

Nuggets of Fun and Nostalgia for Treasure Valley Golden-Agers

She Took Her First Breath Behind Bars

Aurora Sky Castner entered the world inside the Galveston County Jail — born to a mother who was incarcerated, picked up hours later by a father who would raise her completely alone. No stable home. No financial safety net. Moving from place to place across Montgomery County, Texas, just trying to survive each year. Her mother was not part of her life growing up. They spoke just once.

Most children would be defined by a beginning like that. Aurora decided her beginning was just a starting point.

From her earliest days in elementary school in Conroe, Texas, teachers noticed something different about her. While other kids struggled with unstable home lives, Aurora read. Voraciously, hungrily, constantly. She didn't just keep up in school — she raced ahead and asked for more.

Her school connected her with the Conroe ISD's Project Mentor program, which pairs children facing challenges with caring community members. The program gave her a mentor. Her name was Mona Hamby.



"I was given a paper about her," Mona later recalled. "Her hero was Rosa Parks. Her favorite food was tacos from Dairy Queen. And she loved to read. I thought — this sounds like a bright little girl." Mona still has that paper today.

From their very first lunch together, Mona understood that Aurora didn't just need academic guidance. She needed someone to notice the small things that other children took for granted — the ordinary moments that had never come Aurora's way. So Mona showed up.

She helped Aurora pick out her first pair of glasses. Suddenly, the world came into sharp focus — literally. She took her to get her first real salon haircut. Dentists and orthodontists donated their services so Aurora could have the smile she deserved. Local organizations sent her to summer camp,

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Thank You for Your Service

One Sunday morning, the pastor noticed little Alex standing in the foyer staring up at a large plaque.

It was covered with names and two small American flags mounted on either side of it.

The young boy had been staring at the plaque for some time, so the pastor walked up, stood beside the boy, and said quietly, "Good morning, Alex."



"Good morning, Pastor," he replied, still focused on the plaque. "Pastor, what is this?"

The pastor replied, "Well, son, it's a memorial to all the young men and women who died in the service."

Soberly, they just stood together, staring at the large plaque.

Finally, little Alex's voice—barely audible and trembling—asked, "Which service? The 8:00 or 10:30?"



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Eating in the Fifties

- ◆ Home-baked bread was a staple, Wonder Bread (white) was a luxury
- ◆ Oil was for lubricating machines, fat was for cooking
- ◆ Cubed sugar was “fancy”
- ◆ All potato chips were plain, the choices were salted or unsalted
- ◆ “Take Out” was what you did with the garbage
- ◆ There were just four condiments: salt, pepper, ketchup and mustard
- ◆ Pineapple came in chunks in a can, we only saw pictures of real ones
- ◆ Tea was made in a teapot using tea leaves
- ◆ You bought coffee in a 2lb can, not in a 12oz. Cup
- ◆ Drinking water came out of the kitchen faucet. People would have laughed at the idea of bottling it and selling it in the store

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where for the first time, she could simply be a kid.

None of these were grand, sweeping gestures. They were just small acts of someone who decided: this child matters.

And Aurora? She channeled every ounce of it into her future.

In a life where so much was unpredictable, school was something she could control. Grades were something she could earn. So she earned them — straight A's, year after year, with a focus and discipline that quietly amazed everyone around her.

Somewhere in those early years, she set a goal that would have seemed impossible for a girl in her circumstances: Harvard University.

Not “maybe college someday.” Not “if things work out.” Harvard.

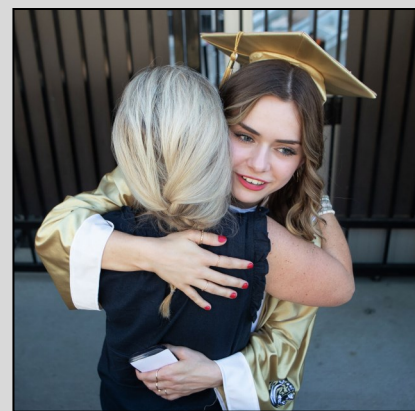
In March 2022, Mona and her husband Randy took Aurora on a tour of Harvard's campus in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Walking past the ivy-covered buildings where generations of world leaders had studied, Aurora felt something settle inside her. “This is where I'm going.”

Aurora's application essay would open with five words that said everything: “I was born in prison.” No easing in. No apologizing. No hiding the truth.

Just Aurora — exactly as she was, exactly as she had always been — refusing to pretend her life was anything other than what it had been, and daring Harvard to see that as a reason to say yes.

Harvard said yes. Full scholarship. Everything covered. The girl born in a jail cell was going to Harvard.

On May 25, 2023, Aurora Sky Castner walked across the graduation stage at Conroe High School — third in her class, summa cum laude, draped in honors cords, with a cap that read simply: “Harvard 2027 Bound.”



(Continued on page 5)



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Older Than Dirt Quote of the Day:

How come when someone tells you that there are a billion stars in the universe you believe 'em, but if they tell you there is wet paint you have to touch it to check?



I tried to organize a "Hide and Seek" tournament, but it was a disaster. Good players are hard to find.

FAST COMPANY

An older couple was cruising down the highway, enjoying their retirement freedom — windows down, classic country playing, and just a tiny bit too much speed.

The wife was behind the wheel, confident and chatty. The husband was riding shotgun, alternating between giving directions and dozing off.

Suddenly—red and blue lights flashed in the mirror.

"Uh-oh," she muttered, easing the car to the shoulder.



The officer approached. "Ma'am, do you know how fast you were going?"

The wife leaned toward her husband, "What'd he say?"

"HE SAID YOU WERE SPEEDING!" the husband bellowed.

The officer smiled. "Can I see your license?"

She turned again. "What'd he say?"

"HE WANTS YOUR LICENSE!"

After looking at her ID, the officer chuckled. "Oh, you're from Utah! I went on a blind date there once—worst one of my life."

The wife frowned, "What'd he say?"

And without missing a beat, her husband replied loudly: "HE SAYS HE THINKS HE WENT ON A DATE WITH YOU!"

The officer nearly fell over laughing, waved them off, and said, "Drive safe, folks—and maybe a little slower next time."

KFC it ain't!



A man was driving along a country road one day when he saw a three-legged

chicken running down the road.

He drove alongside it for awhile and noticed it was running at 30 mph!

"I wonder how fast it can run," he thought, so he sped up to 45 mph and the chicken did, too! He sped up to 60 mph and the chicken easily kept up!

"Amazing," he thought.

Suddenly the chicken turned down a lane leading to an old farmhouse, where he spotted a farmer with a yard full of three-legged chickens.

"How did you get all those three-legged chickens?" the man asked the farmer.

"I breed 'em," the farmer replied. "My wife, son and me, the three of us, we all like to eat the chicken leg, but since a chicken only has two legs, I started breeding this here three-legged variety so we could all have a leg."

"That's amazing!" said the driver. "How do they taste?"

"Don't rightly know," replied the farmer, wistfully.

"I ain't caught one yet!"



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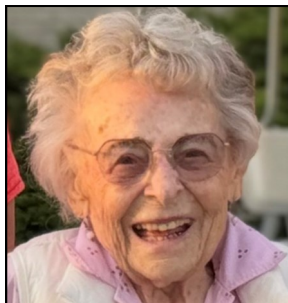
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GENTLEMAN 54 years would like to correspond with respectable, elderly, lady, about his own age; object matrimony. I am healthy, sober, no bad habits. Kind disposition, have an excellent farm here and pretty well fixed. I am not seeking a fortune or a young lady. I have no children and wish a companion. Box 5, W64-Post.

Milestones



Carol Spears

July 17, 1928—98 years
Vale



Neva Jean Coffman

Sept 18, 1933—93 years
Brookdale Ontario



Carl Raasch

Aug 9, 1935—91 years
Emmett

Dating Ads for Seniors

You can say what you want about Florida, but you never hear of anyone retiring and moving north. These are actual ads seen in "The Villages" Florida newspaper. (Who says seniors don't have a sense of humor?)

SERENITY NOW: I am into solitude, long walks, sunrises, the ocean, yoga and meditation. If you are the silent type, let's get together, take our hearing aids out and enjoy quiet times.

FOXY LADY: Sexy, fashion-conscious blue-haired beauty, 80's, slim, 5'4' (used to be 5'6'). Searching for sharp-looking, sharp-dressing companion. Matching white shoes and belt a plus.

LONG-TERM COMMITMENT: Recent widow who has just buried fourth husband, Looking for someone to round out a six-unit plot. Dizziness, fainting, shortness of breath not a problem.

WINNING SMILE: Active grandmother with original teeth seeking a dedicated flosser to share rare steaks, corn on the cob and caramel candy.



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(She Took Her First Breath Behind Bars—Continued from Page 2)

Mona Hamby was in the crowd. She had been there for over a decade — through every hard stretch, every doubt, every achievement. She showed up. Week after week. Year after year. Because that's what a mentor actually does.

Aurora plans to pursue law — to use everything she's learned and survived to help others who were born into circumstances they didn't choose.

Her story carries a truth that is easy to say but hard to believe until you see it lived: Where you begin does not determine where you end.

But her story also carries a second truth, just as important: Nobody does it alone.

Aurora's determination earned her that Harvard acceptance. Her intelligence, her discipline, her refusal to quit — those are hers. But Mona Hamby looked at a paper listing Rosa Parks and Dairy Queen tacos and thought: I can show up for this girl. That decision changed everything.

Aurora didn't need someone to save her. She needed someone to believe she was worth showing up for.

And sometimes, that one thing — that single person who keeps appearing, who notices the small things, who says "you matter" without saying a word — is the difference between a child who merely survives and a young woman who takes Harvard by storm.

Aurora Sky Castner was born inside a jail cell.

Now she's walking into one of the greatest universities in the world.

And the distance between those two sentences is a testament to what happens when one person refuses to let her circumstances write her story — and another person quietly refuses to let her face it alone.



SAILIN' AWAY

A retired mortician bought a new sailboat and asked for suggestions to name it. Here are the best:



Urned It
Ashes to Splashes
Moor Tuary
Six Knots Under
Naut on Call
The Morgue the Merrier
The Last Resort
Undertow Taker
The Grim Reefer
His and Hearse
Final Journey
River Mortis
The Final Bow



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Aye, Aye, Sir!



A Navy Chief noticed a new seaman and barked at him, "Get over here! What's your name sailor?"

"John," the new seaman replied.

"Look, I don't know what kind of bleeding-heart pabulum they're teaching sailors in boot camp nowadays, but I don't call anyone by his first name," the chief scowled. "It breeds familiarity, and that leads to a breakdown in authority."

"I refer to my sailors by their last names only; Smith, Jones, Baker, whatever. And you are to refer to me as 'Chief'. Do I make myself clear?"

"Aye, Aye Chief!"

"Now that we've got that straight, what's your last name?"

The seaman sighed. "Darling, My name is John Darling, Chief."

"Okay, John, here's what I want you to do."

Milestones



Dwane Stoneman
Sept 1, 1935—91 years
Weiser



Bob Savage
Sept 13, 1935—91 years
Brookdale Ontario



Hazel Dalton
Aug 14, 1941—85 years
Fruitland



Nancy Rosa
Sept 17, 1941—85 years
New Plymouth



DeAnn Braun Turner
Sept 21, 1941—85 years
New Plymouth



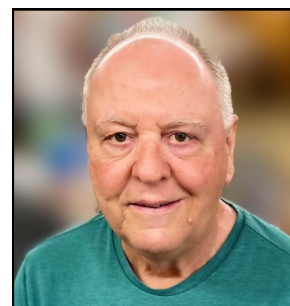
Sandi Brown
Aug 25, 1951—75 years
Payette



Lynda Lloyd
Aug 26, 1956—70 years
Payette

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Dennis Michalek
Sept 26, 1956—70 years
Fruitland

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