

20th Anniversary of Gloria Dei Estates
(Memories of My Mother's Years at GDE)

I am honored to be back at Gloria Dei Estates where I spent many happy years visiting my mother, who was one of the first residents.

When Fern invited me to share my memories through the years, I felt both humbled and overjoyed. Before writing down any thoughts, I took out a photo album of the homes where my parents and I lived. On the cover was a quote from Saint Teresa of Avila:

In this home all must be friends,
all must be loved,
all must be held dear,
all must be helped.

My mother had heard that there were going to be apartments built for independent senior housing living in the Northeast. The timing was perfect since she began to realize our family home was becoming too much for her to handle. We took a ride to the trailer on this site where we met the marketing team, all of whom were welcoming, gracious, patient, understanding, and caring. Time and time again, we returned with more questions. These ladies sent us to the Manor and the Towers to give us an idea of how the Estates would look when completed.

Once the sample apartment (#126) was open, my mother loved it at first sight. That day she chose her apartment (#104). She was now on the list of potential residents. The marketing team gave us lots of reading material along with the name of a realtor, movers, and furniture store.

Our trips to this site were not over. We came several times to measure how and where the furniture would fit into the space provided. The most important question was, "Where would the piano fit"? The adjoining wall between the kitchen and living room was perfect. After that, everything fell into place.

Our family home was put up for sale and sold very quickly. Mother used the monies to pay the entrance fee and we spent the following months preparing for moving day along with little side trips to Rhawn Street to watch the progress of the building project and to measure spaces, all the while meeting daughters with mothers who had an interest in moving into the Estates.

My mother's building was ready for occupancy on November 30, 1998. Mom did not want to be the first to move in, so she waited until December 2, 1998. It was a bright, clear, sunny winter day with no wind. The movers arrived at 7:00 AM. They were fine men who loaded the truck quickly and quietly. Before we knew it, we were driving up the Boulevard.

During the short ride, we shared memories of our home and I told my mom, "you know, all of you who are the first to move into the Estates are like pioneers. You will help to build community together."

We arrived mid-morning, and once the truck was unloaded, we were left alone to start unpacking. Our goal was to have the bedroom, bathroom, and kitchen in good working order before going to bed that evening. Day turned into night. I looked at my watch and it was 9:00 PM. A light bulb went off in my head. "Mother, it's time to do something important." She asked, "What's that?" "We have to fix the stat." Mom called back to me "Red for bed?" and from that first day, she became comfortable with the routine of checking the stat.

The first weeks were very busy getting organized, shopping for little things needed, and most of all, meeting new neighbors and recognizing familiar faces we had met from the sample apartment. Every now and then, my mom would sit down at her piano and play a few songs for relaxation. Little did she know that sometimes neighbors passing by would stand outside her apartment and listen to her play or even open the doors of their apartments and listen to her play as they did their chores. Soon they began calling her 'the piano lady.'

One day there was a knock on the door. A lady said, "There is a piano out in the atrium. How about coming out and playing a few tunes for us?" My mother accompanied her to the atrium. As she played, people were assembling on the four floors looking down over the railing, singing along, dancing, and calling out special requests. They were amazed at her repertoire because my mom played by ear and could not read a note of music.

During the early days, a community spirit started to develop. In addition to my mom, residents pitched in to help in various ways. One resident, who was a retired mail carrier, got a group together to distribute the mail before the mailboxes were in place. Often there was a memo from the office, and the residents would walk the corridors, placing the notes under each door. My mother made them laugh saying it was good exercise to bend down and stand up over and over again.

On Valentine's Day in 1999, there was a lovely celebration and dedication of their new home. Every floor was decorated. Music filled the air. Mayor Ed Rendell, representatives from Gloria Dei Corporation, along with residents and their families were in attendance. Both Jewish and Christian prayers were offered. After the ribbon-cutting ceremony, all assembled in the Grand Room where we shared light fare donated by various businesses in the area. This was a true example of neighbors helping neighbors move into the community.

With a resident council being formed, many activities and little volunteer jobs surfaced. People were happy and were eager and willing to lend a helping hand. My mother was captain on her floor, worked in the coffee shop two afternoons a week, sang in the glee club, played bingo, did line dancing, helped collect money and set tables for dinners, brown bag lunches and special parties. Sometimes she played duets on the piano with another resident musician.

Many other activities were happening, too. Some that come to mind are playing cards, Wii bowling, and arts and crafts. In fact, the magnets in your laundry room

were made by residents in the first arts and craft group. Over the years, many wonderful, faithful, dedicated volunteers made all of these activities happen.

As mother aged, she needed to slow down, but managed to participate whenever she could. I remember how sad she was to give up working in the coffee shop. Due to macular degeneration in both eyes, she wanted to stop before she gave people the incorrect change or spilled coffee all over the floor.

My mom loved people. She would stop to say hello if she met someone in the laundry, the hallway, or the trash room. As people aged, more people needed the use of canes and walkers. When they were hesitant to use them, my mom would say, "God gave man the intelligence to figure out some way to help older people walk easier," so they listened. She would say, "Try it you'll like it." So at age 93, when she announced to the doctor, "I think I need a walker," I reminded her of the words of wisdom she shared with others. Even with the walker, the residents would tell me my mother walked faster than I did.

For me personally, I received many gifts from my extended family here at the Estates. I would like to mention three.

Some residents encouraged my mother, at age 90, to make a CD of her piano selections for me as a surprise for my 65th birthday. Later that year, she made another CD of Christmas songs with both of us playing Silent Night as a duet. I am so grateful to those residents who encouraged my mother and who spent hours with her to complete the project.

In the fall of 2014, I was to celebrate my Golden Jubilee as a Sister of St. Joseph. My mother talked about having a celebration for me in the Grand Room and inviting our family, my sister friends, my choir family, and residents here whom I knew. My mother went to Heaven in June of that year. What started out as a small surprise lunch with a couple of residents blossomed into a surprise party at Red Rooster being filled to capacity. For me, it was a humbling experience and helped me to know how much my mother was loved by the residents here.

Over the years, I came to know residents and their families. There was an unspoken bond among the daughters. To this day, even though our mothers have gone home to God, the girls stay in touch by phone, snail mail, or text.

I will always remember with fondness the office staff, maintenance men, Flossie, night managers, friends and neighbors of my mother who were always there for her in genuine friendship or caring helpfulness no matter the day or the hour. God will truly bless each of you for your goodness to His people.

My mother's name is Verna which means springtime. Every day I thank God and pray for the people of Gloria Dei Estates for filling my mother's golden years with springtime for 16 years.

As you ponder the experience of your home,

Are all friends?

Are all loved?

Are all held dear?

Are all helped?

Only you can answer that in your heart. I hope the answer will be yes.