

Resident Assistance Fund Secures Home



Wilma VanBeber's earliest memories of growing up in Kansas during the Great Depression were of the Dust Bowl. "My mom remembered putting wet towels under the doors and windows so the house wouldn't fill with the silt that was blowing around," says her daughter, Dianne. Wilma's father was a farmer, and the family had very little. "My Mom used to save string from the General Store, and she and her cousin would play a game, mapping out houses in the dust on the ground and pretending they each had their own home."

Eventually, the game became Wilma's reality. After World War II, she met her husband, Henry, who was 14 years older, had served in the Army, and was also from the same small town. Henry became a banker, and Wilma ended up in her dream home, a beautiful brick house made to withstand Kansas tornados. While raising their three children, Wilma, an accomplished seamstress, also started a drapery business. As president of the United Methodist Women's group and an active bridge player and gardener, "Mom really had a lovely life," says Dianne.

When Henry died of heart failure leaving Wilma a widow at 70, she stayed in her hometown – "a very Mayberry kind of small town," Dianne says. "Her neighbors all knew how much she loved her home and kind of covered up for her, even when she began to show signs of Alzheimer's." But on one visit when Dianne found her mother dressed in winter clothes in August and eating cereal with butter, it was clear that she could no longer live alone so far from family.

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The house was sold, and Wilma moved to McLean, Virginia, to live with her daughter. But as the dementia progressed, Dianne knew she needed to find a safer place for her mother. "I drove down Kirby Road every day and had my eye on Vinson Hall Retirement Community. I knew it would be a wonderful community for her." After recuperating from a broken hip, Wilma moved into The Sylvestery in 2016. With her radiant smile and love of people, she took to her new home immediately. "I put it off because I was worried she'd say, 'Please let me go home.' But she never said it once. I think she felt safe there."

Over time, Wilma's long-term care policy was spent down and her savings dwindled. "My parents had built their assets during their lives – it's not that they didn't plan. They just didn't plan on dementia and having to leave their small town," explains Dianne. Then in 2022, as Wilma's resources neared depletion, the Navy Marine Coast Guard Residence Foundation stepped in to offer help through the Resident Assistance Fund, which enabled Wilma to stay in her home until her passing in September 2023. "When I got the news that the Fund had come through, I just burst into tears!" says Dianne. "It was just such a blessing for our entire family. We are so appreciative."

