

VINSON HALL RETIREMENT COMMUNITY CAMPUS NEWS & VIEWS



Summer 2024

CEO Corner

Celebrating Our History and Moving Forward

I hope everyone has had an excellent summer despite the oppressive heat and humidity here in the mid-Atlantic. While the pace often slows during the summer months, we've been keeping the pedal down in the execution of our strategic plan.

Two of the major elements of that plan are the Common Area Refreshment and Enhancement (CARE) project, which will focus on short-term efforts to address the Vinson Hall common spaces and community-wide infrastructure needs, and the community Master Plan, which will address longer-term opportunities to reposition the buildings and grounds of VHRC to meet the needs of current and future residents as those continue to evolve.

We have started our work with CARE, and we will be providing updates to the community as we plan for and execute specific projects. Among other things, we'll ask in advance for your patience; we'll do our best to minimize disruptions while we engage in this important work.

On the Master Plan front, we have recently engaged an architect and other partners to help us conceptualize the future state of our campus, ensuring that our programs, services, and physical spaces are well-positioned to ensure that VHRC remains the best place for seniors in our region to live for decades to come. With data from stakeholder engagement and other sources, we expect to complete Phase I of this work – which includes a high-level conceptual plan – by early 2025.

We are working closely with VHRA leadership – primarily through its Operations and Strategy Committees – to ensure that current resident feedback is thoroughly incorporated into decision-making. We also expect to have additional opportunities for general feedback from residents, so stay tuned if you are interested in participating.

While we are excited about the impact of this work on Vinson Hall's continued success, we will also stay firmly rooted in the culture, values, and history that have made our community a special place to live and work for the past 55 years. Our mission and values will not change, and we will continue to celebrate our history of serving those who have served. These principles are woven into the fabric of our community life, and they will continue to serve as a strong foundation as we move forward.❖



CEO Chip Warner with outgoing NMCGRF Board Chair Mark Skinner and incoming Board Chair Cindy Dullea.

— Chip Warner, President and CEO

Summer Days at VHRC

The sun has been blazing down on Vinson Hall Retirement Community this summer, but the heat and humidity have not slowed us down. In May, 21 teams competed fiercely in one of our favorite activities: a Corn Bag Toss Tournament. Later that month, we presented the largest Art Show in VHRC's history, with more than 350 paintings, drawings and photographs on display. In June, we welcomed back our four-year-old friends from Kidstretch Preschool in Falls Church for an intergenerational playdate, their eighth visit to campus in the past two years. Then, two days before our official birthday on Sunday, June 23, we gathered in the Penthouse to celebrate VHRC's 55th birthday, raising a glass of champagne to toast this remarkable community. On Independence Day, we put on our red, white and blue and celebrated with friends and neighbors, while listening to a special concert

of patriotic music performed by Vinson Voices. Later in July, we laughed out loud as we watched our resident thespians present their sixth play, a comedy spoof called *How to Get Away with A Murder Mystery*. All the while, we've kept cool at ice cream socials, monthly birthday teas and other campus gatherings, enjoying each other's company as the summer heat shimmered on! ❖



About Campus News and Views

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

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Campus News & Views Summer 2024

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Navy Marine Coast Guard Residence Foundation News

Behind the Scenes This Summer

For most of us, summer generally brings a more relaxed pace to our lives. Some head out of town on vacation getaways, others relax indoors to beat the heat, and most everyone takes it just a bit easier. But behind the scenes at the Navy Marine Coast Guard Residence Foundation, there has been a flurry of activity in the last couple months!

Right now, we are deep into planning mode for this year's annual Gala fundraiser on October 5. On July 29, invitations went out for *Moonlight Over Monte Carlo*, and at press time a week later we are nearly sold out! This year, we will take our guests to magical Monaco, the gem of the French Riviera. Festivities will start in the "Casino de Monte Carlo" (Fred Johnson's Bistro), where guests can try their hand at blackjack tables and the roulette wheel or just mingle and enjoy the joie de vivre. From there, we will move up to "Monaco on the Riviera" (The Ballroom) for an elegant three course-meal and dancing to oldies and Motown favorites played by the Moonlighters band. This is the Foundation's only major fundraiser, with all proceeds going toward supporting the residents and staff of Vinson Hall Retirement Community. We look forward to creating a night to remember at VHRC!

Meanwhile, we are excited about the terrific response we have had to our annual Membership Appeal campaign, which we launched in May. As we do every year, we invited our supporters – VHRC residents, family members, friends and staff – to become 2024 members of the Foundation, and over the past couple months your membership donations have made our hearts soar! We are so grateful. Your membership gifts are what enable us to help make a difference in our community.

Throughout the summer, we have kept the presses humming and communication flowing at VHRC. In June, we took a moment to celebrate *The Beacon's* anniversary with a special issue, inviting residents to share their thoughts about the weekly newsletter we launched three years ago. Said Nancy Dietrich: "*The Beacon* keeps us up to date, so we don't miss anything." Added Gene Wentz: "I look forward to *The Beacon*... It makes me feel like I'm a part of the community." We're so happy to hear it! It has been our pleasure to use our communication skills to produce various new publications, including the 2023 Annual Report as well as this issue of our quarterly literary magazine.

In other summer news, we recently purchased new equipment for the Fitness Center and outdoor benches for Vinson Hall's front entrance through the Innovation & Enhancement Fund. We welcomed Tairique Whittaker, our latest wounded warrior to benefit from the Warrior Transition Fund, to our VHRC family. And this month we hosted a Cocktails and Canines happy hour with our four-legged friends from Veterans Moving Forward. None of these things could have been accomplished without your support. So as the summer winds to a close, we want to thank you for all you do to help us support this very special community!❖

— Michelle Crone, Senior Director of Philanthropy & Engagement



From left, Sherm Eagan, Michelle Crone, Cheryl Gayton and Stan Trost at the Cocktails and Canines happy hour.

Upon This Rock...

By Jerry Norris

Jerry Norris was a Peace Corps volunteer in Colombia from 1963 to 1965.



Jerry Norris in La Plata, Colombia in 1963.

In 1963, my site assignment as a Peace Corps volunteer was in a market village in the foothills of the Andean Mountains, called La Plata. It was located at about 4,000 feet above sea level, and had some 3,000 residents. One afternoon, there was a knock at my door. When I answered, I was greeted by three villagers dressed in traditional garb with ruanas (a cape-like outer garment) over their shoulders. They said that they were from the village of La Florida, which could be accessed only by a four-hour bus or horseback ride up the mountains. They told me that their mayor had recently given them permission to build their first school. Would I come up to see its potential site? We agreed to meet in one

week's time if they could provide a horse for me. On the appointed time and date, we met at a trailhead and rode up a steep mountain trail to the village.

When I arrived, I saw that La Florida was a village populated by people of rather limited economic means. They quickly showed me the parcel of land that had been set aside for the school. Smack in its center was a huge boulder, making it obvious that unless it was removed, construction of the school could not begin. I was handed a mallet and I used it to strike the boulder right at its upper-most point. The resounding effect made it clear that, like an iceberg, only five percent of what one saw constituted the mass below it. I casually remarked that the only way to remove it was by the use of dynamite. Satisfied with my assessment, I saddled up and left.

About a week later, there was another knock at my front door. I opened it to one of the three villagers who threw his ruana over his shoulders to reveal an industrial-sized stick of dynamite and asked: "Like this, Geronimo?" I had no idea how they got it nor did I ask. So, I commented, "Well, yes, but now you need blasting caps and a line of fuse," with the full belief that this would get me off the hook.

About another week later, the same three villagers knocked on my door, repeating the same line – "Like this, Geronimo?" – and one threw back his ruana to reveal blasting caps and a length of fuse line. I was now hooked and agreed to go back to La Florida to dynamite that boulder.

I returned to La Florida in about a week's time. Someone produced a four-foot-long hand-operated Starr Drill. Again, I had no idea how they had gotten hold of such an instrument. I instructed them to drill two holes in the boulder, initiating the drilling on the topmost point and then angling the lines to meet as far down as

they could drill. I then cut the stick of dynamite into two even sections, stuffed them into the holes, tied them into a fuse line, with a heavy packing of mud, topped off with the heaviest timbers they could find placed over the two holes.

I then warned everyone to take cover and set the fuse. Within less than a minute, there was huge blast running down the valley, with the timbers flying sky high. We waited until the air had cleared, then approached the boulder.

But it appeared to be no different than before. I asked one of the villagers to strike the boulder at the points between the two holes. He gave it a mighty whack but nothing happened. I asked him to repeat it once again, which he did. Again, nothing! I asked him to strike it one more time which he quickly did. This time, the boulder began to shatter like a month-old cookie! Now,

they could go ahead and easily pry it apart and begin construction of their school.

During the construction process, Lee, one of my site partners, went up to see how it was going. He was met at the trailhead by a young man who had a horse waiting for him. As they got up the trail, after about 20 minutes or so, the young man turned around in his saddle and asked Lee, "Where are you from?" When he responded "I'm from the United States of America," the young man turned his head forward. Then, after 20 seconds or so, the young man once again turned to face Lee, saying, "Is that as far away as Bogota?"

Thus it can be said that it was upon this rock – or more precisely, the removal of this rock – the school was built, marking the foundational starting point that paved the way for La Florida's students to enter a wider world of possibilities.❖

Legacy: The Doily

By Margaret Dean

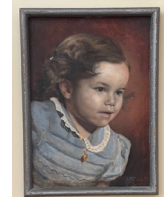
Stitch by stitch I see my mother weave our histories together as she crochets for me a memory now of times long past.

Precious thoughts of family are framed in glass and gold, as

The breath of a life long lived reaches a time now ending.

She leaves that bit of history and art entwined for future generations, trusting that her stitches will link us together through time.

Even though that time has long since faded daughters and granddaughters may yet hold it precious as they recall a time woven in memories of yarn.



To South America in a Single Engine Plane

Part 4

By Maureen Kammerer



*Scenes from
Esmeraldas,
Ecuador in 1965.*

This is the fourth part of a continuing story of the author's trip to South America. Part 1 was published in Fall 2023, Part 2 was published in Winter 2024 and Part 3 was published in Spring 2024.

The mysterious murky brown waters of the Mt. Irazu volcano in Costa Rica became a distant memory when we filed our flight plan to Ecuador at the San Jose Airport in June of 1965. Our destination that morning was Esmeraldas, on the northern tip of Ecuador. It had once been an active slave port for South America and was a banana port in 1965.

We wore trousers that day and strapped on our yellow life vests, as we would be flying over water. The life rafts were on our laps. I wore Joe's Boy Scout Bowie knife on my waist in case I had to stab a life raft that might accidentally inflate. (These WWII rafts were a gift from a Navy doctor and had not been inspected since the war!) We needed to stop for fuel to make the whole journey and decided to land in David, Panama, even though we had no visas. After requesting permission to land, we were met at the plane by security guards approaching the plane bearing Tommy guns. The four of us left the plane as it was being inspected carefully for drugs and

contraband. "Yanqui Go Home" was a commonly seen graffiti in South America in 1965 after the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba by the United States. We saw it in the airport.

We each managed to buy a sandwich in the tiny shack that was the airport. The only gasoline available was so dirty that we had to strain it through cheesecloth to get the insects and dirt out. I held the cloth while Mike carefully filled our tank. We departed quickly as we wanted to get to Esmeraldas before sunset and we felt the tension in Panama.

We landed safely in Esmeraldas in the late afternoon after flying over water. The airport runway was a grass alley between rows of banana trees, making the landing most interesting! The airport was a little green house and there were many young men standing there, anticipating our arrival. They were the tallest Black men I had ever seen. As Esmeraldas had been a slave port, it seemed obvious they were the descendants of tall tribesmen from Africa. After paying our landing fees, we were escorted by several men and boys down a path to a little landing area where dugout canoes awaited us. Our escorts were huge young boys who poled

us across the bay to an old wooden hotel in the town. The two canoes banged up against a landing place with many old concrete steps, and we disembarked and found ourselves in an old town with chickens and children running around in the street, amazed at our being there. My mother, good sport that she still was, said as we approached the landing, "If only the bridge club could see me now."

Our host at the hotel said he could accommodate us, and even called his friend at the only little restaurant in town. We were served a broth with what we hoped were chicken parts floating in it with a few grains of rice and some bread. We guessed at what the parts were, and bravely ate as we were very hungry. Returning to the hotel, we walked up some very well-worn wooden steps to our rooms that featured windows without screens or glass. The mosquito nets with very large holes hanging over the sagging beds were to be our only protection for the night.

The only gasoline available was so dirty that we had to strain it through cheesecloth to get the insects and dirt out. I held the cloth while Mike carefully filled our tank.

We slept in our clothes to stay as covered as possible, but when I awoke in the morning after listening to the roosters all night long, I found mosquito bites all around my neck forming a welt necklace.

I have a vague memory of eggs and bread for breakfast somewhere, but my memory of the boys poling us again across the bay is most vivid. Again, we strained the gas through cloth, and this time we knew we needed every drop to get us to Quito. If you looked up Esmeraldes on the internet, you would find that it is now a luxury resort. Several years after we were there,

oil was discovered in Esmeraldes and everything changed.

Our next destination was Quito, Ecuador, the oldest city in South America with an elevation of more than 9,000 feet in the Andes mountains. It is the capital city, the cultural capital of Ecuador and the seat of the Inca Empire which was conquered in 1534 by the Spanish.

The Quito airport was full of big Pan American Airlines planes, making our little plane look like a mosquito among the birds. We were grateful to have landed midday so that we still had time to explore the city. We knew that our takeoff would be a challenge because of the altitude, but also because the commercial planes would be serviced before us and we needed to get out of Quito before storms rolled in from Guayaquil on the coast. Our plane was designed to fly at only 15,000 feet, and we would be in trouble trying to rise above the clouds.

Quito was declared a world heritage site in 1965, and we found it fascinating, with a blend of Indian residents, Spanish and indigenous people in their costumes selling weavings near the churches. Because we were going to have to use the entire runway when we took off in order to get lift in that rarified atmosphere, we knew we couldn't buy anything to take aboard. So we looked and explored and experienced but did not shop. There were some modern buildings with murals, and we saw Indian women weaving near the churches, children playing in the streets, and the elegant city center buildings. Our hotel looked out over the city and in the distance we could see the shacks of the poor on stilts. It was a wretched poverty that I had never witnessed before.

Two days later, we arrived at the airport early to try to leave but were held up by all the Pan Am planes being processed before us. By noon, the

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Fiction

How I Met My Mother-in-Law

By Stan Trost



This is a work of fiction.

I met my future mother-in-law at Smokey's Tavern. Smokey came from a long line of bartenders, knew how to carry on a conversation, and most importantly, Smokey mixed a great Moscow Mule, properly served in a chilled copper mug.

My export-import office was in a nearby Victorian home, converted for commercial use. I kept busy, enjoyed working with my customers, and travelling overseas. On most weeknights I worked late, but I reserved Thursday evenings for mellowing out at Smokey's.

Smokey's had a regular crowd that swelled on Thursday, as young people from local law firms and tech companies came to participate in activities such as watching NCAA basketball and big league baseball, singing Karaoke, and playing trivia and poker.

Sitting on a corner barstool, I liked to watch the crowd and often I engaged in the activities, hoping for an occasional fling. One evening, Smokey sought my opinion on conducting a scavenger hunt. I nodded my agreement, although this sounded like a bad idea. Memories of a freshman scavenger hunt turned deadly haunted me, but I kept this dark event to myself.

The following Thursday, I occupied my usual barstool. An old, bent-over woman hobbled into the bar and took the seat next to me. She said her name was Hermione and asked me to buy her a drink. Reluctantly, I asked Smokey for two Moscow Mules; he mixed them and set them on the bar.

Smokey announced the rules for the scavenger hunt as he handed us a list of objects: We had two hours to find and bring back all we could find, and the team submitting the most items would win free drinks for a year. Unless one of the objects was valuable, I didn't understand how Smokey would make money on this event.

To my dismay, Smokey paired me up with Hermione. From past events, I knew not to object. I would find a way to get even with him before the year was out. Hermione hobbled behind me to my self-driving car. We got in the car, buckled up, and I told the car to head to the center of Gotham.

As we sped toward the city, a strange aura came over Hermione. A purple mist surrounded her, then it slowly changed colors. She began to shake; she slowly grew tall, and straightened out, her skin began to shed, and she emerged transformed into the most beautiful woman I had ever seen. Hermione looked at me and told me to pull over. I was under her spell.

We studied the list and developed a plan to find fresh scallions, virgin olive oil, a winning lottery ticket, kidney pie, a jar of mink oil, ginger root, dragons' blood oil, a moonstone ring, a hickory staff, and a fertility candle. We puzzled over the last item, a golden orb. She said we would gather as much as we could, then decide how we would get the orb.

We exited the car, she waved her hand and two hoverboards dropped to the ground. We mounted the boards and sped down Broadway.

What an exhilarating experience. In the light of a full moon, we glided above the traffic, avoided traffic jams, and went through intersections as though we were the only ones on the road. More and more I wanted to be with Hermione forever.

We came to a Whole Foods market; Hermione guided us through the walls, and we picked up a kidney pie, olive oil, and ginger root. She took us to Glinda's witchcraft emporium, where we gathered mink and blood oil, a moonstone ring, a hickory staff, and a fertility ring.

We stopped at a 7-Eleven. She bought a lottery ticket and told me it would win. In a few minutes, we had everything except the orb. We jumped on our hoverboards and drifted toward Wellington Tower. Magically, we flew through the walls and down to the sub-basement. Then, in a slow spiral, we began to drift up floor by floor. Hermione was able to guide us through walls and floors without effort.

We reached the pinnacle of the building, and looked out over the city. She turned to me and said that she sensed the orb was nearby, and even though time was running out, we needed to float slowly through the building as we searched for the object. After another scan through the building, I opened my iPhone XV and asked Siri about orbs. We were both startled to find that in addition to being a spherical object, small circles of light on photographs were known as spirit orbs. Spirit orbs represent Angels or Spirit Guides. Siri told us red orbs were anger, blue orbs were protection, violet were guides for spiritual matters. Gold was unconditional love.

Armed with this new information, we drifted down to the lobby; on the wall was a photograph of Arthur Wellington, founder of the Wellington Companies. Looking closely, we saw the presence of a golden spirit orb. Rather than taking the photograph, I snapped a picture with my iPhone. We now had all of the objects on the scavenger list.

By now I was madly in love with Hermione. I suggested we go into a nearby bar for more Moscow Mules and a little dancing. She told me that even though I was enchanted with her, a romantic relationship was not possible. She said she would arrange for me to meet her daughter. Then we began the return trip to the tavern.

This time we rode the hoverboards to Smokey's. As we approached the tavern, a purple mist surrounded Hermione, and she began to shrivel. My hoverboard disappeared and I tumbled to the sidewalk. I saw a bent over woman hobble down the street. I picked myself up, entered the tavern.

Smokey smiled at me as I handed him the bag of items. He asked where my partner was; I was silent. I couldn't believe how much it hurt to be alone. Smokey went through the bag and pulled out each item. When he was done he asked if we had found the golden orb. I handed him my iPhone and told him to look at my photo gallery.

He did and said the only photo was of a beautiful woman. As he handed me the phone, a purple mist surrounded the photo and it slowly faded away. I got up and headed for home.

Several Thursdays passed by before I returned to Smokey's. Though I was a confirmed bachelor, Hermione's beauty had overwhelmed me and I wondered if I could find someone else. Smokey poured my Moscow Mule while I sat remembering the last time I was here. As I looked around, an attractive woman entered the bar and sat next to me. She asked what I was drinking - I ordered her a mule. As we sat enjoying our drinks, Smokey announced that tonight's activity would be a scavenger hunt. I groaned. Slowly a purple mist surrounded the woman. ❖

Lousy Bosses? Yes, I've Had a Few

By Gene Wentz



Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Elmo Zumwalt pins a medal on then-Commander Gene Wentz at Athens in 1972. Zumwalt's relaxation of personnel grooming standards caused problems for Captain Wentz with a boss at a later assignment.

In the last issue of the *Campus News and Views* I praised three outstanding bosses I had during my 27-year Navy career. They included Commander Camille Houck, my boss in Yokohama, Japan, during the early 1960s. Coincidentally, she grew up near my hometown area in central Pennsylvania, and is buried there. Cam was a trail blazer in making senior Navy leadership positions open to women.

Alas, I also served under two bosses who were lousy. One was a vice admiral (three stars) and the other a rear admiral (two stars).

The three-star was my boss at naval headquarters in London during the 1970s. This was a time when the top officer in the Navy, Admiral Elmo Zumwalt, the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO), was trying to humanize the Navy by, among other things, allowing officers and men to grow sideburns, mustaches and beards. These facial adornments might have been acceptable during the Civil War, but had largely been forbidden in the Navy since WWII. My boss, the three-star, decided, in spite of what

the CNO decreed, he wanted his staff officers to be clean shaven. That was OK with me, but I had a junior officer in my office who, respectfully but stubbornly, insisted on wearing his full beard.

My boss wanted me to achieve, by any means necessary, his wish for a clean-shaven staff. There was another factor that complicated my problem. My recalcitrant junior, in his early 30s, had just suffered a serious heart attack. So, in addition to respecting his stand on principle, I sympathized with his medical condition. But, as he told me, "Sir, my wife and children like my regulation beard, and CNO says I can have it." I was between a rock and a hard place.

The three-star was livid. He accused me of having no leadership ability and abetting a distraction in his command. His fitness report on me (a sort of report card) ended all hope of my ever having a career beyond captain.

The two-star, on the other hand, was a victim of his own success. He was an exceptional planner and organizer, but, when given the extraordinary

power of a flag officer, he became a dictatorial tyrant. If displeased by someone, he resorted to humiliation, intimidation and shunning. We clashed. I was not the first to endure his odd moods, but I was the last.

After he gave me an unsatisfactory fitness report, I reported his strange behavior to the CNO, who ordered inquiries and removed him from office. I appealed the unsatisfactory fitness report to the

Secretary of the Navy, whose investigative panel ruled in my favor that the report was unfair and ordered it removed from my record. The two-star ended his Navy career alone in an obscure assignment, without staff, answering his own telephone.

One of my character failings is that I'm vindictive. I rejoiced in his humiliation and would call his number just to hang up after he answered. ❖

To South America - Part 4

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clouds began to roll in and Mike was worried.

Finally, it was our turn. We had to use the entire runway in order to get liftoff, but at last we were in the air. The clouds increased and we were struggling to get above the clouds. We could not get higher because of the design of the plane, so we dropped back down and, in order to see, we followed the Magdalena River away from Quito through a mountain pass barely feet from the mountain wall on each side. Behind Mike, I was telling him to lift the right wing, or lift the left wing, to try to avoid going any lower or to attempt now to go higher. It was truly death-defying flying, and Mike was using all his training to keep us above the river and away from the mountainsides. My mother pulled out her rosary, and eventually we were able to see more open sky and seek a higher altitude without clouds. But our pilot began to feel faint and I grabbed the steering controls and yelled at him, keeping him awake. We were flying to Bogota, Colombia that day and I was determined to make it. As we flew we were all tense and feeling the need to pee.

After flying over the fascinating landscape of the Andes Mountains, we finally landed on a plateau

in Colombia, a city called Neiva. It is located in the valley of the Magdalena at 1900 feet elevation. We all raced into the airport and to the restrooms. Again, we were in a place we had not planned to be, but this time we were welcomed by security guards. We were told we could not go on to Bogota just then because the airport had been taken over by banditos that morning. We would have to wait a few hours. We were glad for the respite, the lack of storm clouds, and the candy bars we were given. (Just two years later, in 1967, a strong earthquake destroyed much of the city.)

After a few hours we were told we could fly to Bogota. When we arrived in the late afternoon, the big airport was a welcome sight and we were directed to a wonderful hotel, The Tocarema, with gorgeous peacocks roaming the grounds. We enjoyed phone calls to home and a marvelous dinner before collapsing in bed after a most frightening day. ❖

Look for the fifth and final part of this story in the Fall 2024 issue of the Campus News and Views.

The Actor in All of Us

By Emmy Simmons



Over the last couple of years, the Vinson Hall Players have become a true theater ensemble. More than 35 VHRC residents have stepped forward and invested in rehearsal time and costumed photoshoots to bring a number of roles to vivid life. Each play is performed with thoughtful, dramatic readings of scripts and accompanied by a “film script” of action photos taken on the Vinson Hall campus. This film script is projected behind the Players on the screens in the Ballroom (*Exposition Woman* and *Complaint Department and Lemonade*) or Alford Auditorium (*Satellite Parking*, *A Krampus Carol*, *Now and Then*). The improved sound system in the Alford Auditorium has made that a preferred venue for many audience members. The photoshoot sites can be anywhere. The Reading Room in the Community Building has been a favorite, but the Bistro made a great Irish bar!

Bob Springer has successfully taken on challenging roles in Player productions, booed as a killer in *Exposition Woman* and hailed as a thoughtful sage (and musician) and time traveler in *Now and Then*.

Lola Le Craw, building on her summer theater experience, created the unforgettable role of Ellie, an old lady waiting for a ride “home” to

Venus in *Satellite Parking*, and sparred with Richard Bizar (as Jacob Marley) in her role as the unprepared Ghost of Christmas Past in *A Krampus Carol*.

Miriam Howard adeptly and repeatedly ignored her true age: acting as a 12-year-old child in *A Krampus Carol* and both a 25-year-old waitress and 65-year-old English professor in *Now and Then*.

Anna Coutlakis began her Vinson Hall Players career by starring in the *Exposition Woman*. Her character, who in real life was a young woman named Audrey Munson, had worked as a nude model in her youth in New York City. In the play, she is celebrating her 95th birthday and being interviewed as a long-time resident in the psychiatric ward of Bellevue Hospital by Florence Hall, who, in her role as Helen in *Exposition Woman*, portrayed a caring as well as intrepid reporter for the *New York Times*. Silvia Fenton played a doctor, highly skeptical of Helen’s efforts to record Audrey’s interesting life.

A whole parade of characters was shaped by the efforts of Bud Dougherty, Arma Jane Karaer, Sue Berkey, Jill Stryker, Ed Davis, Sheila Davis, and a long list of other residents in the comedy,

Complaint Department and Lemonade. Each character served as both complainer and staffer in the Complaint Department, serving up an astonishing variety of complaints about life. Bill Mitchell, as one complainer, seemed unable to stop being a kleptomaniac, and Yvonne Sabine, a wannabe entrepreneur, was unable to figure out why she made terrible lemonade. Jean Mertz was surprised that her own hearing was to blame for her complaints about her husband's hearing. And on and on, for a total of 15 complaints – all of which, fortunately, were resolved in the end!

The production of *A Krampus Carol* gave even more Players a chance to shine. Susan Berkey took on the portrayal of the Eastern European character Krampus both old and young. She was joined by Lonnie Cullers as Old Santa and Bob Purks as a younger version of Santa, Bud Dougherty played Krampus's son gone bad, and Jill Stryker shone as both the Ghost of Christmas Present and a disheartened clerk in Taco Champ on Christmas Eve. Playing Santa's elves, other actors came to the stage: Marion Hart, Margaret Kurth, Marianne Kiernan, and Betty Ochenrider supported Santa's manufacturing efforts at the North Pole. The photoshoot of Santa's workshop built on the Christmas decorations of many willing residents in both cast and crew.

A significant number of these actors – and the VH Players crew members – had last appeared onstage in elementary school, although it seems that a few continued to engage in theater activities during college and grad school days as well as in summer theater. Some masked their love of theater by working as teachers and acting out the joy of learning every day for their students! Others seem to be "born actors," capable of evoking an emotion or a character with little effort.

Finding scripts that are interesting or fun and appropriate to the setting of Vinson Hall requires a bit of searching on "community theater"

websites. There is, however, an amazing variety of shows that – with some editing – fit the constraints of time, scenery, costumes, and sound that the Players face at Vinson Hall. The play put into production in May/June, *How to Get Away with a Murder Mystery*, was a straight-out comedy that provided a light-hearted start to summer. The Players welcomed John McNerney to the cast as Mr. Burgundy, a rollicking role that called for him to be, variously, a rock star, a scientist, and a circus performer. Along with the four other Players identified by the colors of their costumes, John demonstrated the kind of versatility and skills that are now becoming the Players' signature!

Planning is already afoot for new plays that will be presented in the coming year. Ideas from our audience are always welcome. And all those aspiring actors should come out of hiding! The Vinson Hall Players are a DIY ensemble and always open to new talent. We present opportunities to act, manage sound and lights, help with costumes and props, support the photoshoots, and register an opinion on what plays to do. You may not have been the most convincing Snow White when you were in kindergarten, but you have a chance to up your game with the Vinson Hall Players! ❖



Temptation

By Beth Bowers

Your ions are attractive;
I cannot tell you why.
Won't you please turn off
That magnetic field,
And kindly let me by?!

Another Story, This One True

By Stan Trost



Stan and Elaine Trost in 1962. Their twin daughters Randy and Laurie at 18 months.

Education

A few stories from my engineering education. My parents drove me from LA to Berkeley, my first time on campus. I went to see my advisor. He said "Trost, we should not have let you in here." Well what a start. The Asian flu was going around, I was able to get a job in the registration lines, I joined a fraternity, and I got a job serving meals and working in the kitchen. I met my future wife, Elaine, in the library. By the way, tuition when I attended Berkeley was \$0.00.

We had to take a course in measurements. One of our assignments was to hike up the hills behind the football stadium and measure the distance between a tower on campus and a church steeple. We had to carry surveyors' equipment. It had rained and we were muddy when we finished.

My friend Archie and I were taking an advanced calculus class, taught by a grad student named Mr. Ohm. When we came to class, someone would say, Mr. Ohm, I don't know how to work Problem 4. Mr. Ohm would say What's there to know? Then he would not be able to solve the problem. Last I heard, Mr. Ohm was working in a resistor factory.

In my junior year, I took a killer course:

Introduction to Electrical Engineering. The class was seven units for two semesters. We met for lectures three times a week, and had two three-hour lab sections each week. I had intended to be a mechanical engineer, but a friend told me electrical engineering was more lucrative. I didn't know a volt from an amp, but I got shocked into learning the difference. If you survived this course, you were on your way!

To graduate, we had to take a written history test. The test was on a Saturday. Elaine, Archie, and I purchased a book (Pocket History of the United States) and began studying Friday morning. We pulled an all-nighter, and took the test Saturday morning. We forgot all of U.S. history by noon, but we all passed.

During my senior year, I had to make a decision about my future. I had an offer to study for a master's degree at Berkeley, but I wasn't sure what I wanted. I applied for a number of jobs, but the job market wasn't great.

First Job

Finally, I received an offer to join a research group at Northrop in Hawthorne, California (home of the Beach Boys).

The day I got to Northrop was very exciting.

There was a company-wide announcement that the company had just lost a major contract (the Skybolt Missile). Engineers started dusting off their resumes, and many of them ended up at Hughes, North American, and Douglas.

My boss told me not to worry, our research was protected. He asked me to design a double integrating amplifier for use in a guidance computer. I had no idea what I was doing, but off I went. (I should mention that this was the early days of transistors, and there was limited knowledge regarding their use.)

Part of my plan was to enroll in graduate school part time, so I began taking classes at USC. Elaine got a teaching job in Hawthorne, and we shared our one car.

One day, my boss told me to drop what I was doing – we were now a production group!

Another team had designed a voice warning system for the B58 (see warhistoryonline.com for information). The team had now moved on to a similar system for Minuteman Missile Silos, and our job was to solve any production problems.

A word on engineering design: Once a problem is defined, engineers produce drawings, specifications, and bills of materials. Several prototypes are built and tested. Any necessary changes are then made, drawings finalized, and production begins.

It soon became obvious that the previous team had left us with a mess. The first issue was with a stepping motor, used for priority logic. It was wired wrong! It took a while, but several senior engineers on our team solved the problem.

An aside. We still had one car. I started working at 8 a.m. and often stayed until 2 or 3 in the morning. Elaine would pick me up at 5 p.m., we would go across the street to Norms (hamburger \$1.73, deep dish pie \$0.95, coffee \$0.35), and then she would drop me off and go home until I

called her to pick me up.

The first problem assigned to me was a problem with "Shockley Diodes" used for logic. There was an issue called the rate effect that was causing the logic not to work. The fix was fairly simple, but we had to throw away a lot of Shockley Diodes.

Part of qualifying a military device is to subject it to a range of environmental conditions. In our case, we had temperature extremes of 155 degrees below zero F to 180 degrees F, humidity, sand and dust, shock and vibration, audio quality, and electromagnetic interference.

The next problem concerned performance at low temperature. It didn't! We put measurement devices on the system and lowered the temperature. Two issues were identified: the motor would not turn and the transistor that controlled the motor had too large of a voltage drop. We fixed the motor by using a low temperature grease, and I redesigned the circuit so it would work. (By this time I was thoroughly disgusted with the prior design team who were receiving accolades for their accomplishments.)

All the while, I was attending grad school at USC. Fortunately, this is where I learned about computers, leading to my career as a computer engineer. As the project wound down, Elaine gave birth to our twin daughters. They were premature, and the doctor said we had to feed them around the clock every three hours! If you want to know how hard this was, just ask me. The LA Dodgers and the San Francisco Giants were engaged in an exciting pennant race – we spent many evenings listening to their games while we fed the babies.

By the way, my reward for all the hard work at Northrop was a \$30 raise. The boss (a really great guy) said sorry it could not be more. I said, sorry I'm out of here. I'll save that story for another time. ❖

VINSON HALL RETIREMENT COMMUNITY

Campus News & Views

Summer 2024



This summer our military spouses were honored with flowers by the Naval Officers' Spouses Club of Washington, D.C. We competed in a Corn Bag Toss Tournament. We laughed out loud with the talented VH Players at their production of *How to Get Away With a Murder Mystery*. And we cooled off with ice cream at the monthly Ice Cream Socials.