

# Memories

## Seniors share timeless insights in prose and poetry collection

Each of us has a story to tell.

When those stories flow from eight decades or more of life experiences and memories, they offer ageless insights into the world of the author. That recognition inspired a collection of poetry and prose written by 15 resident writers at Chelsea Retirement Community, ranging in age from 74 to 95.

These authors share their reflections, faith and life lessons in Laurels, newly published by United Methodist Retirement Communities (UMRC).

This book presents 23 selections by residents who vividly describe adventures, romance, personal growth, humorous memories, moral guideposts and natural beauty. "...so began my acquaintance with the night sky, as seen through the rear windows of our Oakland automobile," 92-year-old Marian Fullenwider writes of her experience riding in the family car on the way home from a church potluck supper. "The night sky I was most familiar with was clear, dark blue with brilliant stars sprinkled around. It was a comforting sight that made it easy for me to drift off to sleep again."

The anthology also includes recollections of Christmas morning, a used Model A Ford bought for \$30, and a soggy canoe trip on the AuSable River, as well as celebrations of marriage, prayer, nature and personal strength.



## **The Chelsea Standard**

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### **Lifelong Learning**

Six of the authors are members of the Creative Writers Group at Chelsea Retirement Community, part of UMRC. The 42-page book is dedicated to the late Rev. Charles Cookingham, a retired Methodist pastor who started the group ten years ago while a resident there.

"We celebrate life and seek out possibilities for our residents to learn and grow, at every age," says John Thorhauer, president and CEO of UMRC. "We treasure their life stories and have much to learn from their experiences."

This is UMRC's second commemorative book in two years. *Living History / 100 Years of Life Lessons* profiled 20 Michigan centenarians, including seven from UMRC residences in Detroit and Chelsea.

Ray Schairer, an 86-year-old retired farmer, didn't consider himself a writer until Rev. Cookingham coaxed him into joining the creative group in 2004. "He taught me I have stories that nobody else has," recalls Schairer. "I got into it and couldn't let go." His two poems in the new anthology, composed with pad and pencil, describe the rewards of woodworking and learning the craft from his father.

Schairer, who moved with his wife, Jane, to the Chelsea campus in 2001, hadn't composed verses since high school. Encouragement came from fellow residents and Professor Nancy Seligmann Schumann, chair of the English Department at Sienna Heights University in Adrian. As the instructor of the Creative Writers Group, Schumann helps participants recognize and shape the stories waiting to be shared.

### **Burst of Creativity**

"Nancy told me I'm an intuitive writer," notes Schairer. "That kind of flabbergasted me." It also planted a seed that the ex-farmer nurtured into a self-published book, *Barefoot Boy*, about family farm experiences when he was 10. In addition, the late-blooming writer recorded three memoir-style stories onto CDs to share with his brothers, sisters and their children.

The Chelsea "writers in residence" are a diverse group that includes college graduates, homemakers, medical professionals and clergy members. "The things we write about are different, but that's what makes it fun," comments Alberta Sabin, 80. "One thing we have in common is we just like to write. It's very stimulating and another way to keep the brain active. It's one of the neatest things we have on our campus."

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Marian Fullenwider wasn't a novice writer when she began attending group meetings five years ago. "I like to write," says the former language arts teacher, who taught composition and creative writing in Detroit, Hazel Park and Trenton for 23 years. She had a few works published and continues putting words on paper to create meaningful gifts for four grandchildren and one great-grandchild, who receive original poetry each Christmas.

Her three contributions to Laurels include a poem about clowns, a historic reminiscence and "My End of the World," describing a Biblical parable that seemed to come true when she was "a very frightened little girl" at age 6. "But the world did not end," the two-page tale concludes, "and I have been able to live my whole life on our wonderful planet."



Helen Pratt autographs her entry, "Home for Christmas"

This former educator, an avid reader who listens to audio books now due to poor vision, cherishes the opportunity to share a love of language with Chelsea Retirement Community neighbors. "We support each other and enjoy sharing our latest drafts," Fullenwider says of Creative Writing Group friends. "And now we have our own book, too."

Laurels may be ordered for \$10 plus \$4 domestic shipping.† To order, visit the UMRC website at [www.umrc.com/umrc/laurels.html](http://www.umrc.com/umrc/laurels.html) or call the UMRC Office of Advancement at (734) 433-1000, ext. 415.