



Helen Pratt autographs her entry in the book: "Home for Christmas."

LISA FRENCH

Ten years ago, the Rev. Charles Cookingham, Chelsea Retirement Community (CRC) resident, Methodist pastor, and eloquent writer, began a Creative Writers Group for his fellow residents. His inspirational leadership and gentle encouragement set the stage for the group's members to put pen to paper, giving form to their stories, thoughts, and dreams.

Cookingham passed away in 2007, but his legacy lives on through a collection of poetry and prose written by 15 resident writers at CRC, 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 bril-

liant 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 Au-Sable River, as well as celebrations of marriage, prayer, nature and personal strength.

"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."

Ray Schairer, an 86-year-old retired farmer, didn't consider himself a writer until 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 Siena

Seniors share timeless insights in new prose and poetry collection

Heights University in Adrian. As the instructor of the Creative Writers Group, Schumann helps participants recognize and shape the stories waiting to be shared.

"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. Six of the writers served in the United Methodist Church as pastors and spouses, including Cookingham, the late Rev. Roger Merrell, the Rev. Mary Alberty, Helen Pratt, Hertha Laupmanis, and Jeanne Ransom.

"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."

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 six. "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."

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 CRC 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 authors were honored at a reception on July 10 at Chelsea Retirement Community. Pictured are 11 of the authors and their instructor. Seated on floor: Professor Nancy Seligmann Schumann, Instructor of CRC Creative Writers Group. Seated on couch (l-r): The Rev. Mary Alberty, Alberta Sabin, Victoria Baker, Wilma Bird. Standing (l-r): Hertha Laupmanis, Ida Oates Clements, Dr. Winslow Fox, Ray Schairer, Stephen Rogers, Jeanne Ransom, Helen Pratt.

Chelsea Retirement Community hosted a reception to announce the book and acknowledge its authors on July 10. The resident authors will also hold a reading of *Laurels* at the Chelsea District Library on Monday, Dec. 8. The public is invited to attend.

Laurels may be ordered for \$10 plus \$4 domestic shipping. To order, visit the UMRC website at <http://www.umrc.com/umrc/laurels.html> or call the UMRC Heritage Foundation at (734) 433-1000, ext. 415.

French is Director of Annual Giving at the UMRC Heritage Foundation.

Napoleon UMC will mark 175 years

Napoleon United Methodist Church marks the beginning of its ministry with the visit of a traveling circuit rider, Henry Coilclazier, on Nov. 13, 1833 to preach to the settlers. The congregation soon became part of the Ann Arbor preaching circuit and built its first church in November 1847.

Napoleon UMC will mark its 175th anniversary on Nov. 2, with worship at 9 a.m. and a celebration dinner at 11 a.m. District Superintendent Jerry DeVine will preach. Jennifer Jue, pastor, will lead worship and mark All Saints Day with prayers and candlelighting. Bishop Jonathan D. Keaton will celebrate with the church on Dec. 14.

Napoleon UMC fondly recalls the ministry of Bishop Marjorie Matthews, who served as pastor of the church from 1973-75, became a district superintendent and then elected as the first woman bishop in the worldwide Methodist tradition.



LAWRENCE UMC CELEBRATES 150TH

The Lawrence United Methodist Church marked its 150th year of service to the community with a special Sunday service, Sept. 14. During the service, State Rep. Tonya Schuitmaker (l), presented LUMC Pastor Cliff Radtke (c), with a state "Special Tribute." A village tribute was presented to the church by Village Clerk Cindy Nower (r).