in the Penthouse Lounge to celebrate Vinson Hall's 56th birthday and raise our glasses in a toast to all of those who made Vinson Hall happen, and all those who make it what it is today. We welcomed the student interns from the U.S. Navy Memorial to

recognize our residents in their Stories of Service program and record new interviews for next year. And we made the most of Independence Day with a sing-along concert performed by our own Vinson Voices, then watched the fireworks display streamed live in the lounge. It's been a summer full of moments that let us reflect on our past and look ahead to Vinson Hall's very bright future! ❖



About Campus News & Views

Campus News & Views is Vinson Hall Retirement Community's quarterly literary magazine. The goal of this publication is to share stories and remembrances from VHRC residents and staff. All residents and staff are invited to submit articles for inclusion. All items must be original pieces and must be submitted by the author. This publication is reviewed by an editorial committee comprised of VHRC residents and staff.

Campus News & Views is designed and edited by
The Office of Philanthropy & Engagement

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Campus News & Views Summer 2025

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Navy Marine Coast Guard Residence Foundation News

Summer Memories

Summertime is a special state of mind. Along with its hot days and lazy afternoons, summer is also the season of adventure, relaxation and sun-soaked memories. And creating some special memories at Vinson Hall is exactly what we at the Navy Marine Coast Guard Residence Foundation have been working on for the last couple of months!

First and foremost, we just sent out this year's invitation at the end of July to our annual Gala fundraiser, and at press time we are nearly sold out! We are excited to present *Silver Spurs Soirée* on September 27 at Vinson Hall, where the pioneering spirit of the Old West lives on! The evening will start in the Silver Bucket Saloon, where guests can try their hand at blackjack and roulette or just mingle, before forging a path on up to the El Dorado Ballroom for a three-course feast – and some country dancing. This is the Foundation's only major fundraiser, and all proceeds go toward supporting our community. We look forward to creating a night to remember at Vinson Hall!

Another memory we were honored to organize was a farewell party for Wounded Warrior Kayla Saska, who has lived on campus for the past year and a half supported by the Foundation's Warrior Transition program. More than 50 people joined us recently to wish Kayla well as she moves on to her next chapter. With her ready smile and buoyant nature, Kayla won the hearts of our residents, and because of their encouragement and guidance her post-Navy plans now include college. We will miss you, Kayla!

In other summer news, a grant from NMCGRF's Innovation & Enhancement Fund enabled the Visual Arts Committee to purchase 24 additional tabletop easels so that more of our residents' incredible artwork could be displayed at the Art Show – always a huge success. Meanwhile, the campus was saddened to lose a beloved 200-year-old white oak tree that had to be taken down recently. But the Foundation stepped in to commission Rick Weil, a woodworking specialist who lives blocks from campus, to preserve and refinish a massive slice of the trunk. With the support of the Innovation & Enhancement Fund, Rick is creating a table for Vinson Hall so that the memory of this "old friend" will live on.

Finally, in the Philanthropy & Engagement office, it's been an eventful summer! P&E Coordinator Megan Palumbo delivered a beautiful baby boy in May – welcome, Connor! While Megan has been out on maternity leave, we were fortunate to have the help of Grace Warner, former CEO Chip Warner's daughter, during her college summer break. The P&E team has embarked on a big project this summer: organizing and scanning boxes of historic material that goes back 70 years to create an archive for Vinson Hall. Grace worked on the project, and so did volunteer Harper Kelly, a Potomac School senior. It is our hope that by creating this historic archive, we will be able to capture Vinson Hall's unique history and save it for generations to come! So, at the close of the summer, we want to thank you for all you do to help us make – and preserve – memories for this very special community! ❖

— Michelle Crone, Senior Director of Philanthropy & Engagement



From left: Board Member Allie Coetzee, Nancy Kirkendall and Senior Director of Philanthropy and Engagement Michelle Crone at the 4- and 5-Star Donor Happy Hour.

Mountain Lion Face Off

By John Stockman



"Mountain Lion" by USFWS Mountain-Prairie, CC BY 2.0

My two longtime friends and I were bowhunting elk during the second week of the Idaho season. We had packed into the Frank Church Wilderness Area in southwest Idaho a week earlier. The bulls were not yet bugling and we had seen very few elk.

One cold morning I arrived at one of my ground blinds just before dawn. Using a cow elk call, I called periodically in an attempt to lure a bull elk into shooting range. After spending about an hour in my first blind with no elk responding to my plaintive calls, I moved about a half mile to another blind.

The blind provided natural concealment. With minimal pruning, I was able to draw my bow without interference and shoot over a screen of pine boughs. "Perfect," I thought as I began calling.

After calling for about an hour, I had a premonition of impending action. Nearby birds and squirrels that had been chattering suddenly became mute. The silence was ominous. Something was on the prowl. I knew there was a chance that my calling would attract hungry

predators looking for an easy meal. I would not have been surprised to see one of them investigate my calling. However, I was totally unprepared for what happened in the next few minutes.

My anxiety level increased with the lengthening silence that blanketed the creek-crossing blind. Finally, I saw movement on the trail. I instantly identified the animal on the trail as a mountain lion. I felt adrenaline surge through my body as the hair on the nape of my neck stood on end. I was uncomfortably close to one of North America's most deadly and efficient predators and I did not like my situation. "Tell me this is not happening," I moaned to myself.

My first view of the lion was of his twitching tail protruding above the tall grass. As it progressed along the trail closer to my blind, its shoulders gradually emerged. Ever so slowly, its back and head appeared. It was slinking slowly through the tall grass using every bit of available cover. It was a large tom whose ample belly nearly dragged the ground as he crept close. When he was directly opposite my blind, he turned unerringly in my direction. I had hoped he would

continue past my stand. It was obvious that the big cat had pinpointed the source of the elk sounds he had heard. When the lion turned in my direction, I yelled and waved my arms to let him know I was not an elk. He stopped and stared. I knew he could not see me clearly because of my camouflage and the screening brush, and he could not smell me since the wind was blowing from him to me. However, at less than 10 yards from me I had to believe he knew I was not an elk. In retrospect, I do not think he cared about what I was. I had attracted his attention and he was going to investigate. I fervently prayed that he would conclude I was too much of a risk to attack and terminate his stalk. (It is amazing how quickly one can get religion in such situations.) The big cat continued to inch forward. I felt I had to escalate my actions. Yelling and waving my arms had not deterred him from his determination to look into the source of those alluring elk sounds.

My first view of the lion was of his twitching tail protruding above the tall grass. As it progressed along the trail closer to my blind, its shoulders gradually emerged.

I had an arrow nocked but had no intention of shooting the lion. The season on mountain lions was not open and I was not yet ready to shoot in self-defense even though the cougar was much closer than I wanted. The lion crouched close beside a small tree and stared intently at me. I thought if I shot an arrow into the tree beside him, he might end his stalk. I drew and released and watched my white fletched arrow slam into the tree beside him. At the impact, he sprang sideways in a uniquely catlike move. He did not even look at the arrow. His cold, penetrating gaze never wavered. Talk about maintaining eye contact!

I never considered trying to flee. Doing so would

have triggered the big cat's instinct to pursue. When the lion took another determined step forward, I knew I had to do something drastic. All of his hunting assets – fangs, claws, physical strength, feline agility, and killer instinct – were superior to my defensive tools. The only advantage I had was the ability to reason. He was about 10 yards from me in a crouched position. He could be on me in an instant if he so chose. Since my aggressive actions of yelling, waving my arms and shooting an arrow into a tree beside him had not discouraged his single-minded stalk, I thought I would try a different approach.

Without being too aggressive, I had to convince the lion that I was not afraid of him. I slowly stepped from behind the screening pine boughs and stood directly in front of him with an arrow nocked and my bow held in the "ready" position. He never blinked. But he did not attack either. He flattened his ears against his broad skull and displayed teeth designed for killing. He snarled and hissed and batted the air with a huge paw. If his intent was to intimidate me, he did a superb job. I believed, however, that if I exhibited fear he would seize the opportunity and react more aggressively. I therefore forced myself to remain outwardly calm. I thought to myself, "John, you can survive this if you keep your wits about you." So I began to talk to him. My monologue went something like this. "Big guy, why don't you go your way and I'll go mine and we can both forget this incident ever occurred. We're both too old to do something we'll regret. What do you say? I fooled you and I sincerely regret it. I really, truly do." And I really, truly did! The big tom continued his hypnotic stare, and after what seemed an eternity I saw his muscles tense under his tawny hide. "Here he comes!" I thought. Instead, he stood, turned and walked away with the indifference and arrogance cats often exhibit. Throughout the stand-off, he showed no fear.

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In That Time of My Life

By Jerry Norris



Jerry Norris at BB's Bar in North Korea

In 1953, I had volunteered for the draft, then after basic training, I volunteered for service in North Korea with the Recon Platoon of the 89th Tank Battalion. Early on, I learned that when our platoon leader, a first lieutenant, needed replacements, he would go down to division courts-martial proceedings and offer those being prepared for minor trials an option to serve in his platoon, promising that their records would be expunged if they kept their noses clean. When given a choice, that's how he filled the ranks in his platoon.

Beginning with this initial experience, three incidents influenced my life. In the first, as I got to know the platoon better, it became evident that I was an aberration in their ranks. Not only wasn't I profane in language use but I still said

nightly prayers at the foot of my cot in the squad tent. On the first night when I did that, one of the men began to laugh. Another, Corporal Waters, whom I did not know, got off his cot and went over to this guy and pointedly said to him, "If you ever make fun of him for doing that again, you will be dealing with me." That was the first – and last – night of derisive laughter. Of all the guys in the platoon, Corporal Waters was probably the most profane and irreverent. But he had his values, too.

In another incident, I realized something about the other men. Most of the men in the platoon had completed high school. Their ages ran between 18-20. I had a few semesters of college and that made me an exception in terms of educational achievement. I felt safe

and comfortable with these guys despite the backgrounds they represented. They accepted me and in turn I took them as I found them, and wasn't judgmental. Didn't talk like they did, but went where they went, stood where they stood, did what they did, asked for no favors or breaks. That's all they expected of me. In the months that followed, I came to see their profanity and vulgarity, their daring-do behavior, their irreverence, their loutish and bellicose attitude as shields, protecting them from an ever-present fear. For myself, I prayed. A lot.

As I got to understand the men better, more differences between them and myself began to emerge. Their one goal was to get home; they counted the days to this climactic event. But they discussed no future for themselves after they got home, and they didn't see one. None spoke of a wider world than the one they had left before the Army, or ventured a thought about attaining a higher education. Instead of an expanding horizon, they visualized returning to the same place from which they had started. They had no dreams, other than to pick up the pieces of their disrupted lives and continue on again in a ceaseless, repetitive pattern, predetermined by the origins of their births. They were adrift in a vast, indeterminate sea of sameness, wherein the Army served as an unexpected stopover, an island upon it. After getting off, they saw no shore, near or distant. They were content to be headed towards the furrows of Tennessee or the docks of New York City. I didn't realize in our bull sessions that I talked about a future. They realized it, however, though it seemed to be natural to me. I became self-conscious, blushed when they would say: "You're going someplace after this, we're not." I didn't want to be different than they were. They viewed life as a sentence: I spoke of it as an opportunity.

The third incident occurred years later when I had a summer job between semesters at the University of Illinois and was working as a helper on a Millers High Life beer truck. The driver's name was Bart. He liked to needle me about the futility of a college education. Books, he liked to say, "are important when they contain the numbers in the rackets that I run with taverns and hotels along my beer route." Then he would say, "O.k., so tell me about some great writer that you study in college." I would mention William Shakespeare. Before I could get into any of his works, Bart would retort, "So, who's Will, eh?" I would try to explain something about the basis of his work but not get far. Bart would shout back, rather indignantly, "Oh! A (expletive deleted) Brit, eh? Don't you study any Americans!" I would then get into *Moby Dick* and could proceed even less far. On this mention, Bart became focused, saying, "Now you are talking, a moby dick, eh? Tell me more." It was clear we were on different anatomical wavelengths.

When summer faded into fall, I said my good-byes to Bart on our last day. Both of us were a bit awkward. I mumbled something about calling him after graduation: "C'mon," he responded, "That's bullshit, you'll probably own this place in time. Me, I'll still be driving this truck for the rest of my life. We'll never see each other again, talk to each other again. But...thanks anyway."

He was right! Still, every time I see a passing Miller's beer truck, I give it a silent salute in his memory. ❖

Forty Years Later

Harvey Follender



In the early 1960s, I was a cadet at The Citadel in Charleston, South Carolina. Cadets were prohibited from marrying while an undergraduate. The tradition was to marry at the Cadet Chapel right after graduation, and walk under crossed swords when leaving the chapel. I could picture that, but I didn't have someone to marry, so off I went to the Army.

Towards the end of my two and a half years of active duty in the Army, I was going back and forth from New Jersey to the Washington, D.C. area for job interviews with the various intelligence agencies. Having tired of the repetitive flights to and from D.C., I asked my sister, Alice, whether she knew someone I could catch a ride with. She said, Yes. Her college best friend Rochelle was driving to graduate school at the University of Maryland. Rochelle agreed to take me. We talked all the way to Maryland, and during my few days there, I fell in love.

When I returned to my Army base (Fort Huachuca) in Arizona, I had dinner with the base

rabbi and his wife. I said, "I just met a girl who, when I get married, I want it to be to a girl like Rochelle." The Rabbi's wife said, "Well, Stupid, why don't you marry her???" The next day, I took my quarters to a pay phone, called Rochelle, and said, "I want us to get married." She said, "Call me back in two weeks." I couldn't wait and called back in two days. I don't remember what I said but she agreed that we would marry. Years later, she told me that she had been dating another fellow named Harvey, and when she told her Mom that she was "going to marry Harvey," her mom asked her, "Which one?"

Rochelle agreed to my offer that we would marry in a year from that day. A couple of days later, I decided she deserved an escape clause. I told her, "We hardly know each other. I'm going to West Berlin for a few months and after I return to Arizona, I'll be almost finished in the Army. After discharge, I will move to the Washington, D.C. area and we'll get to know each other better. If, during that half year, you decide you don't want to marry me, you'll be free to break the

engagement and leave me, with no hard feelings. Otherwise, we'll be married in a year from now." She accepted that.

I went to, and returned from, West Berlin, got released from active duty, and drove to New Orleans, where Rochelle joined me. We enjoyed New Orleans and then we drove to Washington. I joined the CIA. Rochelle and I got to know each other better and decided we were meant for each other. During that time, she made her beautiful wedding gown. We got married at The Citadel Cadet Chapel. I had given an Army buddy my camera and asked him to take a picture when we were walking under the crossed swords. After it was all over, he told me that he took lots of pictures but missed that shot because he had to change the film. (Remember film?)

Rochelle and I got married again in NYC with our New York family and friends. (My Dad said I was a lucky dog.) After a few months, we left the U.S. to drive around southern Europe (between Marseille and the Yugoslav border) for three to four weeks before continuing on to Iran, where we lived for three years before returning home to Virginia. Our children Saroya and Ivan were born while we were in Iran.

Decades later, we went to The Citadel for my 40th graduation reunion. On the final day, I decided that we should go to the Cadet Chapel and reenact walking under crossed swords. With a digital camera, we got that picture – 40 years later. ❖

My Body Fails Me

By Margaret Dean

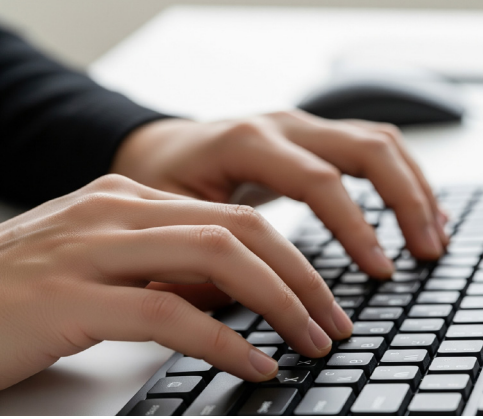
My body fails me
Stiff as a board muscles
Stretch and groan
Dance clumsily
But moving.

My body fails me
As I choke down saliva
As I strain to smell wafting odors
That must be there
Bowels tied in knots
With no forward motion

My body fails me;
Seeing double makes my head ring
Lines of type floating free crashing
One into another

Is Handwriting Becoming Obsolete?

By Gene Wentz



Push-pull, push-pull, push-pull. Around and around and around. My pencil flew over the paper, trying to comply with the teacher's exhortations. Those were some of the penmanship drills that I performed in my fifth-grade elementary class.

I wish it could be said that my handwriting was considered immaculate at the time and has remained so through the years. Dream on. Only doctors, the usual butt of handwriting jokes, have worse handwriting than me. My cursive handwriting suffered through junior and senior high schools. My salvation came when my sister bequeathed her 1939 Royal portable typewriter to me. When I could select an elective course in high school, my mother demanded I take typing. "But, Mom," I protested, "only girls take typing." She was not moved. "You have a typewriter, now learn how to use it," she commanded.

That's how I ended up in typing class in high school. I learned how to master the machine and have greatly benefitted ever since.

I still like getting a nicely formed handwritten letter. They are usually at Christmas and are from women. Ladies are so much neater and capable of attractive handwriting.

Keyboarding is now the dominant form of written communication.

One Vinson Hall resident I know writes in immaculate cursive script. He claims to have learned his handwriting skills in schools where the teachers would make their displeasure known if your curves and swirls did not meet their standards.

Vinson Hall has about 200 senior residents in independent living apartments. In an admittedly unscientific survey I closely examined the signatures of the first 20 on a Fitness Center sign-in sheet: 14 used block letters (70%) and 6 cursive script (30%) to record their presence. The "blockers" far outnumber the "scripters."

I am one of the older people who has benefitted from the transition from cursive handwriting to type. During my undergraduate college days in the 1950s, I am quite certain that the ease with which my professors could read my typed course papers got extra credit consideration over the hard-to-decipher handwritten products of my classmates. As a college professor myself, I greatly appreciated typed, rather than handwritten, assignments.

And I have gotten three jobs in my lifetime

because of my ability to type. For my first interview out of high school I met with a newspaper publisher hoping to land a place in the mailroom. "Can you type," he asked? When

I answered in the affirmative he mentioned an opening in the newsroom and I became an apprentice journalist, which opened doors for other jobs during my working lifetime. ❖

My Pop Pop

By Carol Saunders



Carol Saunders, age 9 months.

Growing up, I, an only child, was fortunate to have my Daddy's parents just a few blocks away on the other side of the railroad bridge, and Mother's mother, my Nana Tilton, about a 90-minute drive away. I'm told that, as an infant, I was especially fussy when Mother was trying to make dinner. So, Pop Pop would walk across the tracks, apparently knowing the train schedule by heart, to come to our rescue. He'd load me in the big black pram, and push me around from kitchen to dining room to living room and back again. Then, he'd dandle me on his knee & sing "Yankee Doodle Came to Town, Riding on a pony. Put a feather in his cap, and called it Macaroni."

To this day, those lyrics still make no sense to me.

Pop Pop was a brick mason, who, after falling from a chimney to the scaffolding, climbed up to finish the job. He was the General Contractor when our little town of 1,800 souls built a movie theater. We all enjoyed this until the advent of TV rang the death knell. It was succeeded by a live theater, then Mirror of America polling group. The best cooks provided delicious pies and cakes for attendees during intermission.

We had one of the first TVs, so Pop Pop would come to our house, sit up close to the black and white screen to root for his beloved Brooklyn Dodgers. He was a great gardener, from climbing roses to every variety of peony. The best part of his garden was the rows of red raspberry bushes. I'd happily risk the scratches on my bare legs to harvest buckets of their succulent deliciousness. In the steamy summer heat of New Jersey, they tasted as good as their scent promised.

Much later, when Pop Pop was in his late 90s and had lost an eye to cancer, I was the one he wanted to trim his white mustache. This simple act of meeting a basic need continued and deepened the bond started in my infancy. I still miss this loving, wiry little Welshman whose heritage I can never fully explore. For, how many results could I find for Edward Jones, Jr??? ❖

Lucy in the Snow with Circles

By John Gardenier



John Gardenier with his mother Lucia.

The Beatles' Lucy (in the Sky with Diamonds) was mysterious. My mother, Lucia, in contrast was cheerful, forthright, and very self-reliant, even as a young Lucy.

Her Danish mother, Jensine, had come to America quite young, inappropriately expecting great success. She had little useable English and minimal marketable skills. The best she could do was serve as a housekeeper and substitute mother for a much older Danish widower with young children. He had a successful fuel oil delivery business in South Portland, Maine. After his kids were mostly grown, he grew ever more delighted in the company of this lovely, lonely young Danish girl who thoroughly understood him and his culture. Marriage was inevitable.

He built a lovely new home in our laboring class neighborhood in time for her delivery of Lucy. Jensine was an excellent mother, cook, housekeeper and gardener. The yard had fruit trees, front and back yards, an ample garden, and several lovely flower beds. Lucy had very happy childhood up into adolescence.

The Great Depression caused many horrible tragedies, including Jensine's and Lucy's loss of their dearest husband/father. The oil delivery business failed. He had to travel far away to support the family. Eventually, he died – somehow, somewhere; they never could find out.

Her mother's friends included a couple who operated a well-established tourist business. It required extensive winter travel to collect orders from scattered Maine tourist enterprises. They then consolidated the orders and sent them to New York suppliers for spring delivery of profitable Maine-themed souvenirs to please the coming season's tourist hordes. Having grown too old for the arduous winter driving, they asked if Lucy would handle that for them.

As a well-trained young Maine driver, facing an opportunity to suddenly become the responsible grown-up, Lucy was delighted! She only encountered one problem. Those long, arduous drives through sparsely settled areas were BORING! She solved that problem by creating her own game. She figured out if she

steered the car slightly and precisely into the snow on the right, then whipped the car sharply left, she could complete a 360-degree turn with acceleration, ending up precisely on track with only a slight loss of speed. What fun!

She thereby learned she did not always need simply to accept life's stresses; she often could force them to adapt to her! For example, her mother never allowed her to date. She had to focus her attention on studies and acquiring good paying skills. She mastered bookkeeping for a salary and indulged her artistic talents for enjoyment. Still, being a healthy and pretty young lady, she naturally really wanted a man!

She accepted the plain fact that her mother would always need her and was terrified that Lucy would leave. Lucy clearly could not admit

Her Danish mother, Jensine, had come to America quite young, inappropriately expecting great success.

to having a boyfriend. Neither would she live entirely without one. Lucy refused to be unhappy so she found her own unique solution! The answer came to her over the car radio!

A part time announcer and narrator on a local radio station stunned her as utterly unique. His strong bass voice was sonorous, rich, and gentle. She wrote a note to him at the station, omitting her name and address, and complementing him on his very impressive performances. She could not risk his coming to her mother's house, and she would not be so crude as to "just bump into him" on the street.

She found out that he was a volunteer with the Portland Players, which annually offered multiple performances including drama, comedy, and comic opera (usually Gilbert and Sullivan). Her own total lack of related experience could not

deter Lucy! She volunteered, boldly figuring that she had enough artistic talent to be useful somehow. So, she met him naturally – as one of his coworkers – and only later disclosed that she was his mysterious admirer. Romance duly developed.

The Players needed an aide in makeup. Lucy quickly acquired a rudimentary capability through self-study and progressed steadily as a diligent, capable, and reliable assistant. Ultimately, she became Director of Makeup.

My wonderful father, John Gardenier, was indispensable as a very versatile worker as well as a singer, actor, and (eventually) a director. He, like Lucy, had been a forced juvenile laborer due to HIS father's untimely death. He had started as a common dockworker but progressed to become foreman, dock superintendent, and years later, an office manager. Mother Jensine had to be thankful to now have a pair of wage earners supporting her home. As for me, I grew up to be a devout fan of theater, and we all were crazy for Gilbert and Sullivan!

We never thought of ourselves as poor. The theater leaders were all better off than we but everybody was equal there as essential contributors to the commonly valued enterprise.

So, what about me? Why should I presume to take up your time and attention with my mother? Lucy's unusual and determined insistence on her and our family's happiness came to dominate my own life. I am so grateful that I feel I must pass this on to others, including to you and your progeny. So, please bear with me just a little while longer while I briefly relate my own tale.

My family not only demonstrated how to live happily without wealth, but also demanded a lot

Continued on page 17...

Navy Pranks

By Jack Hannon



The special "Captain's Mast," featuring a script written by Jack Hannon, played out and allowed the VF-213 squadron's "drinking bell" to be returned.

Every flying unit in the Navy would have a "drinking flag" or some other way of announcing their presence at a Happy Hour anywhere in the world. Some of the other representations of the specific unit could be quite imaginative, as I was soon to learn upon "checking in" at my first operational unit. The practice was, and it seemed great fun at the time, you would hang up your flag or display your other representation of your unit in a highly visible space, and then defend it!!! When I checked into my unit, VA-216, I found that among my new possessions as the Air Intelligence Officer (non-flying, in my case) was the "drinking bell" of fighter squadron VF-213, which the officers of that unit took to Happy Hour in lieu of a drinking flag. How extraordinary! What the blazes was I going to do with that?

It was already engraved in an empty spot as the victim of a secret plot by VA-216, something of the "snatch and carry" type. It seemed to me, even though I was new to squadron antics, that

the fighter squadron was entitled to get its bell back, but with conditions. So, all I had to do, and it took months to come up with an ideal situation, was plan out and get acceptance of some conditions.



VF-213 Squadron's "drinking bell."

I decided that if the Captain of the USS Hancock would go along with it, he could stage a special "Captain's Mast," a serious disciplinary proceeding, especially when the very Captain of our ship is the "responsible officer." The offense would be "dereliction of duty." And my script would allow the Captain to rant and remonstrate for a while, with the Commander of the fighter squadron at strictest "Attention," before the subject of the dereliction came out – the loss of their bell at a Happy Hour somewhere on

the prior nine-month cruise. Our squadron's commander and I would be at the Captain's Mast but we would try to stay in the background for the first part of the little "play."



The bell's "Stolen By" inscription.

Well, it all worked out as hoped, and with great enthusiasm by our squadron, the ship's Executive Officer, and the Captain who played his part magnificently. The Captain ranted, the accused stood rigidly at attention, and eventually we were identified as the accusers and the subject was lack of defending their squadron bell, which

I then produced. Seeing that we were now in Far Eastern waters, the Captain asked us whether we would accept as "just punishment" the delivery of a free round of drinks to our officers at the Crossroads Bar, a well-known watering hole in a Japanese port of Yokosuka, where we would soon dock. (All that was of course prearranged.) We shook hands all around on that and the fighter squadron commander looked much relieved. They never tried to "get even" with us, it was all fairly high-minded, and the fighter pilots did indeed pay for the first round of drinks for the attendees from squadron VA-216! ❖

Mountain Lion Face Off

...Continued from page 5

After he crossed the trail, he effortlessly leaped onto a large rock and turned to face me and snarled defiantly as if to warn me that he was monarch of this territory and that he did not appreciate being duped by an intruder. He then dropped to the ground and simply walked out of my sight.

After the lion disappeared, I nearly collapsed. The composure I had exhibited while facing the lion deserted me. I suddenly felt weak, drained and shaky. However, I felt privileged to have seen the deadly carnivore at such close range in full daylight. I have immense respect for mountain lions, primarily because they are highly evolved predators, something like humans. As carnivores,

they must kill to survive. If they fail to do so over an extended period of time, they will starve. It is understandable then why mountain lions will investigate an opportunity for a meal even if it involves human contact. Failure is not an option for them.

When I returned to camp, I asked my friend where his fifth of Jack Daniels was. He said, "Why? You don't drink." "I just started," I replied.

I rank the incident as one of the most exciting events that has happened to me while bowhunting. I know that when I call elk in the future, I'll remember the confrontation at Elk Creek and wonder what will respond to my call.



Hail to the Gardeners

By Maureen Kammerer



As you stroll around our lovely campus here at Vinson Hall Retirement Community, you will encounter huge old oak trees, lovely pines, tall cedar trees, many maple trees, magnificent flowering plums and gorgeous cherry blossoms and crepe myrtle trees. The star, of course, is the hundreds-of-years-old willow oak in front of the Willow Oak apartments. There are several old magnolia trees that bloom with their huge blossoms in June. We also have many types of bushes, both evergreen and flowering. These include forsythia, azaleas and camellias that bloom in the spring, and many shades of red of the Knock Out roses that bloom in the summer. There are showy peonies scattered among the various planting areas as well as iris and lavender in the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) garden. In early spring we all await the first sign of the daffodils poking through the dormant winter grasses in various spots around our grounds. Mother nature is doing a good job with these plants and trees.

However, loud praise should go to the stalwart and committed gardeners who, having

given up gardens surrounding their houses, have undertaken to beautify our retirement community with their own efforts for our benefit. They are satisfying their desire to get down and dirty in their own spaces once again.

Several gardeners have set about to build and nurture gardens near their own patios on the first floor. Two couples have designed and taken care of plots outside their apartments behind Vinson Hall. Large pots of wonderful flowers, bushes and bulbs outside an apartment across from the parking deck give great pleasure. There is a wonderful native plant garden across from the willow oak tree put there by a committed native plant lover. A lovely patio garden to accommodate a dog, Eli, is complete with a garden gate. Several other ground floor gardeners are attempting to tame many weeds. Someone has enlisted help from a nursery to add to our pleasure and some new plantings are being guarded by alligator and fox sculptures behind Willow Oak building. There are some devotees of the DAR garden pulling weeds and caring for that garden near the Alpine Way.

Plantings greet us at the top of the stairs near the Vinson Hall drive cared for by a resident.

But the loudest applause should go to the chairman of the Health and Wellness committee who has tamed a large section of ground outside his apartment on both sides of the walk behind Vinson Hall. A well planned and beautiful English garden has emerged in this area; it includes trees, bulbs, hydrangea bushes, grasses, and flowers and a bird bath. He has worked this area on his knees, for many months, and it is truly a wonder to see now. His dedication to his hobby has yielded a great deal of beauty for so many of us to enjoy. There are also lovely pots of Lantana on his patio. In addition to working his garden

he is helping to plan our first forest bathing walk with name plates identifying the trees.

There are wonderful things happening in the garden plot area behind Vinson Hall with tomatoes, cucumbers and other vegetables and sunflowers emerging now in the residents' 12 plots. The plots are managed by the chairman of the gardening committee who produces herbs and lettuces along with other vegetables in her plot.

Let us applaud our volunteer gardeners as we notice and enjoy the flowers, plants and trees that make our campus so welcoming and beautiful. Hail, and thank you, to those who are coaxing beauty from the earth for us all. ❖

Lucy in the Snow with Circles

...Continued from page 13

of me, which I appreciated. Early on, I exercised at the Y, studied elocution, took dance lessons (at age 8!), experienced a variety of summer camps, and learned musical performance. What was increasingly weird the more I understood it: I heard constantly (from about age six) that I absolutely MUST "go to Harvard or Yale" (whatever that meant!). Improbably, it did happen, as commanded for Lucia's happiness. She got her Yale son.

But happiness was so fleeting!! Despite remaining strong and trim, my dear father suffered a major heart attack and died suddenly during my studies. Unfair!! Unable to cope with fate's cruelty, I despaired and my grades dropped, causing loss of my scholarship. I expected to have to drop out. But typically, Lucia

would not allow it. She found the money for one more semester and DEMANDED that I must never let my troubles defeat my happiness – or hers.

It worked. I pulled myself together and got revenge by increasing my workload. My senior year, I added a graduate course in linguistics and took the introductory jurisprudence course at the Yale Law School, while also improving my grades in my Philosophy major! I graduated with my scholarship intact.

Never again would I permit any cruel tragedy to ruin my life. Lucia (Lucy) of course, was right. Happiness is always achievable if we demand it, especially of ourselves. ❖

Learning About A.I.

By Stan Trost



Image created by Google Gemini.

It's important to learn about AI (Artificial Intelligence) and what it can do for you. I hope this note will improve your understanding of this important technology.

You access AI on your computer or phone with AI agents (ChatGpt, Claude, Grok). My personal favorite is ITHY which consolidates information from all of the major agents.

Let's look at some examples. You can ask the agent: "Give me 10 trivia questions." Then you can narrow the results by being more specific. For example, you could ask, "Give me 10 trivia questions about left-handed baseball players." You could also ask questions like, "What are the top budget hotels in New York City?" or ask it to make a three-day itinerary for a visit to Paris. Perhaps you have been invited to be on a charity board and you need a resume. You could ask the agent: "Prepare a resume. My recent experience is... (list several positions). I graduated from Vanderbilt with a master's degree in history."

Instead of doing a Google search, you can ask an AI agent. For example, "Compare the top over-the-counter hearing aids."

As an experiment, I asked ChatGpt to write a short story. I input the following prompt and got an amazing result. I think you'll agree that this story is better than anything I could have written!

"Write a four-paragraph short story. Tom and Mary are in a diner on a dark and stormy night. A stranger walks in wearing a black raincoat and carrying a lantern. Suddenly, there is a flash of lightning and a clap of thunder. Tom and Mary wake up on a desert island." ChatGPT answered with this story:

The storm raged outside the small café, rain hammering against the windows like frantic fingers. Tom and Mary huddled over their mugs of steaming coffee, their laughter momentarily eclipsed by the howl of the wind. The warm glow of the café was a stark contrast to the tempest outside, and they found comfort in each other's company, swapping stories that turned the mundane into magic.

Suddenly, the door swung open with a dramatic creak, and a figure stepped inside, illuminated by the soft glow of a lantern. The stranger, draped in a tattered coat, shook off the rain and looked around with weary eyes. Tom and Mary exchanged curious glances, the atmosphere shifting as the figure approached their table. "Mind if I join you?" he asked, his voice gravelly but inviting. As he settled in, thunder rumbled in the distance, vibrating through the floor like a warning.

With a clap that seemed to shake the very foundations of the café, the world around them distorted. The clinking of cups faded, and the once-warm air turned thick and salty. Tom and Mary found themselves standing on a deserted

beach, the sky swirling with dark clouds overhead. The lantern light flickered at their feet, casting strange shadows on the sand. Confusion washed over them as they looked around, their cozy café replaced by a vast expanse of ocean and a seemingly endless stretch of palm trees.

"What just happened?" Mary exclaimed, panic creeping into her voice. Tom took a deep breath, trying to ground himself in the surreal situation. The stranger was gone, but the lantern remained, its light steady and warm in the chaos of the stormy skies above. "I don't know," he replied,

"but if we're here, we might as well explore." With the lantern's glow guiding their way, they stepped forward, hand in hand, ready to uncover the secrets of this unexpected paradise, hoping that the tempest outside would lead them to something extraordinary.

I have tried many experiments with Grok and Chatgpt. You should use your imagination and try experiments of your own. As you get used to the process you will find more and more opportunities to use this exciting technology. ❖

Ode to Turning 90 at Vinson Hall

By Barb Shaffer

Presented on the occasion of a dinner organized by Florence Hall celebrating all those turning 90 this year.

I moved in here at 79.
Thought turning 80 would be just fine.
For those who were ninety,
I considered them mighty,
– a cause for great mystery – and SCARY!

I don't worry much for the future,
could there be more years after all?
But I could have regrets
and there are certain threats, like
Outliving my money and hair-y!!
And I could use some upholstery repair-y!

Some things new folks should be wary.
A labyrinth of hallways seems hairy!
From the first floor of Vinson Hall
you can go straight to Willow Oak,
it won't be the first floor when you get there-y.

It occurs to me that I might be healthier than
when I first moved in.
Some of that may be exercise, and a bit of sin!

When we moved here Bistro was a hot spot,
and night life was beckoning us in.

Exciting!!

We went to evening events, like a Jazz night or
something.

Get all gussied up, walk over there, have a drink
or two, laugh and sing!!

When party's over going home is not very far,
no need even to go to the car.

Get home. Go inside and still sturdy,
Close the door. Check the clock. 7:30! !!

I'll end with a suggestion creative.

We need tee shirts that highlight our vintage.

On the front it should say, "I have never been this
age before"

On the back – like a song – "Makin' it up - as I
go along."

A postscript to my 90th year.

There is a reason I am still here.

The Lord God gets the praise
for my life and length of days,
I really have nothing to fear!

VINSON HALL RETIREMENT COMMUNITY

Campus News & Views

Summer 2025



At Vinson Hall Retirement Community, the summer heat didn't slow us down! (Clockwise from top left) We celebrated birthdays and thanked our community volunteers at June's Birthday tea. We danced ourselves into the holiday mood at an all-community line dance party on July 1. We went on outings around town, including to the Udvar-Hazy Center, and we gathered in the Penthouse Lounge to raise a glass in honor of Vinson Hall's 56th Birthday!