

Chapter 23

After graduating from high school, our son, Barry, spent a year in college. He didn't accomplish much while there, majoring in girls and swimming. So we said, "Son, join the Navy, see the world." And he did. He had basic training at the Great Lakes Training Center. Then he asked Amy for her hand in marriage.

Amy and Barry were married in 1965 at our Methodist Church. His sister, Shari, and her husband, Don, stood up for them. I was the only one in the congregation, along with Carrie, our first granddaughter.

After the wedding, Barney and I drove the bride and groom to Virginia Beach, where Barry was stationed, and helped them find their first apartment. They lived there for about seven or eight months when Barry was scheduled to go to sea on the Eugene A. Green. He was trained as a sonar electrician and was headed to Vietnam.

Shortly after Barry left for Vietnam, Amy found out she was four months pregnant. At that point we decided she shouldn't be alone, so we brought her home to live with us. Amy gave birth to Byron Enoch Downs, III, on September 20, 1966. We call him Buddy. Amy and Buddy lived with us until Barry returned from Vietnam.

Since his discharge from the Navy, Barry has worked for a company that sets up office cooling systems. He is currently the manager of the company.

One day before Buddy's second birthday, his sister Kellie Ann Downs was born. Amy and Barry's third child, Heather Shannon Downs, was born on March 28, 1975 .

After 20 years of marriage, Amy and Barry were divorced. Barry then married Jennifer Granville in February of 1988. They also became a blended family, as Jennifer has a son and daughter from a previous marriage.

Chapter 24

Nineteen-sixty-five marked twenty-five years of marriage with my friendly Irishman. Our life together was as wonderful as the day we met. Our church held a lovely reception for us and dear friends and family lavished us with gifts. Our busy lives had flown by so fast that it didn't seem possible we had been married that long.

Now that Barry and Shari were both on their own, Barney found time to join the Shriners, something he had wanted to do for a long time. He also joined a Boosters club, a subsidiary of the Shriners. In 1968 he had worked his way up to what was called the Big Booster, which is equivalent to president of the club. It was an enjoyable group. They performed community service work, but the social gatherings were exciting, too. When he was inaugurated as the Big Booster, they had a special ceremony and a ball at the Curtis Hotel. I wore a green gown, of course, Barney's favorite color, and we were treated like a king and queen. They put tables together and had us standing on the tables where the Potentate and his Lady (Barney and I) were greeted by all of the attendees. I remember that each lady was given a stuffed tiger as a souvenir.

As the Potentate's Lady, I had the responsibility of decorating the tables for the monthly luncheons, also held at the Curtis Hotel.

Because of our affiliation with the Shriners, we joined the Golden Valley Golf Club, which was only open to Shriners and their wives. They held dances at the Golf Club every month. Many times we recruited the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts to help escort people in and out of their cars.

I never was a very good golfer, but I really did enjoy the game, the exercise and being in the scenic outdoors. Once while golfing with a lawyer and his wife, my ball went into a sand trap. When I knocked it out, it went right into the hole, and the lawyer nearly had a heart attack. I said "God did it," because I knew it certainly couldn't have been me. Sometime later, when we sold our house, we moved into an apartment near Golden Valley so Barney could play golf more often.

Not only did Barney love golf, but he also loved to drive. Sometimes he would drive all the way from Bethpage, New York to Fond Du Lac, Wisconsin, nonstop, 36 hours. When I knew he needed a break, I would have to practically beat him over the head to get the wheel out of his hands. He usually drove a Club Coupe, like the one we drove from Florida to Minnesota.

Chapter 25

The New Neighbors Club had been a great job, but I felt it was time to begin a new adventure. I had used Ovarions Cosmetics for years and it came natural for me to sell them, because I liked them. It was a multilevel business and it didn't take me long to build an organization across the Midwest. I had representatives in Indiana, Wisconsin, Iowa, and Minnesota. We were doing very well and I loved it. I enjoyed teaching women how to cleanse and care for their skin. I don't think I was very good with that part of the business, but I was good at sponsoring and teaching others to do it.

Barney had worked hard to make Workmen's Service Tabulating Company into a very large, successful business. He loved his work. He talked the University of Minnesota into putting all of their alumni on tab cards. It wasn't long before several colleges and universities across the United States were doing the same. The electric company and phone company used their services, rather than hand printing their billings.

Barney had worked for Workmen's Service for ten years when, one Friday, the president of the company called him and his assistant into his office. He proceeded to thank Barney and his assistant for "building this wonderful business for me." He added, "I just sold it for \$3 million and I don't even know if you will have a job come Monday morning."

Barney came home so heartbroken he cried all night long. He had put everything he had into building the business. It was our future, or so we thought. He went to work the following Monday morning and found that he still had a job, but unfortunately he was demoted. All of the workers were devastated. One young man was so distraught he had a heart attack and died.

Barney was never the same after that. While he was still loving, kind, and helpful to anyone in need, he had lost some of his spark. He had started with Workmen's Service and built it from the ground up. He had initiated many innovative ways to do the business. There were times when Shari, Barry, and I went with him to his office on the weekends to learn how to keypunch and verify cards, to help him meet his deadlines. If he didn't meet those deadlines, then the company would have to pay a penalty. He met all the deadlines and saved the company an enormous amount of money.

Barney stuck it out until 1967 and then retired. He worked for a short time as a controller for Dairy Queen and then our life took an unexpected turn.

Chapter 26

In early 1968, Barney joined me at a convention for Ovation Cosmetics in Los Angeles. There we met Bob and Phyllis Secord from Denver, Colorado and became fast friends. They were funeral directors but were also working for Ovations. However, their newest venture was selling bras.

At least once a week for several months following the Ovations convention, Bob called begging, "Chicki, you know, you'd be great in this bra business. You really ought to hear more about it." I kept telling him, "I'm too busy."

During this time, I was involved in professional dress making as well as selling Ovations products. One day as I was putting together a suit, I became irritated when the darts outlined on the pattern would not provide a properly fitted garment. I was constantly changing the position of the darts, not realizing at the time that it wasn't the darts and it wasn't the pattern. It was the bra.

Bob kept calling me and badgering me to join the bra business. Finally, he said "Chicki, come to Colorado. We'll take you to see Pike's Peak and the Air Force Academy, and we'll even take you bird watching in the Rockies." I loved bird watching and he knew it, so I agreed to spend three days in Denver.

Bob and Phyllis picked me up at the airport and immediately whisked me away to their home where Phyllis fitted me in a new bra. It was the most comfortable bra I'd ever worn, and it looked great.

That night Phyllis took me to a spa where I sat on a bench with a group of ladies as she opened her suitcase full of bras. A lady came from the exercise floor and noticed the bras and asked, "Oh, are these those bras? Could I try one? I heard they were wonderful." So Phyllis fit her in a bra. While she was fitting her, other ladies came in from the exercise floor. Before long, Phyllis had fit 14 ladies. I saw them all go from their old bra to the new bra and every single woman purchased multiple bras.

"I'm no dummy," I thought, "There's something to this." So I went with Phyllis the next morning to a farmhouse in Greeley, Colorado where she had scheduled a fitting. Seven ladies showed up and Phyllis began by talking about the bra. She then took the first lady in the bedroom and showed me how to fit her in the bra. We brought the woman back out and everyone in the room was crying. We had no idea what was wrong. The next lady dried her eyes and said, "I'm next." She came with us and, as we were going down the hall, I said to Phyllis, "What do you suppose they're crying about?" She said, "I don't know." So we fit the lady. She was fine with us. She put her clothes back on, came back out and the next lady went with us, but they were all crying again.

As we walked down the hall I told Phyllis, "I'm gonna ask them why they're crying. I can't understand it." She said "Okay." So we brought the third lady out and I said "I gotta ask you, why are you all crying? Did we hurt your feelings or something?" They said, "No, didn't you know? Robert Kennedy was murdered last night." That was devastating news, especially since I had met Senator Kennedy just a few years earlier.

All those women bought bras. I went home with Phyllis and she showed me a copy of her latest royalty check, which was ten times the amount of any of my checks from Ovation Cosmetics. I called Barney and informed him, "I'm not coming home until Sunday." He said "Uh-oh, are we in the bra business?" I answered, "I'm afraid so."

I stayed until Sunday and learned all about the bras and the business, as well as the marketing plan. I went home and started the bra business on the 23rd of June, 1968. It all happened so quickly but it was very exciting.

I arrived home on Sunday from Colorado. On Monday morning Western Airlines called, saying "We have a big package for you out here. Will you be coming to pick it up, or do you want us to deliver it?" I said, "I'm not expecting any package." They asked, "Are you Marian Downs?" I said, "Yes." They said, "Well we have this package out here. It's from someplace in Iowa." I said "I'm not expecting anything."

So Barney went out to the airport to pick up my package, which was my new inventory of bras sent by Bob Secord. I hadn't even signed any papers or given them any money. Barney brought the package home and said "Well, I guess now we really are in the bra business."

I joined the Figurette bra business in the middle of one of their marketing campaigns. If I could sell \$5,000 of merchandise two months in a row, I could go down to the Mercury dealer and pick out any car that I wanted – any color, any equipment. I was driving a four year old Dodge Dart that had automatic nothing, a stick shift, an a.m. radio, and a heater. I was told to go down to the local Mercury dealer and pick out my car. This is part of a program called "If You Can Count To Four." I'll go into that later.

Anyway, I did what they told me. On Monday morning I went down to the Mercury dealership and said "I'm here to select a car."

The salesman asked "What kind would you like?"

I looked around and I said, "I like the looks of this Cougar here." It was a green, XR-7, really sharp.

As I sat in the front seat behind the wheel, the salesman described all the features of the car. He told me it had 420 horses under the hood. I said "Golly, I thought they put an engine in there; I didn't know they put horses underneath there." The man, not realizing I was joking, shook his head and sighed, "Oh, no."

Pretty soon it dawned on me that this young man had dollar signs in his eyes. I'm sure he was thinking, "Boy, the first thing this morning, I'm gonna sell this old lady a car." I said, "Oh you think I'm gonna buy this car, don't you." The salesman answered, "Yeah." I said, "No I'm getting it for free. I'm starting a new business here in Minneapolis and they're gonna give me this car for free." He exclaimed, "Madam, this is a Mercury. They don't give Mercuries away for free." I said, "Oh, yeah, I'm gonna get it. They told me if I did certain things that I could drive this car for free." The salesman tried to get it through to me that "They don't do that with Mercuries." He turned and walked away from me and went over to where a meeting was going on in a glassed-in office.

Bob had told me I should get pictures of the car and put them up everywhere to motivate myself. So when the man returned, I politely informed him, "I really am gonna get this car free," and asked him for some pictures of the vehicle.

Again, the salesman said, "Madam, they don't give Mercuries away free. There's no way. This is a very expensive car." And so he gave me pictures of the car and I went home and posted them in every room of our house. I was determined that I would earn that car.

It was the 23rd of June and I had to sell \$5,000 worth of bras before the first of July. I visited my friend, Elaine Howe, who was a seamstress in Minneapolis. Day in and day out, she sat at her sewing machine in her basement, surrounded by cement walls, making funeral netting for coffins. I took her hand and said, "Elaine, come out of the cellar into the sunshine and sell bras with me."

I fitted Elaine in a bra and, of course, she loved it. I explained clearly everything I knew about the business and shared my enthusiasm. "You've got to help me build this business," I exclaimed. Elaine was my first recruit.

I sponsored a couple of other people who had been in the cosmetic business with me. I fit bras from sunup until 2 the next morning. Barney would have to tell the customers, "You have to go home. She's gotta go to bed, she's so tired." But they all wanted bras.

My Girls Scouts, their mothers, aunts, grandmothers all became customers. They came in groups to be fitted for bras. I was having so much fun, and making money at the same time. It was very exciting. By the first of July, Barney figured it all up and we had over \$5,000 in sales, including my inventory and that of Elaine Howe and the others we had sponsored. We were on our way in the bra business – training recruits and fitting customers. It was nonstop.

Chapter 27

When we entered the bra business, we lived in a condominium in Edina, Minnesota, which had a circular staircase to a basement leading to a huge room next to the laundry room. Each time I sold a bra I hung the customer's used bra on a line in the basement. Before long I had a clothesline full of nasty looking, stretched out, lifeless bras.

We set up our business in the basement. We held marketing meetings one night a week and everybody in our group could bring people to the meetings. There were times when we would have 60 to 70 people show up. We couldn't fit them all in the basement, but we had two window wells and we had the overflow of people standing in the yard outside the window where they could hear Barney explain the marketing plan.

Each couple worked together, the women fitting and selling the bras, the men handling the paperwork and inventory. That was one of the keys to our success. It would never have snowballed had it not been for so many of us working together.

We had sold \$5,000 worth in our first eight days and another \$5,000 before the end of July. In the middle of August I flew to Des Moines with my daughter to pick up the keys to my new Mercury. Shari said to me, "Mother, they're never gonna give you a car free." But, sure enough, they gave me the keys to the brand new, green XR-7 Cougar. It had five miles on the odometer. Sharon and I drove my new green Mercury to Denver to my first Figurette bra convention. I had only been in the business for about six weeks. Shari actually got into the business, too, but didn't stay long. It just wasn't her cup of tea.

The president of Figurettes, Hi Hand, lived in Los Angeles. He was a very smart businessman, especially when he hired Angela Serritella. I have had the honor of working with Angela since I came into the business and she and I are still very close friends. She was the creator of the Figurette bra and never stopped working on it, improving it, adding to it, testing it, trying it on different people. Larger women were coming to be fitted and Angela worked diligently to make the bras bigger so the women were comfortable, not hung from the shoulders, but supported underneath without any underwire. She tested the bras on the ladies who came into the business to sell. She would put them in the bras and say "Wear this for a month and then come back and let me see it and maybe I'll take a little tuck in here or there." Over the years she continually improved the design of the bras.

We had young girls in their late teens with really large breasts. Once we supplied them with a cup that actually fit, their breasts did not get any larger. They were comfortable and they looked great. Many of them commented that it was the first time they were able to put their arms down to their sides because now there was no breast tissue bulging out the sides and underneath their armpits.

A woman named Penny Rich had an idea for a suspension bra and started a bra company. She had bras made in a foreign country and they were of very poor quality. Primarily she sold inventories. She did not give very good training. Angela took and expanded her idea and designed the Figurette bra which was of much better quality. Angela was a dressmaker, so she knew how to measure for different sizes. She ran the factory for Hi Hand. They were both lovely people. They did their best to take care of us.

Angela went to the factory one 4th of July weekend and sewed bras herself in order to fill back orders so we would not be without inventory. That's the kind of person she is. She and I have spent many hours together and always get along very well.

Angela was a diligent, dedicated worker, but always gave God the first day of the week. Whenever we were on the road together, we would find a full gospel meeting in the

neighborhood. Angela is a strong Christian woman and never missed an opportunity to worship the Lord wherever she went.

Angela also created lingerie for us that was becoming. I modeled one of her new creations at a banquet in Salt Lake City, a long, poppy colored night dress.

Whenever we received a bonus check, it was sent directly to our door by special delivery. I remember one day while we were having a bra business meeting and the doorbell rang. When I went to answer it, there was my bonus check. Barney showed the check to one of the men in the meeting who had been a little skeptical about joining. When he saw that it was over a thousand dollars, he was so excited he and wife his signed up right then and there.

Hi Hand hired a man named Del Remmi. Del was a sharp businessman, good at what he did. He had built a business in Nutralite, food supplement products. He had retired from that business and was looking for something to do. So Hi hired him as vice president to train all of us and teach us how to sponsor and how to build our business. Del was very good at doing that.

However, one thing we discovered about Remmi early on was that he would embellish just a little bit on the marketing plan. Barney did not agree with that. He felt the plan was good enough as it was. Barney's motto was to tell the truth and not to try and oversell it. So Del would be up on the platform talking about the program and getting carried away a bit. He'd look down at Barney, Barney would give him a "look," and then Del would change his tune. Del worked with Hi Hand for ten years. He was the one who encouraged both me and Barney when we earned our cars.

Starting in January, 1969 Figurettes, held their annual conventions in Las Vegas and Barney and I attended every year. The amount of our sales and sponsors would determine our cost to attend the convention each year. If we earned a car that year, we would pick up our car on the way and drive to Las Vegas. Many times we would arrive on Sunday and attend a wonderful church service held in the building behind Circus, Circus.

We were not attracted to gambling, but we did visit downtown Las Vegas and shop, and took in a few side shows. Marque entertainment included Wayne Newton, Barbara Streisand, Bill Cosby, Helen Reddy, and Barry Manilow. Interestingly, Barry Manilow opened for Helen Reddy. He was a huge hit, but she seemed like a cold fish.

Years later, when Barry Manilow became popular, I took a group to see him at the Hilton in Vegas. He is a fantastic entertainer and very talented. We sat in the \$100 balcony seats and during his finale, "Copa Cabana," they had this contraption that brought the whole stage up to our level so we could see close up. It was about 20 feet in the air. That was very exciting.

We saw Olympic skater Dorothy Hamill perform, as well as several impersonators of famous people, many of whom were more entertaining than the person they were impersonating. We saw Don Rickles, paid \$70 a ticket and ended up walking out after about 15 or 20 minutes. He was thoroughly disgusting. He was crude and insulting, as was Buddy Hackett.

Zsa Zsa Gabor put on a good show as did Dinah Shore and, of course, Bob Hope. We saw Phyllis Diller at the Tropicana. She started out with the dirty language and, when we didn't clap, she cleaned up her act.

We attended conventions in Las Vegas from 1969 until 1978, when the business was sold to Cameo Couture. Cameo Couture owned the company until 2002 or 2003 and was bought out by Jeunique. Jeunique held some of its conventions in Palm Springs, which was a lot more relaxing because there wasn't as much activity as there had been in Vegas.

One of the bad things about going to Las Vegas every year was the exposure to and the enticement of gambling. Some of the young couples who were making \$3,000 or \$4,000 a month in Figurettes had never had that kind of money before. When they came to Las Vegas, they

believed they were going to make it big. In reality, you don't make it big in Las Vegas. Some of them lost their homes and their marriages. It was very sad. It was one of the reasons I never would gamble.

One time the president of the company received a call from someone at a casino saying that one of their people was into them for \$40,000. "We just want to make sure he is good for the it," they explained. I thought the president of Figuerettes would have apoplexy. There was no way he was going to underwrite this person. The person was fired and lost all of his perks, including an airplane the company had provided for his travel. He lost it all because he couldn't resist gambling in Las Vegas and trying to make a big shot out of himself.

It was heartbreaking to see these young people become so carried away by the spirit of the place and the encouragement to gamble. Just a nickel here and a dime there, then it's fifty cents, then it's a dollar. The next thing you know they're out of luck, and money.

Chapter 28

During our first convention, Bob Secord had arranged for me to be on a panel with him answering questions from other sales reps. I had been in the business six weeks and here I was on a panel and talking about bras.

Elaine Howe and her husband, Orv, also attended the panel meeting, along with their daughter. I remember all of us sitting in the lounge one night until very late nicknaming all the bras. Double B was Beautiful Baby. Double C was Cute and Cuddly. Double D was Delightfully Delicious. We had trouble with Double E, so we named it Excitingly Entrancing. Double F was Full of Fun. Double G was Goodness Gracious. Double H was Holy Hannah. Double I was Ayeyaiyai. Double J was Jumpin' Jiminy. Double K was King Kong. Double L was Lollapallousa. Double M was Mama Mia. That was all the double sizes we had in the bra business. Throughout my career I would amuse my customers by using those nicknames.

I had received my first car around the 10th of August, 1968. In September, Del Remmi, vice president and sales manager, came to me and said, "Now, Chicki, if you do \$20,000 two months in a row, Barney can go down and pick out any Lincoln that he wants." My husband was raised on a farm in South Dakota. Never in his wildest dreams did he think he would ever drive a Lincoln. I set my goal to get Barney his Lincoln and in March we sold \$20,000 worth of bras and another \$20,000 in April. By this time, over 50 in our group had also earned cars. On Memorial Day, about one month before we had been in the business a year, Barney flew to Des Moines, Iowa and was handed the keys to a great big, green, 4-door Lincoln Continental. It was the most magnificent car. It had everything. Now we were both driving brand new cars.

By March we had made Major status and again in April by sponsoring more and more people. We opened up the market in Wisconsin with Al and Phyl Anderson. He was a school teacher. Elaine and Orv Howe were also building a large organization.

We went to a marketing meeting at Orv and Elaine's home one evening. Before the meeting started, Barney said he had to use the restroom. When he went into the restroom, we heard him laughing out loud. We couldn't understand what was so funny in the bathroom. When he came out, he said "You gotta come in and see this." So we went into the bathroom and he lifted up the toilet seat. Underneath were the words "Orv and Elaine will be Majors in April 1969." Their 9 year old daughter told us they had signs all over the house and she had put the one under the toilet seat.

Over the next ten years I had nine different Mercuries and Barney had two Mark 4s. By 1972 we made Diamond Major, which meant that we had sponsored four people who were equal to us as regional directors and we were all in bonus. We were among only 23 other couples who ever made Diamond Major.

I remember the time we were honored in 1972. The convention was in Seattle, Washington at a lovely hotel there. I made a white dress and put a silver sheer overdress on it so that it shimmered like silver. I had planned our attire so that Barney and I would match. For the four days of the convention we had four different outfits that all matched. One of the outfits I made was lavender, so I bought Barney a lavender dress shirt. "I'm not gonna wear a lavender dress shirt," he said. I replied, "Oh, wait until you try it on." And yes, he wore the lavender shirt. He looked dashing in it. One night we wore yellow outfits. The night we were honored, Barney wore a white dinner coat and white trousers and I wore the silver dress with the white underneath and Barney bought me a huge orchid. We were honored on stage as Diamond Majors, with about 100 of our people cheering us on who were attending from all over the United States.

Nine in our group were now driving silver Lincolns. At one of our meetings, there were nine of these silver Continentals parked outside our house. We lived in a predominantly Jewish neighborhood and they all stood in their yards with water hoses, practically drowning their lawns while watching "those people in the bra business" in their silver Lincolns.

We were a bit perplexing to our neighbors. We lived on a corner and I mentioned to the group that it would be nice if we had a huge flag pole with a United States flag. The next thing we knew, 200 of our friends came together, dug a hole, put up an American flag, about 10 feet high, and we all stood around it and sang The Star Spangled Banner and recited Pledge Allegiance. Again, our neighbors were muttering, "Ya never know what those people are gonna do, those bra people." It was no secret to anyone what business we were in; all of our cars donned signs with the company logo and the words "Figurette Bras and Girdles."

We held training meetings at our house every Monday morning and we would have 15 to 20 women in their pink smocks and white slacks. We would teach them all how to fit bras of all different sizes.

I remember working with a group of nurses from a hospital in Des Moines and one fit into a 42 HH. We put her in the bra and she loved it. She had sores from her breasts lying flat against her flesh for so long, but the sores soon disappeared and she was very comfortable. She would call me about every month for four or five months to tell me how thrilled she was and grateful that I was able to help her. That's why I was in the business. I loved helping people and making life better for them, both from the financial angle as well as being able to make them comfortable for being who they are. I guess it's the Girl Scout in me, service to others.

Chapter 29

In 1972 we reached Diamond Major status and the company took us on our first trip. Dorothy and Don Bachelor, a couple in Omaha, Nebraska we had met through the New Neighbors League, put us over the top, made us eligible for Diamond Major. Barney had been working with Dorothy and Don over the phone from Minneapolis, explaining the workings of the business. I was in Texas working with another couple.

The last order was placed at 2:00 a.m. which gave us Diamond Major status. At 8:00 the same morning we left for Cabo San Lucas. It was a real squeaker. Barney flew from Minneapolis and I traveled from Texas and we met at the Los Angeles Airport, where we were to board our flight to Mexico. The international section of the airport was way down at the other end. We came in the door of Mexican Airline terminal and the other Diamond Major couples saw us coming and screamed "They made it!" They all ran up and hugged us. We were each presented with a fresh flower lei.

Our flight took us to La Paz, Mexico where we were met by several 4, 6, and 8 passenger planes. They flew us from La Paz down to the tip of the Baja peninsula. At that time Cabo was nothing more than a small resort at the very tip of the peninsula. There were about three houses and a fishing village and nothing else for miles in either direction. We could walk for 20 miles and never meet a soul on the shore of Cabo.

It was nighttime when we landed at our final destination. The little planes landed in a field where we were met with men driving jeeps who escorted us to a lovely resort. We walked up a long flight of stairs to the top where Del and his wife were standing, along with waiters with trays of margaritas. A Mexican Mariachi band played behind them. We were each greeted with a kiss and a drink.

Each couple had their own little cottage overlooking the ocean. After we settled in, we all met in the dining room which had a spectacular view of the Pacific Ocean. The room was open, with no windows, so we could feel the cool, refreshing sea breeze and view the full moon along with a million stars that lit up the night sky. It was absolutely gorgeous. God had brought us to a wonderful place. We were so spoiled. The little Mexican girls would come to our room every day and fix our hair for a dollar.

We stayed at this little resort for a week. One day Barney and I went fishing with Orv and Kathy Leinan. Orv was a farmer in Iowa, and Cathy was a registered nurse. Neither of them knew anything about fishing. Barney was a real fisherman so he spent his time helping everyone. We were all catching blue marlin and dolphin fish. We went out on little boats which each had a sun deck over the top where we women could sit while the men fished down below. The men sat in chairs and each had a heavy pole with a line in the water. All of a sudden, the fish would take the bait and it would jump way up out of the water and dance on its tail and then go back down and then come back up again. It sounded like thunder when they came out of the water. It was very exciting, especially for those who had never fished before. And for us, we had never seen fish that big. All we could do was scream. I caught an exquisite sea green dolphin fish (also known as mahi-mahi) with a bright yellow belly and dark blue polka dots.

Barney had spent so much time helping everyone else learn to fish that he hadn't caught any for himself. So the day before we were to go home, Del said to Barney, "Where's your fish?" Barney answered, "I've been helping everybody else and I haven't had a chance to get one myself." Del said "Six o'clock tomorrow morning you and I will go out."

So the next morning, Barney and Del went out and Barney caught a 6 foot, 155-pound blue marlin. It was the biggest fish anyone in our group had caught. Barney was so excited when

he finally caught his fish. Our guide said "We'll mount them and send them to you in Minneapolis. It will only cost \$1,000." So we spent the \$1,000 and had both our fish mounted and sent home. Everyone else sent their fish home, too. It turned out to be a really dumb idea for us, since we had no where to put them. We didn't have a wall big enough for a 6-foot fish.

That was our most memorable trip, not because we packed those two fish everywhere we moved, but because it was our first trip with the company and we had worked so hard to qualify at the eleventh hour.

In 1973, we attended the Figurette convention in Seattle, Washington. We took in all the sights, including the Space Needle.

The following year, the convention was in Snow Mass, Colorado, high up in the mountains. At the banquet I was shocked when they announced my name, honoring me as one of the top in the nation in sales and sponsorship. They said my name, and then announced that they had a surprise for me. They whipped the gold table cloth off the wall behind the stage and there was an oil painting of me. It was huge, painted by an artist who has also painted all the Kings of England. It was very becoming. It really looks just like me in my purple and gold outfit. I remember the first time one of my great-granddaughters came to visit and I had the painting on the wall above the fireplace. She was only 3 years old, but she stood there for a few seconds and then said "Uhhh, Nama Chicki!" She is now 46 years old and I think I should give it to her so she will never forget her Nama Chicki.

Being in this business was a partnership. Husbands and wives worked together, giving them all the opportunity to attend conventions and travel to exotic places together. Barney was so busy helping me in the business that he no longer had time to work at Dairy Queen. And we were doing so well, he didn't really need to. When we arrived home from our first trip, we were even more motivated to make this business a success. We sponsored more people and sold more bras. The trips continued and the friendships grew. Orv and Kathy Leinan are still in the bra business, 42 years later.

On many occasions we traveled to Scottsdale, Arizona to train others in the business. I remember one young couple from Wisconsin. The husband's name was Bob, who was a football coach at a high school in O'Clair, Wisconsin. He and his wife were in Arizona receiving the keys to their new car. We gave out keys to 103 cars that week. So many cars were being awarded that a separate leasing firm was formed specifically for us. Mercuries and Lincolns were the two choices, but the people could choose the color. Many in our group took a little longer to qualify than others, but eventually they were all driving their new cars.

The secret to this whole business is setting goals and doing everything in your power to reach them. When I went down to the car dealership in Minneapolis and was given pictures of my future car, from that day forward I drove the Cougar, in my mind, instead of the old Dodge Dart I was driving in reality. In fact, when I first started in the business, I went to a lady's house for a fitting and she took one look at me and had me lay down on her couch with a cold rag on my forehead. My face was beat red and she asked me what was wrong. It was close to 100 degrees outside and I was driving the old Dodge with the windows rolled up, pretending I was driving the XR-7 Cougar with air conditioning. I was determined I was going to earn that car and so I imagined driving it until I actually was.

As I told my recruits, "You've got to set your goal and keep the blinders on and just work towards your goal." That's what I shared with my own children as well as my Girl Scouts. I would set the goal that Barney and I would be going on a certain trip, and both of us worked long and hard to get to that point, but in the end it was very rewarding in so many ways. It was all so surreal. For Barney and me it was like a fairytale – the cars, the trips, wonderful new

friends. More importantly, though, we were blessed to be helping so many others fulfill their dreams and educating women all across the United States about breast health.

Chapter 30

In 1975, Barney and I were host and hostess of the National Convention in Minneapolis. We rented the Minneapolis Auditorium and filled it to capacity, 2500 people. We invited the Oral Roberts singers to perform one evening, as well as the World Action Singers. It was a family affair. We hired sitters to entertain the children while the meetings were going on. One day they took the children to the St. Paul Zoo and the next day they went to the beach for a picnic lunch. This afforded many couples the opportunity to attend the convention together because now they were encouraged to bring their children.

Our beginning ceremonies for the convention included a circus and a parade. All the Diamond Majors wore costumes and paraded into the convention hall as elephants, 12 feet long and 8 feet high. Angela Serritella, the vice president and creator of the Figurette bra, and Ili Hand, the president, rode in on these "elephants." The enthusiasm generated from the convention continued and we all kept up on volume of sales and sponsorships.

That same year, Barney and I held a meeting with our new directors. We spent the weekend talking with 21 couples about how to develop their own businesses. We honored the achievements of some, and encouraged those who lacked enthusiasm. It was a fruitful meeting.

Our group was growing. Barney worked with the men, teaching them the marketing plan and answering questions. I taught the women how to fit the bras and develop their business and gave them suggestions on where to make new contacts.

One of the keys to our success was that, when we sponsored people, we didn't leave them hanging. We taught them everything we knew about sponsoring other people. In our first six months in the business, we opened Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wisconsin, and Iowa. Elaine Howe's brother came from Spokane, Washington and brought his wife, who was a registered nurse. I remember putting her in a 32 double G bra and had her jump up and down to prove to her that nothing moves when wearing one of our bras. She was amazed at the quality of the garment and soon became our new recruit in Washington. That's how we did it. We were sponsoring people and they were earning cars and trips and sponsoring more people. It was spreading like wildfire.

The husbands taught the marketing plan and the wives were the bra specialists, teaching the other women how to measure and fit bras and how to train others to fit them. We also taught them the importance of caring for their inventory, keeping their bras fresh. We taught them that, when they fit a bra and the lady decided to buy that bra, that's the bra she took home so that they would always have a new, fresh bra in their suitcase. Otherwise they would end up with a suitcase full of demos, or used bras.

As bra specialists, we presented ourselves in a professional manner, wearing pink smocks, white skirts or white slacks. Barney taught all the men how to keep track of the inventory, write up the sales slips, and place orders. When we first started with Figurettes, the shipments came from Des Moines, Iowa. Later the company moved to Phoenix, Arizona. At that point, we had to supply all the inventory. We carried our entire inventory in a suitcase, arranged in numerical order, starting with the 28s and then the 30s, 32s, 34s, and up, and we'd go A, B, C, D, so that we would have A, B, double B, C, double C, D, double D, E all the way up in the book. We had each person keep track on a recipe card what bras they had so they knew what to order.

Barney would assemble the inventories, making sure everyone had what they needed. It was a fun business with everyone working together. Training meetings were held once a week so everyone knew their role. Interestingly, when we first started, the only training I had was from my quick trip to Colorado where Phyllis introduced me to the business. So we practiced on our husbands. Then when they went to the banquets and conventions, the husbands would get together and share stories. "Does your wife try it on you?" "What size were you?"

We also had banquets once a month and everyone would bring their prospects and we would share the business. Barney would explain the marketing plan. He always told it honestly, never embellishing it in any way as Del Remmi would sometimes do. I think people appreciated Barney's honesty and integrity. A woman from South Dakota tape-recorded Barney so she could share it with her group at home. That was all she needed to grow her group and qualify as a Major. Barney's tapes were also used at national conventions.

I covered a lot of miles in my car, traveling to and from shows, sometimes all the way to Wisconsin, many times arriving home after 2 a.m. If successful, I would sell \$400 to \$600 worth of bras in one night. I not only sold bras, but I also sold the business. I would ask "Does anyone want to own their own business?" Well, of course, the hands went up, and they were "hooked," no pun intended.

Dorothy and Don's group in Omaha was growing fairly quickly. We also sponsored the Andersons in Balsam Lake, Wisconsin and they sponsored several people, who in turn sponsored more people. Our recruits were from all walks of life, people looking for a way to supplement their income, or just wanting to make a change in their career. The Leinans, the Andersons, and Barney and I put together a seminar at O'Hare Field at the Hyatt House in Chicago and 500 couples attended. Angela Serritella was the featured speaker.

Angela developed the formulas for the bras and registered the sizes. When we first started in the business, we all tried on the bras and Angela would pin them until they were a perfect fit. Angela worked miracles fitting one of our recruits from Missouri who was a 32 GG.

No one knew that we had invited Angela to speak at this convention. We wanted to surprise everyone, so we had her on a luggage cart covered with a sheet. When we wheeled her onto the stage, everyone cheered when she popped out. Then, for the first time, she displayed the new bathing suit she had created. This was not a company sponsored convention. We three couples put the whole thing together.

People were joining the business because they saw the potential for success and they were shown the actual bonus checks many were receiving for their work. They also believed in the value of the product, which made it a natural sell. That's how the business grew. Our group just kept getting larger and larger. Having our husbands to help with the paperwork freed us up to promote the product. We all worked well as a team.

One time we held a banquet in Minneapolis where one of our couples owned a sign business. The husband built a bra that was 12 feet wide and 6 feet tall. He painted it to look just like a Figurette bra and hung it on the wall in the convention hall.

The company formed a council of Diamond Majors, consisting of five Diamond Majors who would serve for two years. We would all meet together in Phoenix and discuss ways to improve the company and the marketing plan. We would explain any problems that we were having in the field, so that those in the company office would understand what challenges we were facing, particularly with getting product and the development of new products. It was very productive, but it was also a lot of fun because we all became close friends. We were on the first board. At the end of the two years we relinquished our position to others.

Bob and Phyllis Secord, who had recruited us into the business, were the only ones who had five Diamond Majors in their group. Both of them had graduated from college as funeral directors, owned their own funeral home, became bored with it, and wanted to do something

different. As I said, like me, they were in the cosmetic business and from the cosmetic business we both entered into the bra business and did very well. The Secords were the anchor to our success. They wanted the best for us. Barney and Bob were like two little kids driving their brand new Lincolns around town and honking their horns at everyone and waving. Phyllis was a lovely person and I loved her dearly. They are both gone now, but they had an exciting life and did a lot of good and helped many of us to be who we are today.

One thing that truly contributed to our success was Del Remmi's presentation which he called "If you could count to four." It forced us to focus on getting to where we wanted to go. He placed a chair in the bathroom and said "I want you to stay in here until you find out who you are, what you are, and what you really want to do with your life."

Barney went first. Then it was my turn. I really believe that exercise changed my life. There's nobody but you and the mirror. I had to decide between me and myself who I was and what I wanted to do with my life. I was nearly 50 years old and I had been successful in several things – as the hostess of the New Neighbors League, as a Girl Scout Leader, as a trainer. But I didn't really have direction to my life as to what I really wanted to do.

Then Del had each of us sit down and he said "Now write it all down, define it. I want you to really decide what you want to accomplish in your lifetime." It forced me to recognize the potential I had and what I could do and what was the most important thing in my life. Of course, the most important thing is Jesus Christ. I am a Christian. I love the Lord and I believe the Lord has had his hand on my shoulder my whole life, guiding me and directing me, and helping me in all that I do. I felt that one of the things I was supposed to do is educate and help other people to achieve a better way of life and I believed the bra business was the way He facilitated it.

I've always been a teacher, from the time I taught Sunday school and vacation Bible school and later the Girl Scouts. I had 109 girls, including my own daughter, who made Curve Bar because I inspired and encouraged them and saw to it that they did the work, that they honestly earned the Curve Bar. I am a Curve Bar Scout myself. The bra business put these same qualities to work.

It's really amazing how many people are out there floundering and not knowing where to go or what to do with their lives. They're unhappy, dissatisfied, and don't know why they're unhappy and dissatisfied. I believe it's because they don't have any direction to their life. They don't know where they really want to go. Del's exercise was wonderful as far as I was concerned.

First you have to define who you are and what you are, and then you decide what you really want to do with your life. What do you want to accomplish? God gave us each a magnificent body and a mind, even our health and what are we to do with it? What are we really going to try to accomplish with what He has given us?

The second important lesson I learned was to pretend that I had already accomplished what I had set my mind to do. That was what I did when I pretended I was driving that new car. I pretended I was a Diamond Major and it wasn't long before I became one.

Chapter 31

We had begun working with Figuerettes in 1968 and ten years later the company was sold to Cameo Coutures, Inc. We would travel to Dallas for conventions, as this was the new headquarters. We now sold Figuerette bras along with the Cameo line, giving our customers more choices.

When we joined Cameo, they developed a computer program which simplified the ordering process and we were able to receive our merchandise more quickly than ever before. They had a customer service staff that was always available to assist us if we had a problem. Their annual conventions were all held in a Dallas hotel where we stayed. There would be 400 to 600 people at the different banquets.

We still went to Las Vegas in January, but instead of going out to the different cities, they set up the conventions themselves. We would have a large crowd there. Sometimes there were 1000 people. Since we were in the top echelon in the selling, our group sold a lot of bras every year and we were always in the top ten in receiving awards.

We no longer wore pink smocks. Cameo decided they wanted us to look more professional, so we were provided suits, a jacket, and skirt or slacks. At one time I had a total of ten suits, one of every color. They were high quality suits and I still have three of them.

Every year at the convention we received top honors. One woman asked "What do I have to do beat you?" and I said, "Honey, you have to run like hell." And the very next time she was number 1 and I was number 2. The competition was good for all of us, and, of course, for the company.

The new owner, Novice Nicholson, came to San Francisco to meet with us. He introduced himself as one of our new vice presidents. Adjusting to the new rules and new regulations was difficult at first, but we were all excited about the business. We continued to be very active and became a large part of the new company.

The new inventory included lingerie which helped expand our business. Some people came into the business wanting only to sell lingerie, which worked out well because many of us preferred promoting the bras. The catalogs were changed twice a year, at which time the company held a huge convention in Dallas, replete with a fashion show for their lingerie and casual attire. I did wear the lingerie, but I was more interested in selling the bras. Very few of the people in our organization were interested in selling lingerie.

Our group was earning good commissions every month. We were leaders in the Cameo business, always in the top ten in sales. We worked towards all the trips. Every year they offered a Caribbean cruise and trips to many other countries.

Cameo took away the cars, but added more trips, including cruises, which was a new experience for Barney and me. We earned our first cruise on the Costa Carla which set sail out of Florida. We were met at the ship by John Frederick, one of the owners of Cameo. It was a seven-day cruise in the Caribbean. We had a wonderful time. It was unbelievable that we were on such a wonderful vacation. And for free!

One of the most memorable trips was to Rome, perhaps because it was the first big trip we had earned, and our first trip to a foreign country, other than Mexico and Canada and my trip to Austria and Paris with my mother in 1964. We flew all night and then boarded a Greyhound bus to Naples, where we toured a cameo factory. A cameo is a shell from the ocean and the brown part is the inside of the shell and the white part is the outside. They scrape it and make these exotic figures. I had no idea then that this was where our company Cameo got its name.

The company had made all the plans for our trip to Italy. Barney and I decided before we went that if we were going that far, we did not want to go home after seven days. I called the

travel agency they were using and tried to arrange for travel from Rome to London and accommodations there. The travel agent said, "Oh, you can't do that." I replied, "Oh yes we can. We just won't tell anybody. You make arrangements to come home from London three weeks later." And so Barney and I went to Florence for two days, then we went to Venice for two days and took the train to Innsbrook, Austria and met my sister and her husband who were again living there. They knew the area well and we toured with them for ten days.

We had a wonderful time with Dorothy and Dave. Then we went to Geneva, Switzerland and took the train to Paris. After two days in Paris, we went to London for two days and then we went home on the 15th of May. We had a wonderful time. We didn't have any reservations anywhere. Barney had said, "You can't do that." Well, we did. We never dreamed we would ever have the opportunity to travel to all of these places and see the things we saw, including the Statue of David and the Cathedrals. When we arrived in Paris, Barney said "Let's throw the suitcases in the room and go see the Eiffel Tower." As we stood there gazing up he said "Never in my life did I ever believe I'd stand underneath the Eiffel Tower in Paris, France." He was so excited.

At a restaurant in Switzerland a woman noticed me admiring the exotic water lily cactus. She asked if I would like some pieces to take home. I gave her an inquisitive look and she explained, "If you rip off the little pieces and plant them, they will grow." I said, "Sure." So she gave me four little pieces about 2" long in a wet napkin in a zip-lock bag. I took them home but had forgotten about them. About two and a half months later I found them and discovered that they had little roots that were just beginning to come out so I planted them. I still have that plant and it is huge. The blooms are similar to a water lily, white in the center with deep pink petals on the outside.

While we were building the bra business, we continued selling cosmetics, as did many others in our group. By 1976 Ovarions realized they were losing me so they offered me the job of National Director. They gave me stock in the company, and agreed to pay all of our moving expenses. The only drawback was we would have to move to Los Angeles but, as always, we were up for the challenge. We could run the bra business from anywhere, and it seemed like a good opportunity, since we had so many recruits keeping us going in both businesses. So I took the job and we moved to Los Angeles.

My new job took me on the road for up to two weeks at a time, flying all over the country, teaching women how to sell the product and how to build their own businesses. Every time I returned from a business trip, my neighbors would tell me how my husband seemed so lost without me, wandering around, all alone. He wouldn't eat unless they fed him.

On a road trip to Springfield, Missouri in the dead of winter, after sitting in the airport for seven hours trying to get a plane to Chicago and spending three days sitting on the floor in the Chicago Airport with no food, I decided that would be my last road trip. I quit my job. I needed to be home with my husband.

I continued to sell bras and cosmetics, but for three months I also worked for a Beverly Hills employment agency. I remember a young man came in with long, stringy hair and dirty jeans looking for a job. I had a job that he qualified for, but he looked so terrible. I told him, "If you think I'm gonna send you out for a job, you're crazy. Look at you! Your hair! Your clothes! If you represent me, you gotta look good. You go get yourself cleaned up, come back and see me tomorrow and if you look proper, I'll send you out." The next day, he came in clean shaven, with a haircut and nice slacks and clean, pressed shirt. My boss was very impressed with how I handled the situation.

Neither Barney nor I really liked living in Los Angeles, but we tried to make the best of it. On my birthday in January of 1978, Barney took me to a place called Zuma Beach outside of Malibu, California. We took our chairs and sat on the sand watching the sunset. It was a site we

never forgot – no, not the sunset -- the two young men who were running up and down the sand, in and out of the ocean. They were totally nude. They were not bothered in the least by us two old folks sitting there.

Chapter 32

We finally had enough of L.A. Our daughter and her family had moved to San Jose in northern California and we talked about moving there. We would be able to continue selling bras and cosmetics. Barney said, "If you can find us a house, we'll move." Three weeks later I went to San Jose, found a house, came home, and we packed up our things. In April of 1978, the same year Cameo bought out Figurettes, we moved to a very nice neighborhood in a suburb of San Jose. We had a smaller cottage behind the main house where I sold bras and cosmetics. The bra business was doing so well, I decided to drop the cosmetics. Barney was helping me with the bra business, but also landed a job in the automotive department at J.C. Penney's in the mall near our home.

Dad died in 1980. We didn't visit him very often since we left Florida, but on our last visit we could see that he was quickly losing his memory. He kept asking to see our little boy, Barry. We told him Barry was a grown man and had to stay home and work. He never seemed to grasp that fact.

Louise had Dad cremated and she scattered his ashes over the ocean. She didn't have a funeral service for him so we never had the opportunity to say goodbye. My sister Dorothy decided to hold a funeral at her church in Michigan and I had one at my church in San Jose. We both said our goodbyes as best we could.

In 1981, the year following my dad's death, we bought a mobile home in northern San Jose and moved the shop to Santa Clara.

In 1982, one of Mother's former piano students heard she was dying and drove to see her. For 24 hours he and his wife stayed at Mother's side and he played the piano for her. Thirty years later, that student nominated her for a major national teaching award in New York, which she won. He accepted the award on her behalf and presented our family with a lovely plaque and a booklet with a picture of Mother and a story about her career in teaching music. That student is now an accomplished musician and CEO of a piano company with a Master's degree. He gives much of the credit for his success to Mother, whose musical background began with six months of piano lessons at the age of 10. My mother died at the age of 88. I traveled to Wisconsin to attend her services and visit with my family.

In 1987 we sold the mobile home and moved into the very nice Camden neighborhood, a suburb of San Jose. About that time, Barry's daughter, Kellie, came to live with us. Barry and Amy were in the middle of a divorce and Kellie needed to get away. She was 18 years old and in her last year of high school.

Kellie had been living in a basement apartment in Minneapolis with her folks. They had too many kids and not enough places for people to sleep. We bought her special furniture including a vanity dresser and I had a huge pillow on her bed with a sign "Welcome to your new room." A purple ruffled bedspread also brightened her room.

Barney would take Kellie to and from school. She would come home and share stories about her time in ROTC at the high school. The way she described some of her experiences was hilarious. One time they had gun practice and she said they had to take a big rifle and pound it on the ground, and then they had to move it into different positions and then they were supposed to put it over their shoulders. Well, she never got it over her shoulder. She lost control of it and it fell to the ground. In the evenings, we would all lie on the bed and eat popcorn and watch television together.

While Kellie was living with us, we attended Los Gatos Christian Church and she was baptized the first week of January on a Sunday evening. Even though we had been baptized already, Barney and I were baptized along with Kellie and two other teenagers.

Kellie was a sweet, adorable, young lady and never shy on dates. She also joined the Rainbow Girls. I took her to Gunny Sacks, a wholesale dress shop in San Francisco, where we could buy evening dresses for as little as \$5 each. We bought her six evening dresses. We then went to the yardage store and bought all kinds of trimming, lace, ruffles, and ribbons and Kellie decorated all of the dresses and made them look like very expensive gowns.

Kellie graduated from Leah High School in San Jose and returned home to Minneapolis. We thoroughly enjoyed having her with us. She truly illuminated our lives.

Barney had developed diabetes over the years and the one thing he hated about the strict diet was giving up was his popcorn in the evenings. That was probably his favorite thing about Kellie living with us. But, like a little boy, he would sneak a forbidden snack whenever I wasn't watching. Because of his illness, I was now attending meetings alone and leaving Barney at home. One night I drove halfway to my meeting when I realized I had forgotten something. So I turned around to go back home. I came rushing into the house just in time to catch Barney walking to his chair with a big bowl of popcorn which he wasn't supposed to have. He was caught with his hand in the popcorn bowl. If I wasn't there to say "No, you can't have popcorn," he'd have it anyway, knowing it was not good for his health.

Barney and I were blessed by the traveling opportunities afforded by Cameo's rewards program. We went on three Caribbean cruises and then they offered a trip to Hong Kong, China in 1988. We were determined to meet the sales and sponsorship requirements for this trip, and we did.

How exciting to fly across the Pacific Ocean. The trip was delightful and educational. Orv and Elaine, the first couple we sponsored, also earned their way and went with us, as well as another couple we had sponsored from Milwaukee, Ron and Terri Wysocki.

After we landed in Hong Kong, Barney stood with his arms straight out turning his body around in a circle and exclaimed, "China, China! Just think, I'm in China. Not South Dakota, but China." He never dreamed, as a farmer's son, ever traveling all the way to China.

We took in all the sights and sounds of China, the city life, the countryside, the food, and even the Peking duck farms. Only the government owned cars. Most people rode the bus, taxis, or bicycles. They transported their goods as well as their families on truck beds that were hooked to the backs of their bicycles. It was a very educational trip, but we "kissed the ground" when we returned home. We are so blessed in the United States, and traveling to China helped us appreciate what we have.

Chapter 33

On October 17, 1989, I was working in my office in San Jose and was serving the needs of a new mother. She had her four-week old baby with her and I had fit her in a bra and we had just completed our transaction. The woman said to me, "The baby's hungry, I better nurse him before I go." As she was nursing the baby, all of a sudden, the earth started shaking. I was experiencing my first earthquake since moving to California and it was a big one, 7.1 on the Richter scale, hitting the San Francisco and Monterey areas.

Many items in our studio fell over. I had my customer stand in one doorway with her baby and I stood in another. Everything was falling around us. After the shaking subsided, I had her sit down and said "You wait here." I went outside to see the damage and I noticed at the end of the driveway a telephone pole with sparks shooting into the sky. I said to my customer, "You're not going home, not until we get this situation a little bit more settled than it is right now." Of course, all the people from the surrounding buildings were out wandering around. We didn't have much damage except a few pictures that had fallen off the walls and I had a lightweight bookcase that fell over.

I became extremely concerned about Barney who was home alone and had become quite handicapped. I tried calling him but there was no answer. My customer stayed until the men in the building thought it was safe for her to get in her car and drive home. That took about half an hour. After she left, I locked up my office, got in my car and went home to see what happened to my husband.

It took me about an hour to get home. As I pulled into the driveway, I saw Barney coming out of the house, limping on the sidewalk. When he saw me he burst into tears. He was so frightened. When the quake hit, Barney had rolled back in his wheelchair and became stuck. He could see the lamps falling over and could hear the china falling out of the china closet crashing onto the floor. I went and got his wheelchair and settled him down.

We lived in a duplex and so I went next door to check on the lady who lived there. She and her children seemed to be alright, just a little shaken. We could see there was quite a lot of damage on our street and I said to the neighbor, "I've got this big table, let's put it outside with some food so that we can feed the neighbors." So she and I emptied our refrigerators and we were setting up an eating station in front of our house and all of a sudden, I noticed my husband had taken the brakes off of his wheelchair and was rolling down the driveway into the street. One of the neighbors ran and caught him and brought him back. I said, "Don't unlock your wheelchair anymore; just stay right here so that you're safe with me."

Pretty soon our son-in-law and grandson showed up and they found we had candles lit in the house. Our son-in-law exclaimed, "Oh, you can't light candles, it might set the house on fire." So they went and got batteries and lit flashlights.

It was quite an event. It was dark all night. There were no lights because the poles were all down. My first earthquake and it had to be a big one. We were lucky we were safe and the things that we lost were not that expensive nor were they that important. We lost some wine glasses and some of my china. But other than that, we were just fine.

Chapter 34

Barney and I celebrated our 50th wedding anniversary in 1990. He had taken it very hard when Workmen's was sold, but his involvement in the bra business with me gave him a new spark. We met many new friends, traveled all over the world, and attended all the conventions, being recognized for our hard work and successes.

Barney's health deteriorated quickly after our move to San Jose. Eventually I was unable to care for him and had to move him into assisted living. This was one of the most difficult decisions of my life. However, the following year he was able to travel with me one more time.

Barney's last trip was a Caribbean cruise. We had purchased an electric scooter for him as he was becoming more non-ambulatory by this time. He was able to get around on the ship because we took his scooter on board. This truly lifted his spirits. The handicapped room also made his trip more comfortable, as it was large enough for him to maneuver in his scooter. It was a memorable time, but somewhat bittersweet, knowing this would be his last trip.

Barney had his scooter at his last convention. We were #2 in the nation in sales that year and, when it came time for us to be honored on stage, the vice president of the company and another lady lifted Barney up under his arms and walked him up onto the stage. He stood on stage with me as we received our award. He was so proud and I was doubly proud of him because I know how difficult it was for him. I had made a gold dress for the occasion and Barney had a matching gold tie and cummerbund under his tux. The vice president said to me later as we spoke of that evening, "That's an event we'll never forget."

A trip to Australia was offered in 1993 but Barney's health would not permit us to go, and I would not go without him. A year later I moved to an apartment on Saratoga Avenue in San Jose with my shop located down the street.

Chapter 35

On June 15, 1995, the Lord took my sweet Barney home to Heaven. When he died, it was like saying goodbye all over again, because I was already living alone. He was such a wonderful, kind, caring man. I miss him terribly. Every life that Barney touched was impacted forever in a positive way. Whatever he did, he put his whole heart into it – as a husband, a father, grandfather, friend, and coworker. He was not only my husband, but my best friend and for many years my coworker. We built an awesome life together, a loving family with our two fantastic children. I think I have 11 grandchildren, 36 great grandchildren and 7 great-great-grandchildren. That list is growing all the time; so by the time this is published, I'm sure there will be many more.

Barney and I were married for 54 3/4 years. Shari, her husband, our best friend, Misi Hill, and I were all at Barney's bedside in the hospital when he went to be with the Lord. Misi was first a customer and then went into the bra business with us. She was such a godsend when Barney was at home and unable to care for himself. There were times I had to be away and she would fly from Portland, Oregon to stay with Barney and give him his shots and take care of him. I hated to leave Barney, but if I didn't attend the conferences, the members of my team would not receive credit for attending. Barney understood this as he had been my right hand in this business for so many years.

It was amazing how people came from all over the country to Barney's services. The vice president of the bra company spoke at his funeral. Angela Serritella also spoke. Business associates drove all night from Los Angeles to San Jose to attend his service. It was a special occasion.

First we had a service in San Jose for Barney and then I had him cremated. Two months later I mailed Barney's ashes to Mitchell, South Dakota where we were going to have him buried. The family and I flew to Minneapolis and then drove over to Mitchell, South Dakota and had him buried at the feet of his mother and father. There was room there for him and his sister is just across the way, so I felt that was the best place for his remains spend eternity, with his mother and father and sister and her family.

We had a service for Barney in Minneapolis at our old church where all of our Minneapolis friends gathered. Many of them drove to South Dakota to be with us for the small ceremony at the grave site. Barney was already in the ground and had grass covered over him. It was a very nice gathering, with many kind words, saying our final goodbyes to a wonderful man.

Following Barney's death I continued to run the bra business by myself. I was not able to do anywhere near the volume we did before. We worked so well together as a team, we sold thousands of dollars worth of bras every month and sponsored others to do the same. There just weren't enough hours in the day for me to do all of that by myself. And as I was getting older, I was not able to move as quickly as I used to.

Barney and I made some wonderful friends in the bra business, and helped a lot of people fulfill their own dreams. Oh what memories we have of the places we have visited all over the world. There is no way we could have done any of that had it not been for the bra business. And to share those times with the love of my life made it all the more wonderful.

Chapter 36

In 1996, I began traveling again with friends. I obtained top ten status that year and won another cruise. None of the places I have visited, however, could compare to my trip to the Holy Land. I was a widow, 79 years old, when the opportunity presented itself. Oh how I wish Barney could have shared this one with me. When my church, Central Christian, made the announcement for the trip during a Sunday morning service, I was so excited that I went home and called my friend Angela Serritella in Los Angeles.

"How would you like to go on a trip with me?" I asked.

"Where would we go?"

I said, "You better sit down, this is big."

"What do you mean?" she asked. "Where would we go?"

"How about Israel and Jordan?" There was dead silence on the other end of the phone. "Are you still there?" I asked.

"You mean walk where Jesus walked?"

"Yeah. How would you like to do that?"

She answered, "I've always wanted to do that."

I told her that our church was going and I would like her to go with me.

Her reply was a resounding "Yes."

The announcement came in the spring of 1998 and we had until October to save up for the trip. We would be in good hands, as the pastor, Mark Leaper, and his wife were going, as well as the couple who owned the travel agency where the trip was booked.

Twenty-six of us signed up to go. We left on October 22 and returned on November 4. We flew from San Francisco to Frankfurt, Germany and stayed overnight in Frankfurt and then took a plane to Tel Aviv, Israel the next day.

Upon landing in Tel Aviv, we began what was called the Journey of Faith to the Bible Lands of Israel and Jordan. We were on an Italia tour from the United States. Our hotel was lovely and very comfortable. First we visited several synagogues in the area and then were taken to one of the largest diamond distributors in the world. Several in our group purchased diamonds, something they could not have afforded to buy in the States.

The next morning we traveled to the ruins of ancient Rome in the city of Caesarea. We visited the theater and the aqueduct, continued to Mount Carmel and to the Carmelite monastery. Then we went where Elijah fought against the gods of Bael. We drove to Magni and visited the ruins and the water system there.

Then it was on to Nazareth and the Church of the Enunciation and St. Joseph's Grotto. This gave me goose bumps, knowing that this was the actual town where Jesus was raised. Nazareth is a quaint little town with very narrow streets. The people were as curious about us as we were of them.

In Caesarea we visited the huge outdoor stadium made of stone. This was the site of generations of theater productions. It was a breathtaking spot, right on the edge of the Mediterranean Sea.

A taxi took us to the top of Mt. Tabor where we visited the Church of the Transfiguration. What a majestic view of the valley! To think that people worshiped there over 2000 years ago!

After we left there, we drove to Tiberius where we had dinner and stayed the night. While in Tiberius, we took a private boat ride across the Sea of Galilee. A young man throwing his net out of his boat and drawing in the fish reminded us of the descriptions in the Gospels of Peter and John. We could imagine Jesus walking on the water.

In Kibbutz Ginosar we saw a boat that was discovered in 1986 which dates back to the days of Jesus. It had been brought up out of the water and was being restored. It was very well preserved. Just think, Jesus may have ridden in that very boat.

Peter's house in Capernaum had interesting architecture. They built a church over the top of the house and now have actual services there. The walls and gateways were all built with huge stones and mud mortar which have survived over 2000 years. It was amazing to see how much was preserved from Jesus' time.

We visited the Church of Multiplication in Capernaum, as well as the ancient synagogue and, of course, the Mount of the Beatitudes where Jesus delivered his Sermon on the Mount.

We traveled to the border of Israel and followed the Jordan River from the north to where it is believed John the Baptist baptized Jesus, marking the beginning of Jesus' ministry. The water was so clear we could see the deep, rocky bottom.

I had made the decision before leaving California that I was going to be baptized in the Jordan River. I had already been baptized as a baby, and again as an adult, but this was the opportunity of a lifetime. We wore our swimsuits and were given white robes to wear over our suits. Eleven in our group were baptized.

What a thrill, to be baptized in the Jordan River, just like Jesus. In addition to the rocky river bottom, the water was very cold. We held onto ropes that led us in a line down to where our pastor Mark baptized us one at a time. When he brought me up out of the water, he led me over to the assistant pastor who was off the shore so that I wouldn't trip and fall. Angela was unable to submerge her ears in the water, so she opted to photograph my baptism. I cherish the baptismal certificate I received after being baptized in the Jordan River, at the age of 79.

Jordan, Jericho, and Amman all brought the Bible to life. It is difficult to imagine how people could live in such a dry desert with so little vegetation. Many still live in tent houses, which were undoubtedly similar to how the people lived 2000 years ago. The streets of the town of Juras are lined with houses that had no roofs. The sides of the buildings are still standing, presumably preserved for over 2000 years, made of rock and mud mortar. In the heart of the city stands a series of 12-foot columns, 25 to 30 of them, with a big arch that had once been a building. They also had an outdoor auditorium where people could sit on stone seats on both sides with a stage in the center for plays and other forms of entertainment. The Bedouin women all wore scarves to keep the sun off their heads and to keep their bodies cool. Where we were staying, they had a collection of costumes that we could try on and then have our pictures taken. Of course, Angela and I had our pictures taken in full Bedouin garb, with baskets under our arms and our gowns touching to the floor.

Our side trip to Petra was quite memorable. We were told it was too far to walk from where we were staying, so a man who smelled as if he hadn't bathed in two months, took us in his two-seater buggy and he rode on the fender and his horse pulled all three of us up to Petra. We had no idea what to expect. For about a mile and a half we were between two solid rock walls, 50 feet high. The road was maybe 5 feet wide, just enough room for the horse and buggy. So we proceeded through this tunnel-like road and then all of a sudden we saw a huge, pink building in front of us. It was absolutely magnificent. And to imagine it had been built over 2000 years ago. It was carved out of the side of this rock. There were carvings on it of people up above and they turned it into a temple down below. We went into the temple and, interestingly, there was no back door, just more solid rock. There was a large open area in front of the temple where we could purchase souvenirs or take a camel ride through the area. The pillars and the carved rock walls are grand. Some are even multicolored. It was like nothing I had ever seen before. I have heard that just before the Lord returns, the Christians are going to flee to Petra and the Orthodox Jews are going to Masada.

After we left Petra, we continued down to the Dead Sea to cross back over into Israel. When I read of Ruth and her mother-in-law, Naomi, I am amazed that they walked all that way, through such a desolate region, alone. Not a tree, not a blade of grass. Now herds of goats and sheep are around and I have no idea how they keep them fed and watered.

We stayed at a lovely hotel near the Dead Sea. The Dead Sea is picturesque. It has no fish, but is more like an outdoor spa. We put on our bathing suits, covered our arms and legs with wet, black mud, and then sat in the Dead Sea to wash off with the warm, salty water. We felt so relaxed and rejuvenated at the same time. We traveled to Masada the next morning.

Masada is a mountain, but the top is flat like a pancake. The only way up is by cable car which goes across to Mt. Masada. Then we had to climb 65 steps from where we exited the gondola. The village of Masada is where people from Jerusalem used to come for their rest. About half way up on one side there is a shelf like area where Nero stayed. He was protected there as no one could get to him because of the size of the walls. There are still houses there but, again, no roofs. The 65 stairs were covered for protection from the sun. They also had a booth up there where they gave massages.

We then traveled to Bethlehem, the birthplace of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is a fairly large town, about 6 miles south of Jerusalem. Bethlehem is about 80 miles from Nazareth, which gives a little perspective on the trip Joseph and Mary made just before she gave birth. We saw where Jesus was presumably born. It has been fixed up real fancy with colorful tiles, now somewhat of a tourist trap.

We spent several hours in Bethlehem and then traveled to Jerusalem. It is a very modern city. The men wear black stove hats and black clothes and the women wear modern, colorful clothing. We spent three days in Jerusalem. One of the first things they told us we could do was plant a tree in the forest in Jerusalem in honor of a loved one. So I planted a tree in honor of my 1 year old great-grandson, Jacob James Parrish (Shari's grandson) who was born with cystic fibrosis. He has not been well all of his life and I planted a tree in his honor in the forest in Jerusalem and have a certificate saying so. My goal is that he will grow as tall and healthy and lovely as this tree is going to be. Angela planted a tree for her children.

On the way back from the tree planting ceremony, our bus driver who had been driving us everywhere and telling us about all the sites, took us into Jerusalem just at sunset. The sun wasn't quite set, so he stopped at a street corner and announced "Now you all get out of the bus and go around the corner." We weren't sure what we were going to see or do, but we trusted him because he had already taught us so much. So we all got off the bus and went around the corner and in front of us was the whole city of Jerusalem with the sunset behind it. It was the most breathtaking sight I've ever seen. We could see all of Jerusalem, the golden dome of the church and the Mount of Olives and the wall around Jerusalem. It was breathtaking. The brilliance of the sun shined for several miles each way. We were all crying it was so awe-inspiring.

Today the 3000 year old city of Jerusalem is the capital of the Jewish faith. It is also the Holy City for Christianity and Islam. We were in Jerusalem for three days so we saw many important sites – the Dead Sea Scrolls, many well preserved ancient buildings, the tombs, the Mount of Olives, the Temple Wall where we prayed and put our prayer requests in the wall. We ate at many different restaurants and the food was unusual but very good.

Standing at the location of the three crosses where Jesus was crucified was very emotional for Angela and me. We are both Christians and have received the gift of salvation and know the price that Christ paid to save us. To visit the many places mentioned in the Bible and to walk where Jesus walked was a once-in-a-lifetime experience. I know I could go on, describing in minute detail everything we saw and how we felt, but everyone must experience it for themselves to understand what a tremendous emotional and spiritual impact a trip to the Holy Land can have on an individual. I know it changed me.

I have been to every State in the United States. I've been to most of Canada, most of Mexico, Costa Rica, Asia twice, South America twice, and Europe close to 15 times. I've been to Israel and Jordan and was baptized in the Jordan River. I caught a dolphin fish in the Pacific Ocean, and I swam with dolphins off the coast of Florida. God blessed me with good health and a business that afforded me the opportunity to fulfill my childhood dream of seeing the world.

Chapter 37

In 1999, I earned another trip to London and Paris. Barney was gone so I called my 24 year old granddaughter, Heather and asked "Would you like to go on a trip with Grandma?"

Heather asked, "Where would we go, Grandma?"

I said, "You better sit down for this one."

Heather said, "Really, where would we go?"

I said, "How about London and Paris."

You should have heard Heather squeal over the phone. She was ecstatic. She flew from Minneapolis and I flew from California and we met in London and spent a week together. We took the Chunnel over to Paris and spent 12 hours there. We saw William Shakespeare's house, Oxford College, and all the different churches. We saw where Lady Di and Charles were married. We saw the changing of the guard at the Palace. I took Heather to see Les Miserables at the theater. We were in the eighth row back.

I have been to London three different times and Paris three times. I enjoyed each trip, but this one was extra special. I was delighted to have given Heather this opportunity. I wish I had been able to do the same for all my grandchildren.

Chapter 38

In 2004 my life took another detour when I underwent heart bypass surgery. Shari was living in Vacaville, California, and thought it would be best if I lived with her for a while, until I was able to get back on my feet.

After about four months, I had recovered from my heart surgery and I moved from Shari's home into my own apartment. I fell in love with Vacaville. It's a cute, little town. Before long I was back to my old self. I thought, "There's no reason why I can't start my business back up right here in Vacaville." So I rented a two-room studio downtown and placed an ad in a small, local newspaper with a circulation of about 35,000. I began talking to everyone I met about the bras. I started receiving phone calls and soon I had a good business going here.

Then some of the women I had worked with in San Jose called and said "I need more bras." So I ordered the bras and had them sent directly to them. I received invitations to speak to several of the clubs in the area. The title of my talk is "What is the Altitude of Your Attitude?" I offer guidelines for better business productivity and stress that a new lease on life will come from adding wider dimensions, brighter insights for today and tomorrow. I tell my audience they can experience the exciting adventure of growing in life, if they can learn to harmonize contentment, happiness, and a feeling of total success in their lives. The program is aimed at the busy person wanting to expand their mind. The sky is the limit, I am living proof of that.

I joined the Vacaville Soroptimist Club and, after living in Vacaville only two years, was named Senior Citizen of the Year. The previous year, Jeuniqué honored me with the Founders Award for outstanding achievement for company loyalty and amazing spirit. Along with a beautiful plaque, I was presented with a two-week, all-expenses paid Mediterranean cruise. In 1997, while living and working in San Jose, I had received the "Women Helping Women" award from the Soroptimist International.

While I missed Barney, my dear husband and traveling partner, I was still willing and able to take a few more trips. My friend and colleague Sharon Calhoun accompanied me to South America. I invited another friend and colleague, Margine Yeaton, to join me on the Mediterranean cruise that I had won from Jeuniqué. That would be my last cruise.

Chapter 39

At 87 and 89, my sister and I were not ready to lie down and die just yet. One day she called and asked if I would like to meet her in Omaha and spend Memorial Day weekend with her and her family. It was a special time visiting with Craig's three children. It was difficult for them losing their father at such a young age, but he would be so proud of all of them.

On Monday morning, Dorothy and I rented a car and she drove me to Branson, Missouri. Four hundred miles was quite a trek from Omaha for these two old ladies, so we took our time and stopped halfway. We saw seven shows in four days during our stay in Branson. The day we were to come home a tornado whipped through Branson, so we spent several hours in the cellar of the hotel where we were staying. After the tornado passed, we went to our last show, Roy Rogers' and Dale Evans' grandson, who showed old pictures and told stories about his grandparents and all the adventures they had shared over their lifetime.

On our way back to Omaha, we stopped in Kansas City and visited more relatives. After two days in Omaha, Dorothy and I flew back to our respective homes. It was my first time in that part of the country and I thoroughly enjoyed seeing the lakes, mountains, and rock formations.

Dorothy and I made many trips together over the years, but our most recent was in 2010. I flew to Greenville, Michigan where she lived and from there, Dorothy drove and I navigated our way across Canada to New York. This was probably the same route Dorothy and I took in the backseat of Dad's old Buick when we were little girls.

I flew to Grand Rapids, Michigan where Dorothy was living. The first leg of our trip took us to London, Ontario. Dorothy had made arrangements for us to stay at a lady's house where she charged \$20 a night. It was a brand new apartment house, 13 stories high. Her apartment was on the ninth floor. It had all new furnishings. We arrived around 4:00 in the afternoon and asked the woman if we could take her to dinner. She said, "Oh, no, you come ahead, I want you to have dinner with me. I've wanted to make my husband's special dinner and he's passed away so I'll make it for us."

So the sweet lady made us a lovely dinner and we spent the evening visiting with her. We had our own bedroom and private bath. The next morning she prepared a hearty breakfast and we were on our way.

We were looking for the Lewiston Bridge which enters into Canada. We drove and drove and couldn't find the bridge. Finally, I asked Dorothy, "Do you think we're already in Buffalo? Maybe we missed a turn along the way." Sure enough, we were in Buffalo and didn't even know it. We still don't know how we made the mistake or how we ended up in Buffalo, which was where we wanted to be.

We spent several days visiting our cousin Shirley and her husband Clyde in the town of Tonawanda, north of Buffalo. One day we went to Rochester to visit our other cousin Dorothea. Shirley's daughter Charlotte, named after her grandmother, taught kindergarten and asked if we would like to come and share in her classroom. Oh, what fun we had working with the children. After we left, they asked their teacher, "What happened to Grandma Chicki and Grandma Dorothy? Aren't they coming back? We like them."

It was a thrill visiting our old high school and watching our friend's granddaughter play volleyball. I even saw my old boyfriend whom I had dated for years before I met and married Barney. He lived four blocks away from the Spiegel's. It was special seeing him since he died a year later.

We also visited a house near the park in Buffalo that Frank Lloyd Wright had built and they have made into a museum. Both Shirley and her brother Bruce work there as tour guides.

While in Buffalo, Shirley's husband took Dorothy and me on a tour of all the sites of the city. We saw the downtown area and Lake Erie and how things had changed since we were young.

The day we were to leave for home, a huge snow storm hit the Buffalo area. It is not uncommon in October to see snow in Buffalo. We decided to go home the northern route through Niagara Falls, which was the route we thought we were taking when we arrived. It did not snow on us the rest of the way home. That would be our last trip together.

Shortly after our trip, Dorothy moved from Wisconsin to Seattle to be near her family. She was also receiving cancer treatments there. All things considered, she did quite well. I flew to Washington to see her in May of 2013 to celebrate her last birthday. She passed away in early 2014. At her request, she was buried in Austria, alongside her loving husband, Dave.

Chapter 40

In December of 2005 and into January of 2006, northern California was hit with a series of heavy rain storms. The creek near my apartment was ready to overflow. I was the only person in my complex who had the wherewithal to move her car. I decided to drive over to my daughter's house. The streets were like rivers and I had no choice but to continue driving, even though the water had reached the floor boards of my car.

When I arrived at Shari's, she could not believe I drove through the water. The inside of my car was soaking wet. When I went back home, the water from the creek had seeped into my apartment. I was forced to move into another apartment, where I stayed for about a year.

By 2007, I had begun to slow down a bit and the time had come for me to look into moving to a retirement home where I would no longer have to shop and cook for myself. I visited Merrill Gardens in Vacaville where the staff was very sweet and kind but the residents seemed so old. I had been too busy to realize that I, too, was getting older. I wasn't thrilled about the move, knowing the rooms were so small I would have to give up my bra business. But if I did that, how would I have enough to live on?

As always, God had it all figured out. There just so happened to be a room available with a larger living area and a smaller room off the living room. It was perfect. I set up my office in the back end of the living area and conducted my fittings in the smaller room, where there was also enough space for my large inventory. Just outside my living quarters in the hallway, there was a bench which worked well as a waiting area for my customers. Word traveled quickly and I had fittings scheduled ever day of the week, except Sundays, of course.

In every local community where I have lived, I have tried to educate women on breast health, including breast-feeding. I was still attending conventions for the bra business, teaching and training in Los Angeles. The last convention I attended was in Florida. I had planned to stay a little longer and visit Epcot and other attractions. Those plans changed drastically when, on the first night, I got up to use the restroom in my hotel room and fell and broke my arm on the side of the bathtub. Incidentally, I won two awards at the convention, but was unable to accept them in person because of my injury. I also won another trip, as I did at most of the conventions.

My grandson Buddy lives in Castle Rock, Colorado. His sweet wife, Lori, flew to Florida to pick me up. I spent the next seven weeks with Buddy and Lori and their son, Alexander, age 7 at the time. Buddy and Lori have a large, blended family, but Alexander is their only child they had together. The other children are grown.

It was a delight to get to know Lori and Alexander and spend time with Buddy. They all took good care of me until I was able to return to California. My associate, Neva Thorson, was keeping my bra business going, and when I returned home she continued to assist me, as it was difficult for me to hook the bras with my weak arm.

It was a long recovery, but I was finally normal again. Then the following year I came down with pneumonia. Over the next six months I had three bouts of pneumonia, including three 8-day stays in the hospital. Following each stay I had to have round-the-clock care at home for several weeks. Shari stopped by every day after work to check on me. She was by then in her 70s and recently retired from her job as an office manager for a small company. She was also caring for her husband who was not well. I certainly appreciated her help because I know how busy she was.

I returned to working the business, attending church and Bible studies, and Wii bowling. We had tournaments at Merrill Gardens, and once I bowled a 245. I began using a walker, but was still receiving calls for bras. People continued to come from all of the United States to buy bras. My customers, many of whom have been with me for over 25 years, told me they wouldn't

wear any other bra. They were so thankful I was still able to keep them in their bras. It was amazing how so many stayed with me through the years and through all my moves to different towns.

Chapter 41

There was a higher purpose in our business, aside from the cars and the trips. Traveling was the icing on the cake for me. I always wanted to see the world, and that I did. But we also made a decent living for ourselves and were placed in a position to train many more to do the same. We were given an opportunity to serve the Lord through helping others.

In June of 1988 I worked with a group of young people which was sponsored by the movie star, Hugh O'Brian. He believed that young people needed training and help. So they invited me to be one of the speakers and help these young people set goals and to share with them. I told them that, if they would join hands with the Lord, He would lead them throughout their lifetime. We had young people from all over Northern Minnesota who came to take this training. During the three-day training, they lived in the dormitory at a nearby college.

Phyllis Keuckenbergh, the executive vice president of Jeunique, calls me the "Energizer Bunny." We've known each other for over 40 years. She always says, "When I grow up I'm gonna be just like Chicki." Well, she's not a young lady. She's getting along in years, too, a grandmother and great-grandmother.

As I said, when Cameo added the lingerie line, I continued to emphasize the bra business. I am a bra lady. I've always believed in fitting every woman in a decent bra. These bras are the very best. They have sizes from the very smallest to the very largest. Late in my career I fit a lady who wore size 42 KK. As always, when she jumped up and down, nothing moved.

There was an infomercial on television the other day about a certain bra. After they fit several women in their new bras and had them model them, the woman said, "So, see, we have bras that fit every woman." The largest woman on that stage wore a 38DD. I'm here to tell you, that is just the beginning of where we went with our sizes. "What about the women with the E through N cup sizes?" Well, they came to us.

I cannot stress enough how rewarding it has been to help women feel good about themselves. Some of these women had no hope when it came to finding a comfortable bra, or even finding a bra that would fit at all. A young lady from Texas came to see me who had just had a baby. Her husband was in the service and they were stationed at Travis Air Force Base near where I lived. This woman was one of many who have run into the same dilemma when shopping for bras.

The reaction by every woman was the same when I would fit them in the bra and have them jump up and down. They could not believe it. Nothing moved. They were not hung from the shoulders any longer. Many women have suffered years of back and shoulder pain from the weight of their breasts.

Several years ago I received a call from a nearby jail. They apparently found my number on the Internet. There was a woman in the jail who was so large they couldn't find a bra to fit her. I went to the jail and took Jean Vistica, one of my associates, with me. We had to sign in and prove who we were. We waited in the waiting room for a few minutes and then two guards came out to escort us into the jail. A female guard carried our four suitcases full of bras and we followed her to the jail cells. There were two more female guards inside the cell area.

They brought the prisoner to us and I measured her to fit her into the right garment. As always, I had her jump up and down. The four guards were amazed. They said "Wow, I didn't know you could do something like that."

I fit the woman in her bra, they paid me and one of the guards helped carry our suitcases all the way to my car. The guards each took one of my cards and came to see me later and I fit them each in a new bra. I had also given one of my cards to the inmate who was wearing the new bra.

A few months later, I received a call from the inmate. She had served her time and when she was released, they kept her bra, because it was the property of the government. She was almost in tears, stating "All I have is \$25, but I need a bra." I told her, "Today, Honey, the bra is \$25," even though it was a \$60 bra. I told her when she got a job she could come back and pay full price. And that's exactly what she did. She eventually straightened out her life and came back to see me several times for bras, and always paid full price.

I had two women, one came from San Jose and one came from Vallejo and both of these women I fit over 20 years ago in San Jose. They were still wearing the same bras. The bras were in terrible condition, but they were still wearing them. They looked me up and finally found me on the internet. They each bought four bras because they knew these were the best bras on the market and they never wanted to be without again.

A black woman I sponsored in Palo Alto held fashion shows at black women's conferences all over California. She wanted her gals to look their best in the clothes they were modeling, so she brought them to me to be fitted for bras. I did this for her two or three times when I lived in San Jose. She called me in Vacaville and said she had a fashion show coming up in Elk Grove, near Sacramento, and would I fit her ladies in bras. I said, "Sure," and so she brought these five women over to Vacaville to be fitted. These were all good sized women, from size 40-KK to HH. With Neva's help, we were able to fit all of them in new bras to model their fashions.

Before they left, the group insisted that I attend the fashion show. Of course, I said I would. Neva drove me to Elk Grove, to the Hilton Hotel for the event. The special dining room was beautifully decorated, ready for the show. There were both men and women in the group. It was a religious group, all wonderful, friendly people. They introduced me as Sister Downs. Did I mention Neva and I were the only white folks in the room? All the gals looked great in their outfits, smooth lines and no bulges, with special accessories and shoes to match each outfit. They all loved how they looked and felt in their new bras and became regular customers.

It is not only the large breasted women who need help. Smaller women have their own issues, and there is a solution for them, too. An 80 year old woman who had recently moved into Merrill Gardens Retirement Home came to see me about a bra. She was almost certain I wouldn't have a bra small enough to fit her little buds, but she thought she would at least try. I turned her little buds into blossoms with a 34-A Jodie mastectomy bra. While she is not a mastectomy client, this was the best fit for her. I inserted small, silicone prosthetics called "Little Secrets" into the bra. These are manufactured by True Life in Michigan. When she looked at herself in the mirror, a broad smile appeared on her face. She exclaimed, "My husband is not going to believe this!"

Chapter 42

Neva was a Godsend. As I was getting older, it had become more difficult to hook the bras, especially on the very large women. Neva is a retired nurse who had been ordering bras from me for years. One day she decided to join the business. Her decision was timely, given my broken arm and three bouts with pneumonia.

Returning home from yet another trip to the hospital, this time just for the day, I found a customer in front of my door, waiting to be fitted for a bra. I had totally forgotten about our appointment. I told her I had just returned from the hospital and would have to reschedule. She became very concerned about my care, and it just so happened she owns a business that provides home care services to those in my predicament. She stayed with me for several days and later returned for her bra fitting. I am thankful I was able to pay her fees because of my income from the bra business.

During my various illnesses and injuries, Neva was able to keep the business going. Recorders were fairly simple, but fitting new customers required a bit more time and expertise and she learned well.

When the president of the company died, there was a short period of time we did not know what was going to happen with the business. I had one customer who came all the way from San Jose, which is about 100 miles, and bought 12 bras because she was afraid they would go out of business and she did not want to be without.

I had another customer who used to live in San Jose. She called me and said "I bought bras three years ago from you. I don't live in San Jose anymore; can I still come and get bras?" I asked, "Where do you live now?" She answered, "Charlotte, North Carolina." And believe it or not, she flew all the way to California and bought four bras from me. She said "I won't wear another bra. I love this bra."

Eventually the company was sold to Ian Weingarten, a 36 year old man who knew nothing about the bra business. He was married and had two small children. Whatever he learned about the bra business was from spending time with me. He would call me frequently seeking my advice. I tried to instill in him the importance of this business, that it is not just a money making venture, but a ministry to women of all ages and sizes. Those who sell the bras must be expertly trained to fit them properly. As with anything, there is a wrong way and right way. The salespeople in the department stores have no idea what they are doing, but they do the best they can with the few sizes they have available.

Unfortunately, Ian Weingarten discontinued the business. I then contracted with Custom Fit Bra Company, Ltd. in Flower Mound, Texas for my inventory and also continued to sell Jodee bras, as well. Jodee specializes in mastectomy bras. I was also selling from my large inventory. I put in a lot of hours, but I didn't call it work. I enjoyed every minute of it. Some days I spent a lot of time doing paperwork and I didn't mind that, either. It was all part of the business, the part that Barney used to do. Oh, how I miss him. I do hope that future leaders in the business will find another company to represent and take what I have taught them to continue educating woman on good breast health.

There have been many incentives over the years to succeed in this business. However, no amount of trips or cars or other awards can match the satisfaction of seeing the smiles on the women's faces when they finally have a bra that fits. I love people and I love helping people.

I have met so many wonderful people through the bra business, customers as well as other women in the business. One of those women, Mary Shaw, introduced me to Dona Bakker and both she and Mary have become wonderful friends. Dona has helped me write my story and Mary has spent many hours editing the manuscript. I could not have done it without them. I pray

that God will use the experiences of my life to encourage other women to fulfill their own dreams and to be a blessing to others.

At age 94, my failing health took me to a rest home. I am no longer able to work the business I loved. I thank the Lord for sustaining me throughout my life. I am able to live comfortably in my later years. I have had a glorious life and I know it will go on until He is ready to take me home.

Chapter 43

As women, we all aspire to maintain the youthful shape and firmness of our breasts. Our worst enemy is gravity and our worst nightmare, other than breast cancer, is an ill-fitted bra! Although some researchers would disagree, I am of the firm belief that the two go hand in hand. If you are “dumped” in front, and your bra rides high in the back, you are not wearing the right bra.

Breasts that are held in the proper position, cradled in a good support bra, can defy gravity and alleviate the problem of sagging. Are all women doomed to sag eventually? No, they are not. I am 95 and I don’t sag. Even people who exercise regularly can retain or even restore the youthful shape and firmness of their breasts when properly fitted.

For over 40 years I taught women how to take care of their breasts. I have spoken to many groups about the importance of good breast health and the prevention of breast cancer through wearing a properly fitted bra. I have personally fitted hundreds of women in bra sizes up to 52 N. Yes, you read that right – N as in Nancy.

The findings of a study of more than 4,000 women concluded that women who wore their bras 24 hours a day had a 3 out of 4 chance of developing breast cancer and women who wore bras more than 12 hours per day had a risk factor of 1 in 7. Women who wore their bras less than 12 hours per day had a 1 out of 52 risk, while women who wore bras rarely or never had a 1 out of 168 chance of developing breast cancer. (Singer, Sydney and Grismaijer, Dressed to Kill: The Link Between Breast Cancer and Bras.) I would disagree. This study could lead the reader to conclude that going braless would prevent breast cancer. However, the real problem with this study is that they failed to ask, “How many of these women were wearing the wrong bra?” I am of the professional opinion that the answer would undoubtedly be “nearly all.”

Can a poorly fitted bra lead to health problems? Absolutely! Every female has to deal with gravity, many are affected by breast feeding, and it is an obvious observation and well known fact that not all breasts are created equal. Whatever the situation we face, we all want to do our best to keep our breasts healthy. Without proper support, stretched ligaments result from prolonged sagging. The unsupported weight of the breast can impede blood flow and hinder the lymphatic system, which carries toxins out of the breast area, from functioning properly. Many women experience headaches, backaches, neck pain, sloping and indentations of the shoulders and, because the weight of the breasts, is not appropriately aligned and supported. A properly fitted bra can help avoid these undesirable effects and give the support needed.

I’ve seen many “braless” proponents over the years and their sagging and uncomfortable condition left them all looking awful and feeling miserable. The worst case I have ever seen was Sally. Before I began to fit her, she warned me that what I was about to see I had probably never seen before. I assured her that I had fit thousands of women and I had seen it all. Boy was I wrong! When she removed her blouse, I was horrified. Sally had, at one time, had very large breasts. However, after many unsuccessful attempts at finding a good bra, she had hopelessly concluded that braless was her only option.

Sally’s large, elongated breasts now drooped down to her waist where she secured them in place with a belt. It was the saddest thing I had ever seen. I proceeded to gingerly roll each breast up, like wrapping tissue over a pencil, the tissue being so deformed and shapeless. The skin underneath her breasts all the way down to her waist had become chafed and raw. After putting her into the bra, she was so happy she cried.

Every woman, no matter what her age, has her own personal breast challenges. Factors such as shape, size and formation, pregnancy, the use of hormone therapy, going braless, unusually small or large breasts, or wearing an improperly fitted bra all contribute to the

problems women face. In addressing these challenges, begin by considering the bra you are now wearing. Most likely, it is doing more harm than good.

- Do your bra straps slip off your shoulders?
- Does your bra ride up in the back?
- Do you have grooves in your shoulders caused by the weight of your breasts?
- Does your neck and back ache?
- Do you have one breast larger than the other?
- Would you like a matched pair?
- Are you dumped in front?
- When you jog or exercise, would it help if your breasts were supported so that there was no bounce?
- Would you like your clothes to fit and flatter your figure?
- Would you be pleased if all of the breast tissue was returned to where it belongs, in the cup and held in place?

If the answer to even one of these questions is "yes," you are definitely wearing the wrong bra, as are most women.

When a woman goes into a department store her choices are very limited. Cup sizes ranging from A-DD are common, but these "potluck" bras" do little to provide proper comfort and support for the majority of women.

The proper fit of a bra is crucial to healthy breasts and breast tissue. In an article for Healthy.net by Michael Schachter, M.D., entitled "The Prevention and Complementary Treatment of Breast Cancer," he writes:

"Over 85% of the lymph fluid flowing from the breast drains to the armpit lymph nodes. Most of the rest drains to the nodes along the breast bone. Bras and other external tight clothing can impede flow.

The nature of the bra, the tightness, and the length of time worn, will all influence the degree of blockage of lymphatic drainage. Thus, wearing a bra might contribute to the development of breast cancer as a result of cutting off lymphatic drainage, so that toxic chemicals are trapped in the breast." ("The Prevention and Complementary Treatment of Breast Cancer," Michael Schachter, M.D., F.A.C.A.M.

The lymph nodes begin in the abdomen and, when the underwire compresses the tissue under the breasts, it spreads the tissue and cuts off the circulation. Most commercial bras do not hold the breasts in their proper, natural position and if a woman has very large breasts, she will never find a bra in a store that fits properly.

There are five elements of a properly fit bra:

1. The front center seam should lie as flat as possible against the chest wall.
2. The back of the bra should lie low, well beneath the shoulder blades.
3. All of the breast tissue should be comfortably contained within the cup of the bra.
4. The cup should be full and free of any puckers.
5. Any underwires should lie on the rib cage, never on the breast tissue.

Underwires are unnecessary and are not found in a properly constructed bra. (The ABC's (and D's) of Bras," *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 27, 2000, Sylvia Rubin, Chronicle Staff Writer.)

The reaction by every woman is the same. I would have them jump up and down. They would say "You're kidding." Then they could not believe it. Nothing moved! They

were not hung from the shoulders any longer. Many women have needlessly suffered years of back and shoulder pain from the weight of their breasts.

After fitting women in their new bra, I also taught them how to care for their bras so they will last a long time and not lose their shape. Hand washing and line drying is always best. This is why I never sold just one bra to a woman, I would sell her at least three, so that she was never without, or forced to go back to her old bra that did not fit properly.

Through educating women, they are becoming more and more aware that their breasts can be firm, not just two wet sacks of Kleenex hanging down. When I started the business in 1968, 1 out of every 28 women was having a breast removed. It's now 1 out of every 5, possibly even more in metropolitan areas. I think that is just awful. And on top of the trauma of losing a breast, there is the chemotherapy and radiation and the financial burden all that entails. I truly believe if they had been placed in a properly fitted bra, nine times out of ten they would not have had the problem in the first place.

In my training, I taught what is known as the Bowen Chest Procedure. This is something that can be used for all types of breast conditions, from painful breasts, fibrotic tissue, mastitis, post-mastectomy to prevent lymphedema, lactation conditions, but particularly to promote lymphatic drainage as a means of cancer prevention. As I stated earlier, underwire bras cut off the lymph flow and promote stagnation.

The moves are performed by pushing the breast tissue aside rather than working through. The procedure can be done through lightweight clothing. If one breast is painful, begin with the other side first. The following example is for the left side:

First, use your left hand, palm down, to gently push the top of your left breast downward. Then place the edge of your right pointer finger on your chest centered at about nipple line. After exhaling a deep breath, move both hands toward the side of your body, taking the slack of the skin only. Now make the move by taking the slack to the center, as far as it will go, while putting comfortable pressure along the right hand pointer finger only. Then inhale.

Second, with your left hand, lift your left breast. At about nipple line place the pad of your right pointer finger. After exhalation move the slack with both hands towards the center. Then make the move by adding light pressure with your right pointer finger taking the slack with both hands toward the side of the body as far as it will go then inhale. Repeat the procedure on the other breast. (Taken from Bowen Chest Procedure flyer, by Greg Kennedy, RBT.)

The most difficult part of my job was seeing the increasing number of women shopping for mastectomy bras. Since we first started fitting mastectomy patients, reconstructive surgery has come a long way. When I first started in this business, mastectomy surgery involved removing everything down to the ribs to where there was no breast tissue remaining and thus no skin left for reconstructive surgery. It was a gruesome sight. Some women had lost both breasts, and others had lost only one. To make matters worse, there were no prosthetics on the market at that time.

In 1974 or 1975, after discussing the problem with my dear friend, Angela Serritella, who was a nurse and who enjoyed sewing as do I, we pooled our talents and our resources and created a prosthesis that would fit into the bras featured by the company we represented.

When a woman goes to a department store to be fitted for a bra after a mastectomy, she can be charged from \$300 to \$500 for a prosthesis that doesn't fit properly. So we were determined to give these women another option. It was bad enough

they had to go through the cancer and the treatments and the surgeries, the least we could do was help them find a properly fitted prosthesis and a bra that would fit their needs.

We first tried filling the prosthetic with polyester, but found we needed some kind of weight to keep it in place. So we went to the hardware store and found a foot long bar that was used in fishing. It was made of lead so we were able to cut it with tin snips. We would bury the piece of lead in the polyester to balance the weight with the other breast. We created these prosthetics for about ten years. These women had nowhere else to go. Some months I would fit up to ten mastectomy patients. Doctors found out about me and sent women to me to make sure they were fitted in the right bra.

Prosthetic breasts have come a long way since those days. We began carrying sizes 1 to 18. Seventeen is a very large breast. My favorite is the heart-shaped silicone design by True Life, which I purchased from a Michigan distributor. They feel closer to real skin than any other prosthetic I have sold in the past.

I never put my clients into a mastectomy bra directly following surgery. It takes a while for the body to heal and for the swelling to go down. I would put them in a "sleep" bra for at least two months, which would give them comfortable support while recovering. When they were ready for a mastectomy bra, they would be properly fitted with one that was comfortable which they could wear for a very long time.

Over the years I have encouraged and helped many women who did not feel very good about themselves and the way they looked following the surgery. Our mastectomy bras helped, but the emotional scars run deep. Sometimes husbands are turned off by their partner losing a breast. For a woman to go through breast cancer and all it entails, and then to have to deal with a shallow and cruel husband just boggles my mind. However, I did find many husbands who were sensitive of their wives' conditions and told me that they would pay any amount of money to have the right bra helping her to feel good about herself again.

I believe I have saved many lives over my 40+ years in the bra business. My immediate goal was to teach other women to do the same thing because I knew there would come a time when I would not be there to help. I would like for every woman in the United States to be fitted with the proper bra and to stay healthy and free from breast cancer.

Chapter 44

The world has changed in incredible ways over the past 94 years. Amazing discoveries and inventions have made our lives easier, travel more accessible, and people living longer. It saddens me, though, that, along with those changes, we are seeing the moral fiber of our country disintegrate before our very eyes.

Prior to the 1960s, who would have dreamed that any reference to God would be forbidden in our public schools? Materialism has become our God and, when both parents are working, many of our children are left to raise themselves. Their caretakers have become the television and the Internet.

The Girl Scout Promise reads: "On my honor, I will try: to serve God and my country, to help people at all times, and to live by the Girls Scout law." The Girl Scout law states: "I will do my best to be honest and fair, friendly and helpful, considerate and caring, courageous and strong, and responsible for what I say and do, and to respect myself and others, to respect authority, use resources wisely, make the world a better place, and be a sister to every Girl Scout."

Over my 35 years as a Girl Scout Leader, I emphasized to each of my girls the importance of every aspect of the promise and the law. They learned to serve others, honor God, and respect themselves and each other. When these attributes are taught to young, impressionable girls, they stay with them their entire lives.

When I was a leader, it seemed every girl wanted to be a Girl Scout. We were involved in serving the community wherever we were needed. We were constantly learning and discovering new things. Now it seems the only time I see a Girl Scout is in front of a grocery store selling cookies. As I stated earlier, my girls were required to wear their full uniform when attending meetings or any other Girl Scout affiliated activity. Nowadays, a pair of jeans and a vest thrown over a T-shirt passes as a uniform. It's just appalling to me. I still believe if you dress like a slob, you will act like a slob.

Little girls today are no longer allowed to be little girls. They are enticed to wear makeup, high heels, and low-cut, tight-fitting clothes when they should be playing with dolls and going to Girl Scout meetings.

And it is getting worse. On television the other day I saw the saddest documentary about little girls, the ages of my Girl Scouts, being sold for sex, hired by pimps to walk the streets and sell their bodies. "Where are their parents," I ask? Unfortunately, working moms and dead beat dads are becoming the normal family. Many children have parents who are strung out on drugs and/or alcohol and have no business being entrusted with the precious lives of children.

Then there is the matter of abortion. It is not a political issue. It is a moral issue. It seems the most dangerous place for a baby these days is in his or her mother's womb. The number of people who would love to have children but can't rises, but those who don't want children, either kill them before they are born, or totally neglect them after they are born. Because it is legal to kill babies before they are born, we as a nation will be judged for this atrocity. Since *Roe v. Wade*, over 50 million of God's little children have been destroyed.

Chapter 45

As you can see throughout this book, my faith in the Lord means a lot to me and I have never been shy about sharing it with others. I have loved the Lord since I was a little girl and I can't remember ever not going to church. I've gone to a lot of churches in my lifetime and I wanted to share how my faith has guided me and taken me through all the different years.

As I stated before, Grandfather Bommer was the strongest influence in my life in helping me to develop my faith. He was my father's father and I was his oldest grandchild and he and I were very close. He guided and directed me many times. Grandfather always had the Bible on his dining room table and would read it every morning to Grandma and whoever else was there. He was the one who facilitated my transfer to Houghton Academy for a year in high school, which was a turning point for me in my walk with the Lord.

We belonged to the Kenmore Methodist Church and went there from the time I was about 7 or 8 years old. When I was about 14, I taught daily vacation Bible school. I was married in that church and Barney and I attended there after we were married until we moved from the area.

I was just looking at a picture of me with my group of students in vacation Bible school and I am wearing a hat. I still wear a hat to church every Sunday and nowadays I'm about the only one in the church with a hat on. It doesn't bother me, because I've been wearing a hat to church my whole life.

As I said, I also taught Sunday school at a very young age and was able to control up to 50 kids of different ages, from 1 year olds to about 8 or 9. I was always good with children and I love teaching them.

After we were married, Barney and I attended an adult couples Bible study on Sunday morning, before church. Whatever church I have attended over the years, I have always been very active in serving.

After the revival meeting at Houghton Academy where I received Christ, I wrote the following letter to my mother:

"10:35 Thursday evening after church.

Dear Mother: I went to church tonight to their revival service and Rev. Pitt had his sermon on Acts 9; 1-16, 16 being the text. When you get this letter, look up these verses and read them. After the sermon he asked the people who were not Christians to take the Lord Jesus into their hearts and He would forgive all their sins. I did this and at the close of the service the minister said that those who wanted to be saved to come to the altar and pray. All the others that I was with went out but something held me there. And so I went up to the altar and prayed, but I didn't understand it very much. It made me feel like crying. Then I arose and started to go out when Miss Pool, my history teacher stopped me and asked me if I understood about being saved. I answered no so she drew me aside and started to explain to me. Then she prayed (out loud) to God to save me and when she finished she told me to pray. Something happened to me and I asked the Lord to forgive my sins and then I started to cry. Then she started to pray again and when she finished she told me she knew that God had saved me.

Then she explained to me how to pray and what to read in the Bible. She talked to me about the girls and told me the kind to associate with and things like that. She is going to take me to church with her tomorrow night.

It would be very nice if you wrote to her and thanked her for showing me the way to Jesus. Her name is Miss Alice Pool, Houghton College, Houghton, New York.

I wish you would read the verses I sent to you and really try to be a better Christian. Pray at your meals and each one take a turn so that when I come home you too will be Christians. You have to suffer to be a Christian and to see the glory light but I know you will feel much better in the end and never fail God for Dorothy's and my sake.

Well, I've got to go to bed now but I'm going to pray that Dorothy, Dad and you will be saved and will see the glory light, too. Good night and God be praised. God Bless you, Love, Hinky.

P.S. - Write to Miss Pool right away. I think it is your duty."

I know I was a little harsh and straightforward, but I had just accepted the Lord and couldn't wait for everyone I loved to have that same experience. Of course, I thought I knew everything. Here I am, almost 80 years later and boy do I realize now how very naive I was at 17. I also know that my mother loved the Lord in her own quiet way and was a devout Christian woman. Dorothy and I were raised to always do the right thing.

I feel that tithing is a very integral part in service to the Lord and I have done that all my life. I always make sure He gets part of what I earn so that His work can continue on.

I have always attended small group Bible studies in addition to Sunday service. When I was living in Minneapolis someone told me about an organization called Women's Aglow and invited me to a meeting at a Lutheran church in St. Paul. So I invited a friend and we went to the meeting together. It was so inspiring, when it was over, I asked "When will you have meetings in Minneapolis. I'd like to join this kind of organization." They said "We don't have any in Minneapolis." I said, "I'll have one at my place, I'd be happy to work with you and help get one of these going because I'd like to belong to one." So we arranged to have the first meeting in Minneapolis in my apartment. We just put out the word to a few people and low and behold the day of the meeting, the lady who was in charge of the Women's Aglow for the State of Minnesota came along with 20 other women. Three Christian men from my apartment house also came.

Before the meeting ended, we had organized our small group into a chapter of Women's Aglow and asked if anyone felt led to be an officer. Soon we had a president, a vice-president and another who would be in charge of organization. I wasn't inclined to volunteer to be an officer. God didn't tell me I should do that, so I just let it all take place. When it was all over, the woman from the State Women's Aglow organization said to me, "God didn't tell you to do anything, did He." I said "no." She said, "Well we want you to be the vice-president of the State Board of Aglow and be in charge of helping new chapters to form. We need to build this. God wants us to serve Him and specifically to help other people." After much prayer, I did feel the Lord calling me to this position.

In the next two years we formed about ten chapters. One of the new chapters was in Fargo, North Dakota. I had a friend there who organized it and we held the first meeting in a restaurant. We had so many women that we couldn't fit them all in the restaurant. They stood and looked in the windows. The owner of the restaurant kept saying, "I never had so many people. I don't know how many you got here, but you've got too many." There were over 100 women who came and wanted to be part of Women's Aglow in North Dakota.

We started new chapters all over the State of Minnesota. When we went to Duluth, we had over 100 women show up. God led a Catholic nun to be the leader of this group. They had a wonderful chapter there. Within a year we had five chapters in Minneapolis – one in Burnsville and North Minneapolis, Edina, Bloomington, and the one I had started. It was amazing how so many women were thirsty for God's Word. It was exciting to be a part of Women's Aglow.

I stayed with Women's Aglow and was on the board for two years and then the opportunity came for me to become the national sales director for the cosmetic company. That's when we moved to Los Angeles. My Women Aglow group held a going away tea for me. They all laid their hands on me and prayed for me and one of them had a prophesy for me. She said that I was going stay young and vibrant and soar like an eagle. That was in 1977 and 35 years later I was still working. I am still enthused about God and still going to church every Sunday and wearing my hat.

In Los Angeles we attended Jack Hayford's church in Van Nuys. Jack Hayford is a wonderful man. He writes songs and preaches a wonderful sermon every Sunday. It was a real privilege to go to that church, but we weren't happy in Los Angeles. So I quit the job and we moved to San Jose.

In San Jose the bra business was booming. We joined a church there and were very active members. We had a senior minister who was about 5 feet tall. The associate pastor was over 6 feet tall. These gentlemen did not have robes. So I made robes for them for Easter. The robes were full length and reversible and I also embroidered colorful designs on them. Both ministers were thrilled with their new robes and I was blessed to be able to do this for them.

When I was living in San Jose, three of my bra customers were looking for a church so I invited them to mine. They liked it so well they decided to become members and I was allowed to help baptize them. That was a thrill for me, and for them.

I am currently attending New Hope Christian Fellowship in Vacaville. Pastor Curtis Miller and his wife Debra are loving and caring people. When I was ill with pneumonia, Pastor came to see me three times when I was in the hospital. Every Sunday when he is finished with his sermon, he motions for his wife to come up to the piano and she plays while he sings. I close my eyes and can almost envision my mother playing the piano when I went to church as a child. Even at my age I am learning so much under Pastor Miller's teaching. I guess that's why they call the Bible the living Word. It really comes alive when he preaches.

I know that Jesus put me in this business and has helped me to sponsor others. In my later years, he placed me in a wonderful home where I was fed and cared for and, at the same time, was allowed to have my shop and run my business.

At 94 I called it quits. Up until then people were still coming to buy bras. They would say to me, "Oh, Chicki, I love you, I love your bra. I couldn't wear anything else. Since you put me in this bra, look at what it's done for me. I'm well and I'm healthy." It's a wonderful thing to know that Jesus cared enough to keep me well and healthy for all those years where I was able to continue helping women learn about the business and educate them on breast health and the importance of a properly fitted bra.

Jesus owned the business, I just operated it. He kept me in it for a long time. I had a customer who wanted to postdate a check because she did not have enough money in her checking account to pay for her purchases. She said "The check will be good." I pointed to my picture of Jesus sitting on my desk and told her, "If it's not, you'll have to take it up with my boss."

In the packet I prepared to give to people who were interested in the business, I had a sheet that stated:

"I want to share with all of you my daily prayer which helps me each day in all phases of my life. 'God, you know all my needs and You know all the needs of others. Please put us together to help each other, for this we will give You the thanks and the praise every day.' If you are wondering how you can get your business or life going, why not try my way. I'm living proof that it works. Chicki Downs."

I also share these comments:

"If it's going to be, it's up to me."

"Remember, as I think, I am."

"Positive or negative? Funny, isn't it? I get to choose. My future is in my hands."

"Where do I want to go and what do I want to be and what do I want to achieve?"

I put this page in so each one knew before they came into the business where I stood and how they could build for themselves a business on the faith that Jesus will help them and will bring them customers.

I don't know where they all came from. I did not go out and look for them. They were out there and they would call me and make appointments and come. In less than three years I had over 700 new customers who had come from all over the area, just by what little advertising I had in the paper and by word-of-mouth, one person telling someone else because they were so pleased.

Everything I have accomplished in my life I owe to Jesus. He did it all, not me. I'm blessed that he chose me to be his instrument to help others. He has always supplies all my needs. I am not in debt. I never have to worry about anything because he gives me everything I need to keep me going and to keep me on the right path. For this I am grateful to Jesus Christ for taking care of me and wanting me and keeping me healthy enough to keep working as long as I did. I've survived cancer. I've survived heart surgery with a new pig valve in place, and still am healthy enough to get up every morning and do whatever He wants me to do. It's a real blessing and I give Him all the praise and the glory.

Chapter 46

Here is a sampling of what others have written about me over the years. I am humbled by their kind words.

Chicki and I met over 30 years ago when she came to help train new couturiers. She has always been an energetic and positive person, willing to help whoever and wherever; a real inspiration. Between what I learned from her and from others who held training meetings, I gained the confidence I needed to fit my clients and to conduct my new business.

One day, after a number of years in the business, one of my clients said, "You must be pretty good at what you do." My first impulse was to say, "Oh, no." Instead I said, "Yes, I am. I have been doing this for seven years, and if I don't know what I am doing by now there is something wrong with me."

Having been short all my life made fitting tall ladies a special challenge. One six-foot lady looked down at me and said, "Would you like me to kneel down?" Another time, in an older home, a tall lady stood in the step-down bathroom and I stood in the hall in order to fit her. Life as a bra lady has sometimes been a challenge, but never dull.

A request to fit a lady at the women's jail San Jose, California came to Chicki one day. She asked me to accompany her. Not knowing what size would be needed, we each carried in two suitcases filled with bras. Everything, including us, was checked. Our purses were kept at an office and we were shown to a private room. The fettered inmate was brought in by four guards, most of whom watched us the entire time. No store carried what the lady needed, but we had the correct size. The women guards had a fund they used to help out the prisoners in cases such as this. Our purses were returned to us and we were escorted off the property.

Driving into ghetto areas all over the San Francisco Bay Area was never a problem for me. God and my Guardian Angels were always right there with me. I was cautious, but never felt afraid.

Over the years, I eventually helped Chicki with her bra fitting training sessions at seminars. At other times, another lady and I would conduct training sessions.

At one point in my business, a family member asked me when I was going to get a real job. I replied that I had a real job; it just didn't feel like a real job. As of now, I have been doing my job for over 36 years.

In order to put bra fitting information into the hands of all the couturiers, especially new recruits, Chicki and I compiled a bra manual. At the time, she had a limited knowledge in computer skills and I had none. A computer savvy neighbor came to our aid. I was good with wording, spelling, and punctuation. It took weeks to plough through it. One day Chicki said, "You are such a nitpicker." And I said, "You knew what I was like when we started this." We both laughed. When the project was finally completed, we were, and still are, the best of friends.

Jean Vistica

* * *

Dear Chicki,

You are so thoughtful and caring. Joy for a woman's soul. How special of you. For sure you are always thinking of other people. I miss you a lot. I will miss everyone at conference. Have you been asked to do anything yet? Or are you not going to go? You be careful. A lot of people need and love you.

How many new recruits do you have? You are one of our very best leaders and you must know how much the company loves and needs you.

Love you,
Nancy Haan

* * *

In all the years I have visited textile mills in the south, watched giant looms turn out cloths that I have chosen for all our lingerie, seems as tho our lives pass as quickly as those looms. It is almost over before we realize it. The Bible says this is the chronology of eternity. We may live to be seventy to ninety years old. That is a snap of the finger compared to eternity, we have only a few years at the most. So let's live them for our Lord. We can start living, really living, when we go home, and living them with our Heavenly Father. I am ready. Love you all.

Thank you Dear Sister, for asking me to do this. You are always in my heart. God bless you always.

Angela (Serritella)

* * *

Chaplain P. K. Roberts and the Great Associates of your September 03 team want you to know that you are special. You have touched our lives in such a powerful magnificent way. Thanks a million for sharing your many life experiences with us. Your sensitivity to women's issues transcends the color barrier. Your understanding of the principles of success will propel anyone to greatness. Your love and support to our team granted you a seat in our circle of "Great African American Women." Up to this point that was all there was, but now comes Ma Chicki Downs! Love you.

Longevity Is Yours,

P. K. Roberts

* * *

A number of years ago, I was unable to find a good brassier at a department store. My breasts had grown too large.

I heard of Chicki Downs and went to her store in San Jose, California.

She fitted me into a great bra and I have purchased them since that time.

She had a great personality and was very thoughtful to be certain I would be comfortable.

I was a fortunate woman to have found her.

Ardis Orlando

* * *

It was in the early 80's while working at "Elias Fine Fabrics" that Chicki Downs entered my life. Who was that stunning, white-haired lady, full of energy in line chatting with customers about custom fitted bras, sizes AA to K "without underwires!!!"

That very day, I was fitted for my lifetime bra and also convinced to enter the business. How wonderful to never again spend hours in department store dressing rooms trying to find the right bra. Even if you did get lucky, you soon discovered that "right bra" was soon to be discontinued.

We had many fun trips together during lingerie shows. One of those times took place in a park in Modesto. We had quite a mixed crowd of mature adults. The men were in the back row chairs, while their wives were doing the modeling. None of those outfits were "Victoria Secret" type but conservative, feminine lingerie of top quality fabric.

We had borrowed a motor home where the ladies could change clothes. It was Chick's job to send the ladies out of the motor home according to my "cheat cards." We also had display tables of bras, panties and shapers (which I used to call girdles).

The show was going great. I was describing each outfit modeled until a giant gale scattered my cards, along with the bras, panties and shapers. I panicked and said "That's it. You will just have to see for yourself what comes out of that motor home. It was hysterical watching the men, trying so hard to help save the bras, panties and shapers. They didn't quite know how to handle these delicate items.

It was a barrel of laughs. Several men came up to me later, complimenting on the ad lib and saying I could be the next Bob Hope. We had a great sale but best of all, everyone had a great time.

Thanks for being a part of my life. We had so much fun and I thank the Lord for bringing us together.

Lorraine Glathe

* * *

My Friend Chicki Downs!

Along life's path as in a garden there are unique and very special people whose love and quality of life enrich and inspire. Chicki is one of those. Yet unlike many blossoms that appear briefly and whose beauty is temporary, Chicki's positive attitude, commitment to others and tenacious circumventing or conquering any challenge is not temporary, but in her numerous years has endeared her to all who know and love her.

No beating around the bush, bold but kind always in her assurances to all – if you can conceive it you can do it. Never has she lost sight to always strive to live up to the standards in conduct and business to our Creator's clearly outlined values which she reads in the Bible and makes every effort to apply.

What an example to all is her cheerful, fun loving, personality – to never throw in the towel, but, with reliance on Almighty God and His Son along with diligent personal effort to use her gift of life unselfishly and in so doing has enriched so many.

A book? Why there is no volume that can capture the lady's rich rewarding life – but the effort to do so will be an adventure in itself!

Our love to a dear, dear lady and friend!

Muriel Guffey

* * *

Chicki

By Millie

(a new customer in 1995)

A lovely lady I have met,
Into the shop, a foot I stepped.
To buy a bra that I could wear,
So I would look nice everywhere.
An added bonus I did get
She loves my Savior, Lord, and yes,
His picture, there, for all to see
He's owner of the shop, and we.
Delighted in the picture there we saw

That she has hanging on her wall
Of her sweet husband, gone to be
With Jesus for all eternity.
This is what we all hope to do
to go to Heaven, Lord, live with You
then we'll all be together again,
Loving and praising You, Lord. Amen.
His love shines through as you speak the Word
And flit around the shop like a bird,
A hummingbird, so beautiful to see
Busy taking care of others, and me.
So Chicki, keep selling lingerie,
Sharing the Good News every day.
God uses His people everywhere,
People that He knows do care.

* * *

Chicki as I know Her
By Joan Biesiada, Dallas, TX, August 18, 1996
Old enough to have great wisdom,
Young enough to enjoy life and be a pleasure.
A lady that leads by example, a great teacher,
She still learns new things from others.
Proud to be number one,
She lets others enjoy the spotlight.
As busy as the busiest, always on the go,
Always has time to send a thoughtful note or make a call.
Chicki is a good steward and servant,
She humbly accepts help from others too.
She loves life and lives it to the fullest every day,
She sets a good example for us
She is a caretaker to us all,
She is loved and cherished.
She always has a kind word of encouragement,
She is willing to help those in need.
God bless you Chicki,
We are lucky to have you in our life.

I love you,
I appreciate you.

* * *

Chapter 47

The following was written by my family:

My daughter, Shari Dornbach, writes:

On September 11th when the 4 hijacked airplanes struck the World Trade Center, Pentagon and rural Pennsylvania, I kept hearing the newscasters comparing it to the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. On that day, my mother was 9 months pregnant with her first child. I was born one week later and over the years have often wondered what my mother was thinking as the radio blared the news of the attack and she was sitting waiting for her first child to be born. Knowing her as I do today, I am sure she spent much of that week praying, holding fast to the knowledge that God was in control and that somehow, some way, everything would work out.

What a wonderful gift God gave me when he sent me to be the daughter of Barney and Chicki Downs. From the time I was born, I was in church every Sunday. During my childhood my parents modeled for me a deep and abiding love of Christ and faith in the Lord. Each has always been an ardent believer and active member of the churches we belonged to in the towns where we lived. When I was a teenager, my dad was the lay leader first of the Minnihaha Methodist Church and later of the whole Minneapolis District of the denomination.

Growing up, my dad often spoke of when he was a little boy on the farm in South Dakota during the depression. His mom was very ill with juvenile diabetes. She lived to sew and made quilts and somehow they managed to get a manually operated sewing machine, but Grandma's legs weren't strong enough to work the treadle that made the machine go. So my dad would climb underneath the machine and operate the treadle for her. While she sewed and he rocked the treadle back and forth, she sang to him the great hymns of faith and built in him a love and understanding of God and Christ and of worshiping through music and thus helped shape who my father became and he passed it on to me.

Looking back, there are so many times when my parents' love of the Lord and faith was so clearly demonstrated to me. My most vivid memory happened when I was 13. I knew my dad had left his job, they had sold our house, put our furniture in storage and we were moving north from Florida, but as far as I knew it was just a wonderful camping trip. What I didn't know at the time was how much of a faith journey it was for them. As we traveled north, my dad was looking for work in the cities we drove through. The last place we camped was at Lake Geneva, Wisconsin. I remember the day my dad went into Chicago and came back to the campsite in the evening with a new job to begin in Minneapolis, Minnesota right away. What I didn't know until later was that my folks were down to their last \$20. But they both knew that God had a special job for dad and a place for us to live, and all would be what God wanted for each of our lives. And that is my memory, not fear or uncertainty, but joy knowing there was a wonderful adventure just waiting for us in a new place. What a heritage that has been for me. Faith, demonstrated not only by words but, more importantly, in the way they have lived their lives, by being living examples of Mom's life verse found in Philippians' 4:6-7, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

Their unrelenting example of faith encouraged me to seek and find my way to a personal relationship with Christ, and has continued helping me along the path to where I am today.

* * *

Shari's daughter, Cheryl Bamberger, shares the following:

Born into this family ... I was in church every Sunday along with my sister, Carrie, and brothers, Rick and Bill. I can remember asking Jesus to be my Savior when I was 10, but I have really grown to have a deeper relationship with Him and trust Him with my life by watching these amazing women grow in their faith.

I could give you so many examples, but one that a lot of you see every Sunday is my Mom when she worships. She used to give her singing voice to the Lord in a brown choir robe holding her music and now she worships the Lord with every fiber in her being. She inspires me in so many ways to draw closer to God.

And then there is my Grandma. At age 94 she was still running her own business and outselling other people in her organization. But she always reminded me that her work belonged to the Lord and she has Him to thank for all of her life's blessings.

These are incredible women of faith and they have shown me through their lives what it means to walk with the Lord.

* * *

The following was written by my Cheryl's son, Scott:

Last summer I decided to accept Christ into my heart and my mom said that I could pick anyone I wanted to baptize me. I picked my Grandma Shari because she always shows me how much she loves me and I can see how much she loves God.

* * *

EPILOGUE

On January 21, 2013, at the age of 94, I finally retired from the bra business. My eyesight is going and I am no longer able to service my customers. I am moving a little more slowly these days. I know every day is a gift and I thank God for each one.

I was asked if I had any regrets in my life. Without hesitation I answered "No." Sure, there were times I made a decision that maybe wasn't the best. Our decision to move to Florida comes to mind, but even though it seemed like a bad decision, there was, as always, a silver lining. We met some wonderful people, and it was an education and an adventure. It led to the next chapter in my life, which led to the next and the next and the next.

God has always guided me along the way and brought me through every trial and every illness and every heartache. He has blessed me with so many dear friends along the journey, from New York, to Florida, to Minnesota and finally, California.

If God hadn't had His hand on my life, I would have died either as an infant from the flu, or at age 18 from tuberculosis, or from cancer at 35, or from heart disease at 85, or pneumonia at 92. God has His reasons for sparing my life over and over again. I hope and pray 'til the day I die I will glorify Him in my thoughts, actions, and words.

After I'm gone, I would like to be remembered first as a good daughter, sister, wife, mother, grandmother, great-grandmother, and great-great-grandmother. I also hope I am remembered kindly as a Girl Scout and as a Girl Scout leader. During my 35 years as a leader, I assisted 109 girls achieve Curve Bar. A girl's life between 5th and 8th grades can shape the rest of her life and I hope I helped my girls to become the best that they could be. I made every effort to honor them for their accomplishments and the things they learned under my leadership would carry them through the rest of their lives.

I also want to be remembered as a godly woman who always glorified and served God by caring for others. As The Bra Lady, I believe I was given a special opportunity to do just that. The money and the trips were an added bonus, but being able to help women achieve and be all that they could be, as well as helping them to find the proper bra was the real payoff. I believe I have saved hundreds of women's lives throughout the United States and Canada.

When I sponsored others in the business, I didn't leave them on their own. I spent several months teaching them about the bra and the importance of a good fit. I told them stories about the women I have helped over the years and how much their lives have been changed for the better. Sure, they liked the idea of the trips, but after the first six or eight months, they began to catch on to the business and were excited about teaching others what they had learned. They had the opportunity in this business to work as hard or as little as they liked. They could work their way up the ladder of success, or stay small. I told them they would get out of it what they put into it. This is true in every aspect of life.

I would also like to be remembered as a faithful friend, a fun, positive person, as well as a good businesswoman. I know I must have done something right because the women kept coming back to me for bras. I knew how to fit them and I trained others to do the same. If not fitted properly, it might be better not to wear a bra at all. This is why training was such a crucial part of my job over the years. I hope that the women I have trained will continue to teach others, so that one day every woman in America will be properly fitted and there will be an end to breast cancer.

AFTERWORD

CHICKI'S HOME-GOING

Marian L. (Chicki) "The Bra Lady" Downs, born on January 21, 1919, went home to be with her precious Savior Jesus Christ, her beloved husband Barney, and sister Dotti Rackliffe on December 15, 2014.

Chicki had an extraordinary life that impacted thousands of lives all over the world, from her birthplace in Buffalo, New York and home bases in Yonkers and Bethpage, New York; Minneapolis and Richfield, Minnesota; San Jose and Vacaville, California. In her life, she was a devoted child of God, a housewife and mother of Sharon R. (Shari) Dornbach and Byron E. (Barry) Downs II, Girl Scout Leader and Volunteer Trainer, New Neighbors League Hostess in Minneapolis, Minnesota, Distributor for Ovarations Cosmetics and for the past 50+ years provider of custom fitted bras (retired at age 93). Among her many achievements were New Neighbors League Hostess of the Year, recipient of Girl Scout Thanks Badge, Leader of Outstanding Girl Scout Troops in both New York and Minnesota, Diamond Major Status in Ovation Cosmetics and consistent ranking in the top five sellers in Figurettes, Cameo, Colesce and finally Jeunique Bra Companies.

Since moving to Vacaville, she was selected as one of Vacaville's Seniors of the Year in 2006 and Distinguished Senior of Solano County in 2007. In addition to all of that, she was 11 grand, 33 great-grand, and 9 great-great-grandchildren. Everywhere she has lived she has been very active in the churches where she held memberships. Since 1995, she joined the congregation of Central Christian Church in San Jose, and following the move to Vacaville, she belonged to Discovery Christian Church in Davis and New Hope Christian Fellowship in Vacaville, California. One of her goals in life was to travel the world and so she visited every continent by tour bus, cruise liner, plane, train, automobile and on foot. She saw most of the mountain ranges of the world, the wettest place on earth at Kauai, Hawaii, the Holy Land where she was baptized in the Jordan River (where Jesus began His ministry) and more places too numerous to list here. While living in Vacaville she was an active member of the Soroptimists and loved being part of this outstanding organization. Chicki was a very special woman and I know we will all miss her very much.

Sharon Dornbach
(Chicki's Daughter)

Chicki loved going to church. For the last one and a half years of her life she was unable to attend, so it seemed more than fitting to celebrate her life in a church service. The following was sung at her home-going ceremony:

I SEE THE LORD (by Chris Falson - Taken from Isaiah 6:1-3)

I see the Lord seated on the throne, exalted,
the train of His robe fills the temple with glory,

And the whole earth is filled,
And the whole earth is filled,
And the whole earth is filled with His glory

Holy, Holy, Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord!

“Always hold onto Jesus’ hand and He will guide you wherever you go.”

Chicki



Tribute to Chicki Downs:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nij7iMxe1UA>