

99 Characters in Search of an Author

**A Story of Memory and Memories
by Marco Messina**

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Introduction

The famous Italian playwright Luigi Pirandello, Nobel Prize for Literature in 1932, wrote a play titled *Six Characters in Search of An Author*.

In 2015, as I found myself in this retirement community in Sun City, Arizona, I found dozens of characters that I thought might be in search of an author. It seemed a shame not to try.

Whether I can or should be the author, I will let the reader decide. It remains that the characters I met here are real, are fascinating in their honesty about themselves and their past. Collectively, they offer a glimpse of how much happier society would be if most tried to emulate their kindness and determination to live and let live.

So, dear reader, if any of the characters you run into forthwith appear in any way lacking, hold that against the would-be-author, not them, because they are all real, complete, honed by lived lives, by lessons learned, by families built, gushing with memories worth telling. What you find lacking may simply be a pretender pitching beyond his range, fishing the wrong pond, and on occasion, overly focused on banal cliches. You are warned.

Note: These sketches were written from memories and notes that started in 2015. Some of the tennis players no longer play or have moved to pickleball or whatever. The notes may be dated, but the characters endure even if changed by time.

And now,

Once upon a time...

The Book Reading

The hall of the Sundial Recreation Center was full, but he did not know their faces.

The old man stood at the podium with his manuscript—a story of nearly a hundred souls, names that once meant known faces, laughter, and late-night talks, now only black letters on white pages and ghostly images in memory. His mind, worn smooth by time, no longer held them as firmly as before.

But they had come.

The townspeople. His friends. Couples he had spoken with on porches, at tennis and pickleball courts, at dances, and across fences and firelight. They came because the social grapevine had reported that he had written something, and they suspected they were in it.

He cleared his throat.

“Introduction:

The famous Italian playwright Luigi Pirandello, Nobel Prize for Literature 1932, wrote a play titled Six Characters in Search of An Author.

In 2015, as I found myself in this retirement community in Sun City, Arizona, I found dozens of characters who I thought might be in search of an author. It seemed a shame not to try. These are my memories of friends that, by some accident of destiny, all congregated in Sun City. They brought here their life experiences from different parts of the country and of the world. They have differing viewpoints, and a unifor-

mity of mutual respect, friendliness, common sense, and common decency uncommon elsewhere. It was my privilege to spend the last years of my life with them. Documenting their lives may give them a small measure of immortality. They deserve it. “

He looked up at the audience; they were seated with an air of curiosity. He went on.

“Carla and Vince, the ones who planted their lilacs by the wall behind the pickleball courts of the Marinette Rec Center...”

A couple stood. Quietly. No words. Just a gesture—a small offering of presence.

He looked at them wondering. Who are these? Was that Carla’s hair? He could not remember if she had braided hair. Is that Carla?

He read on.

“Jules and Maddy, who fought about just about everything for fifty years, and loved each other longer.”

Another pair briefly stood with a little smile at each other. A low murmur passed through the room, like breath through tall grass.

The names were waking something in him—not the faces, but a feeling. A warmth. A flicker.

They were rising, these people, not to be honored, but to, in a way, to say “hello”, to help him remember. One by one, like stars coming out.

And somewhere deep inside, he began to see them—not just as briefly standing in the room, but as they once were: laughing, flawed, ordinary and brilliant.

The names went on. And the old man read, not as a stranger, but as a friend—finding his way home through the words he had once written, and now read back into life. The pages remembered what the mind could not.

The old man adjusted his glasses and turned the page. The faces before him remained attentive, some leaning forward in anticipation of hearing their own stories reflected back to them.

The Tennis Players

Mike & Barb

Mike and Barb were the first we met of the “Tennis Gang at Bell Center”. Both were solid regular tennis players. Mike is a former Air Force officer, the friendliest ambassador of the Drop-in Tennis program, and organizer of the summer camp that many tennis players attend in Ogden, Utah on the campus of Utah State University.

Were it not for them and the rest of the Bell Centre Tennis Welcome Wagon, Darlene and I probably would not be in Sun City today. Thank you all from the bottom of our hearts.

This is a sidebar on how it happened:

In 1996 Darlene and I moved from Seattle, Washington, to Scottsdale because of a new job that I had accepted there. Darlene’s mom and dad, Vern and Char, were snowbirds spending winters in retirement in Sun City in their fifth-wheeler. After our permanent move, they decided to buy a condo in Sun City, on Pinaire Drive on the Riverview Golf Course. They lived there from 1998 until Char passed in 2013 and Vern in 2015. Over those years, we visited Sun City for weekly Sunday dinners and came to know the community and the rec centers and the world-famous Tip Top Dancers of which Char was a member. When we lived in Park City, Utah, from 2010 to 2020, Darlene would often say she’d like a little second home in Arizona to regularly visit kids, grandkids, and old friends. On those occasions, I always said that Sun City was the place where we should have that second home. Having lived in Scottsdale, Darlene was more prone to go back to her old stomping grounds of her younger years, seeking a younger crowd.

When her dad died in 2015, she and her brother inherited the condo on Pinaire. Neither was interested in living in Sun City, and so in 2016 we came to clear out the place and list it for sale. We spent a few long, stressful days of packing for Goodwill, house cleaning, and memories inventory. On the morning we were to meet our agent to list the

property, Darlene and her brother and sister-in-law decided to go for a morning walk around the neighborhood. It was not my habit to join them in those walks, but by some accident that day, I did. When we came close to the Bell Rec Centre, I noticed that there were new lights over the tennis courts, and I proposed to go and see what had been done.

We arrived as the morning drop-in tennis session was ending, and many players were on their way out. We were obviously curious and looking around, and Mike asked if we were new residents or visitors and if we were tennis players. On hearing that we played tennis, an unexpected and extremely warm welcome followed. As we left, Darlene asked me, “Are we making a mistake selling the condo?” I replied that it was not necessary, and to wait a while carried no cost or risk in a rising market, we just needed to buy her brother out. Fortunately for us, Wayne and Lisa wanted no part of Arizona; they are Seattleites in the extreme and love the cold and wet Northwest climate like a snail. So it was that we became Sun Citizens thanks to old memories of her parents and thanks to the Bell Tennis Welcome Wagon. We had skated to the edge of thin ice, and they had pulled us back before it cracked.

The room seemed to squirm as they saw people and stories they had witnessed or heard of. As the room settled with some odd, tentative half-hand clap, he turned to the next page. “There were so many of you who shaped our little tennis universe,” he said, his voice gaining strength from the growing recognition in the audience.

#

Craig & Nancy

Craig and Nancy were among the first to draw us into the social side of the tennis community. For years, they’ve been the heart and soul of the Thursday Night Mixed Doubles Tennis Social—a delightful invention of theirs combining spirited tennis matches with post-game happy hours. What a concept! The idea of mixing serves and volleys

with shared food and drink turned out to be a brilliant recipe for camaraderie.

Nancy is the quiet force on the court, a top Women's 4.0 Team player—graceful, calm, and steady, the one everyone wants to beat, but few do. Craig is a solid player, grounded now by aging knees and the careful retraining that followed knee replacement. His laughter, his mid-game quips, and his effort to keep everyone included have made them both indispensable.

They split their time between Sun City and a home tucked in the woods of Wisconsin; a place Craig describes as peaceful but “maybe too solitary now.” They’ve begun to think that Sun City might be their true center, with a rental cottage up north for the hot months.

Years ago, in his 30s, Craig suffered a terrifying case of Guillain-Barré syndrome. Numbness began in his feet, climbed to his face, paralyzed him fully for a month, then slowly released its grip. It’s the sort of experience that either breaks a spirit or forges something new. For Craig and Nancy, it was the latter. They never mention it as an excuse, only in passing. But when you see their optimism, their humor, and their deep contentment in the everyday—on and off the court—you sense that brush with fragility left a mark that shaped them both. Nancy’s serene demeanor might come from knowing that, after that, everything else is just a good day.

He paused, taking a sip of water, his eyes scanning the room until they rested on a familiar face in the third row. He thought “Ah, and here we have...”, but he could not match names and faces. He read on, patient with himself. The pages remembered, and that was enough.

#

Dennis & Jill

Dennis and Jill came to Sun City from Minneapolis—or so we think; they tend to downplay details that would make them too easy to label. They originally bought on the golf course near Sun Bowl,

then upgraded to a home along Willowcreek, only to discover the early morning mowers and lively golf chatter and loudspeaker calls are less romantic in practice.

They're strong players, steady and consistent. Their tennis reflects their lives—disciplined, balanced, and full of quiet determination. Their children's accomplishments speak volumes: one, an electrical engineering grad from Berkeley; another, now on a path to medical school in New York City. Dennis and Jill don't brag—but when they talk about their family, their pride glows just beneath the surface, like a warm ember.

"Tennis brought us together," he said, looking up from his manuscript, "but it was characters like these that kept us coming back day after day."

#

Sharen & John

Sharen and John are fixtures at the Thursday Night Tennis Social that Craig and Nancy have orchestrated for years. If there's a tennis event happening at Bell Center, you can bet Sharen will be there—racquet in hand, ready smile that shines across the courts. She seems to belong to every ladies' tennis group in Sun City, moving between the daytime and evening, and occasional organized matches with equal enthusiasm.

"I just love the game," she once told me after a particularly competitive mixed doubles match. "My husband and I both played tennis together for forty-two years." John, on the other hand, carries himself with the quiet confidence of someone who once played at a much higher level. His strokes are near perfect at the bounce—fluid backhand, crisp volleys, and a serve that still has surprising pop for a man in his mid-seventies. When the ball lands within his reach, he delivers great shots. His knees, though, tell a different story. They're no longer as

quick as they once were, something he jokes about with a self-deprecating charm.

“I used to run down everything,” he mentioned one evening as we shared a beer after the social. “Now I’ve got a three-foot radius. Anything beyond that, and I’m waving at it as it goes by.” He laughed, but there was a flicker of the competitive player he once was.

What makes both Sharen and John special to the Thursday Night Tennis Social isn’t just their play—it’s how they elevate the atmosphere. Sharen cheers on everyone, remembers personal details about players’ families, and always brings extra water bottles during the hot months. John has a calming presence on the court that defuses tensions when competitive spirits occasionally flare. He’s the one who’ll quietly say, “Nice shot,” to an opponent who’s just aced him, and truly mean it.

It occurred to me then that for all the talk of forehands and backhands, what makes these Thursday nights special isn’t the tennis at all—it’s the Sharens and Johns who show up, week after week, making everyone feel like they belong on the court and off.

#

John & Michelle

John’s story begins halfway around the world, in the volcanic Aeolian Islands off Sicily’s coast. His father, a native of Salina, passed away when John was only nine, leaving behind a cultural legacy John could sense but never fully inherit—including the Italian language that remained forever foreign to him. The whole family transplanted itself to Sydney, leaving Mediterranean waters for Australia’s distant shores.

“I sometimes wonder who I’d be if we’d stayed,” John mentioned once during a post-match chat. “Maybe more Italian, less Australian. But then I’d never have met Michelle.” His accent carries that distinctive Australian lilt.

John and Michelle came to Sun City as temporary residents—”just long enough to help Michelle’s mum settle in,” as John put it—yet four

years later, they're still here. What began as filial duty transformed into a community connection, especially on the tennis courts at Bell Center.

On the court, John plays with surprising power as you'd expect from a member of the Men's 3.5 Team. His groundstrokes come heavy with topspin, a technique he developed decades ago on Australian courts. He's not the quickest around the court anymore, but his anticipation makes up for it, as does his willingness to go for the occasional winner that leaves opponents blinking in surprise.

Michelle's tennis journey tells a different story. For years, she watched from the sidelines, her knees too painful for the lateral movements tennis demands. But after successful surgery and patient rehabilitation, she ventured onto the courts with careful steps that soon became the confident strides of a six-footer.

"She's a natural," John told me once, with unmistakable pride. "Picks things up faster than I ever did." Michelle's progress over two years has been remarkable—from beginner to a solid player who can hold her own in the Thursday Night Tennis Social. Her forehand, in particular, has become a weapon that makes opponents wary.

What strikes me most about John and Michelle is their adaptability—from continent to continent, from caregiver roles to community members, from spectator to player. They both found new careers in Arizona, John as an IT and logistics manager of a local trucking company, and Michelle as a well-known and active Realtor in the Sun City market.

Their story reminds me that tennis at Bell Center isn't just about who you were before arriving, but who you become once you're here. And sometimes, like Michelle's revitalized knees and newfound skills, we discover capabilities in our later chapters that surprise even ourselves.

A hand squeezed his shoulder—Darlene, reminding him not to rush. These were more than just character sketches; they were tributes

to the people who had made Bell Center feel like home. “Take your time” she meant silently.

#

Jo & Jim

Jo’s tennis passion runs so deep that even after two decades, she still volunteers annually at the Indian Wells Tournament. It’s no small commitment—two weeks of desert sun, long hours helping players and spectators navigate the second-largest tennis stadium in the world—but her enthusiasm never wavers. She returns each year with stories of brushing shoulders with tennis royalty and the behind-the-scenes magic that makes the tournament tick.

“Last year, I was stationed right by the practice courts,” she told us at a Thursday night social, eyes bright with excitement. “Nadal was just ten feet away, working on his serve for nearly two hours. The dedication these players have—it’s incredible to witness up close.”

While Jo lives and breathes tennis, Jim gravitates toward golf—or did, before his knees and back began their rebellion against the sport. He moves with the careful precision of someone managing chronic pain, but his wit remains lightning-quick. His dry humor often catches newcomers off guard, delivered with such perfect timing that you’re laughing before you realize the joke has landed.

“My doctor says I should take up swimming,” Jim quipped last summer. “I told him I’m not interested in any sport where ‘drowning’ is a possible outcome. At least in golf, the worst that happens is embarrassment and financial ruin from lost balls.”

What makes Jo and Jim special in the Sun City tennis community is their role as unofficial social directors. They’re the connective tissue between the Bell Center regulars and the broader tennis world beyond our retirement community. Every August, they organize what’s become a pilgrimage of sorts—a caravan of Sun City tennis enthusiasts who head to Ogden, Utah.

There, on the Utah State University campus, they take over the empty student housing during summer break. For two glorious weeks, they create their own tennis utopia: courts available all day, no desert heat to contend with, and evenings filled with tournaments, dinners, and stories that grow taller with each telling.

“The campus housing isn’t exactly five-star,” Jo explained with a laugh. “But when you can roll out of bed and be playing tennis within minutes, who needs luxury?”

Jim orchestrates the social calendar for these trips—arranging the evening gatherings, planning the day trips to nearby attractions, and ensuring everyone feels included, especially newcomers.

Their Utah tennis retreats have become legendary in Sun City circles—a tradition that many plan their entire year around. Jo handles the tennis logistics with the same efficiency she brings to Indian Wells, while Jim organizes the golf outings.

In many ways, Jo and Jim represent the heart of what makes our tennis community special—the understanding that while the game draws us together, it’s the connections forged between points that truly matter.

By now the sundial in front of the Sundial Recreation Center had stopped working after sunset, but no one seemed concerned about the time. The stories were bringing the community to life in a way that scorecards and tournament brackets never could.

#

John & Jane

John and Jane are the kind of neighbors every community hopes to attract—engaged, supportive, and willing to step up when needed. On the tennis courts, Jane is a regular at the Morning Drop-in Tennis, bringing her cheerful disposition and steady play regardless of who’s on the other side of the net. She has a particular gift for making newcom-

ers feel welcome, often inviting them to join in with an encouraging “Don’t worry about mistakes; we’re here to have fun!”

John’s tennis style is more intense—calculated, strategic, and fiercely competitive. His backhand slice has been known to frustrate even the strongest players at Bell Center. While Jane plays for the joy of the game, John plays to win, though always with impeccable sportsmanship. Together, they balance each other perfectly, both on and off the court.

It was John’s executive background that ultimately pulled him into the complex politics of Sun City. When Bill P. called and asked him to run for the Board of Directors of the Recreation Centers of Sun City (RCSC), John initially hesitated. He and Jane had moved to Sun City to enjoy retirement, not to navigate the treacherous waters of community governance. But the situation had grown dire—the administration had drifted far from its purpose, and the community was feeling the effects.

“Someone has to do it,” he told me over coffee one morning. “And I suppose thirty years in corporate leadership prepares you for dealing with bureaucracy, if nothing else.”

What surprised many was how effectively John transplanted his Denver executive experience to the RCSC boardroom. While others had complained about problems for years, John managed to reintroduce the concepts that had guided his corporate career—clear mission statements, defined values, strategic planning, and most importantly, measurable outcomes.

“You can’t improve what you don’t measure,” became his unofficial mantra, though the entrenched administrative culture tested even his considerable patience.

Jane supported his efforts from home, listening to his frustrations when the bureaucracy proved particularly stubborn. “I tell him to remember the tennis court,” she shared with a smile. “Sometimes you have to play the long game to win the match.”

Though John eventually stepped away from the Board, his influence remains. The governance structures he helped implement continue to guide RCSC decision-making, and the community is stronger for it. These days, he's content to return to being an astute observer rather than an active participant in governance, offering occasional wisdom when asked in the various chat boards of the community

When you see them at Bell Rec Center, you're witnessing a perfect example of what makes Sun City special: residents who bring their best selves to our community, whether that's corporate expertise or simply a friendly smile across the net.

#

Rory M.

Every Thursday evening at the Bell Center Tennis Social, you'll find Rory—steady backhand with a ferocious backspin, reliable serve, and an artist's eye for finding the open court. He moves with the practiced efficiency of someone who spent decades teaching high school athletics, conserving energy and maximizing impact. What most opponents don't realize as they trade shots with him is that they're playing against one of the Midwest most celebrated nature watercolorists in the English style. His obsessively detailed paintings of nature make eagles and wild turkeys or butterflies come alive in flight against stunning backgrounds of Midwest barns and trees around Albert Lea, Missouri.

Rory's transition from physical education teacher to acclaimed artist wasn't planned. "I always dabbled, for more than forty years," he told me once as we cooled down after a heated doubles match. "But when retirement came, I suddenly had entire days to paint, not just stolen hours on weekends." What had been a hobby before, in retirement, exploded as his distinctive landscapes and dramatic birds of prey in flight caught collectors' eyes.

These days, Rory's artistic calendar is fuller than his tennis schedule. His custom-built trailer and portable booth have become familiar

sights at premier art shows across the Midwest and the country. At particularly successful shows, his paintings—now commanding impressive prices—can generate \$7,000 to \$9,000 in a single weekend.

“I sometimes wonder what my high school students would think,” he mused with characteristic humility. “Their old gym teacher selling paintings for more than their first cars cost.”

Rory’s stories from the road—art festivals, interesting collectors, and the camaraderie among traveling artists—often entertain me during post-tennis gatherings. But his most memorable tale has nothing to do with art or tennis.

Years ago, after breaking his nose in what he describes only as “an embarrassing accident involving a ladder and overconfidence,” Rory found himself in an emergency room. The doctor, to stop the bleeding before setting the break, administered a shot of cocaine as a vasoconstrictor—a legitimate medical use that had unexpected side effects.

Rory tells what happened next with a twinkle in his eye: “I went home completely stoned with two things standing at attention—my freshly bandaged nose and another part of my anatomy.” His wife, rather than being concerned about his injury, found the situation hilarious and rewarding. “She still brings it up at parties, much to my embarrassment,” he adds with a laugh.

The doctor, seeing no harm in the situation, provided two more doses “for pain management.” Rory shakes his head at the memory: “It was great fun while it lasted. These days, I have to settle for the natural high of selling a painting.”

What makes Rory special in our tennis circle isn’t his artistic success or his colorful stories—it’s his genuine interest in others. He’ll ask about your grandchildren, remember your recent knee surgery, or compliment an improved backhand with the same sincerity he brings to everything. The high school teacher’s instinct for building confidence never really left him; it just found new courts on which to play out.

#

Kathy & Bob

Kathy is one of those players who commands attention on the court—a strong with a competitive edge that makes her a valuable doubles partner. She brings an intensity to the Women's 4.0 Team training sessions and at the Thursday Night Social that raises everyone's game. Bob, on the other hand, made occasional appearances at courtside or for the Thursday Social hour, with polite but limited interest in the tennis unfolding before him.

What's remarkable about this couple isn't their tennis dynamic but their seemingly superhuman energy levels. Both work night shifts at the Recreation Centers of Sun City, handling the late hours when most Sun Citizens are tucked away in bed. Yet, come morning, while others who've worked all night would be collapsing into bed, Kathy is on the tennis courts playing set after set with unwavering energy.

"How do you do it?" I asked Kathy once after watching her sprint around the court for two hours following what I knew had been an all-night shift. "Don't you ever sleep?"

She laughed and shrugged. "You get used to it. Besides, there's too much living to do to waste time sleeping."

Whatever their secret—whether it's exceptional genetics, iron-clad discipline, or some magical supplement I'd pay good money to discover—Kathy has mastered the art of squeezing more hours of productive activity into a day than seems humanly possible. The rest of us can only watch in wonder and perhaps a touch of envy at her perpetual energy and zest for life.

#

Terry N.

In the varied landscape of Bell Center tennis personalities, Terry N. stands as a testament to how genuine kindness elevates any commu-

nity. His presence on the courts represents that welcome balance between competitive spirit and unfailing sportsmanship that transforms casual recreation into something more meaningful.

Terry's tennis credentials are substantial—a hard-hitting regular at every significant tennis gathering from Morning Drop-in sessions to the Thursday Night Tennis Social to the various Saturday special events and tournaments. His game reflects years of consistent play, with a powerful forehand and strategic court awareness that comes only through experience.

What truly distinguishes Terry, however, isn't his athletic ability but his remarkable consistency of character. In environments where competition occasionally brings out less admirable qualities in otherwise pleasant people, Terry maintains an unwavering pleasantness regardless of score, partners, or playing conditions. His good-natured approach to both victory and defeat serves as a quiet example for others—a reminder that at our stage of life, the joy of continued play far outweighs the momentary satisfaction of winning at all costs.

Off the court, Terry extends the same considerate attention to community members experiencing challenges. When fellow players face health issues or personal difficulties, his quiet check-ins and practical offers of assistance come without fanfare or expectation of recognition—simply the natural extension of someone who understands that community means more than shared recreation.

The highest compliment one can pay to Terry comes not through elaborate praise but through simple observation: Every gathering feels somehow more complete when he joins it, and his absence is genuinely felt rather than merely noted. In a community built on voluntary association rather than obligation, this represents the truest measure of someone's contribution to our collective experience.

#

Sharen A.

If there's an athletic activity happening in Sun City, chances are, Sharen is somewhere in the mix. She's a constant presence on the tennis courts—Morning Drop-in, Thursday Night Social, Women's 4.0 Team matches—but that's just the beginning of her sporting life. Many days, she'll finish a hard-fought tennis match only to rush off to softball practice, her tennis shoes barely off before the cleats go on.

On the court, Sharen moves with a quickness that belies the usual expectations of retirement-age athletics. She reaches shots that should be winners, returning them with interest and a competitive glint in her eye. "I've always been this way," she mentioned once when I complimented her hustle. "Can't stand the thought of a ball going by that I might have reached if I'd just tried a little harder."

The Bell Center staff know her well by name, not just from tennis, but from her regular appearances in the gym and at the pools. Her workout regimen would exhaust people half her age, yet she maintains it with remarkable consistency. "The body is like a car," she explained during a water break between sets. "Keep it tuned up and moving, or it'll rust out on you."

What makes Sharen truly remarkable, however, isn't visible on any court or field. Behind her perpetual smile and energetic presence lies a woman shouldering responsibilities that would crush many spirits. She's the steady rock for several family members navigating serious health challenges, providing both practical support and emotional ballast through difficult treatments and uncertain prognoses.

"How do you manage it all?" I asked her once, knowing she'd spent the previous evening in a hospital waiting room before showing up for 7 AM tennis.

"One day at a time," she replied, her customary smile never wavering. "And honestly, being here—playing, moving, competing—that's my therapy. This community keeps me sane."

That resilience, that toughness beneath her friendly exterior, earns her a special respect among the Bell Center regulars. We've all seen her

arrive for tennis looking tired after a difficult night, yet she never complains, never seeks sympathy, never plays with anything less than full effort.

In many ways, Sharen embodies the spirit that makes our retirement community special—finding joy in activity, building connections through play, and facing life’s challenges with grace and grit. When younger visitors express surprise at the competitive energy of our tennis matches, I often point to Sharen and simply say, “That’s how it’s done here.”

#

Vicky & Carol

To watch Vicky and Carol play tennis is to witness a study in contrasts. Vicky attacks the court with explosive energy—charging the net, smashing overheads, and punctuating winners with a distinctive “Ha!” that echoes across the Bell Center courts. Carol, meanwhile, taller and with a long reach employs a more tactical approach—patient baseline rallies, strategic lobs, and an uncanny ability to find her opponent’s weakness with methodical precision.

As different as their playing styles are, they share an equal standing as formidable competitors on the Women’s 4.0 Team alongside Nancy, Kathy, and Sharen. Their opponents quickly learn there’s no relief when facing either one. “Playing against Vicky is like trying to contain a tornado,” a visiting player from Surprise once remarked. “And then you switch to Carol’s court thinking you’ll catch a break, only to find yourself slowly dismantled, point by calculated point.”

Their contrasting approaches extend beyond tennis. Vicky embraces life with the same vibrant energy she brings to the court—quick to laugh, quick to decide, quick to organize an impromptu gathering. Carol’s warmth builds more gradually, her humor more subtle, her friendships deepening through thoughtful conversations.

Yet for all their differences, they share a passion for cycling that takes them on long rides through the desert landscapes surrounding Sun City. On weekend mornings, you'll often spot them leading a pack of riders—Vicky typically at the front setting an ambitious pace, Carol somewhere in the middle ensuring no one gets left behind.

Their shared love of music has made their home a focal point for the community's social life. The backyard concerts they host showcase local professional bands against the backdrop of spectacular Arizona sunsets. Their patio, with its sweeping territorial views, transforms into an intimate venue where neighbors gather with drinks in hand as twilight paints the desert in gold and purple.

It was at one such gathering that I first met Larry, who would become my harmonica teacher—a fateful introduction that my wife Darlene has yet to fully forgive. “I think that needs more practice...” is a frequent comment with the weary resignation of someone who knew the answer all too well. If we had a cat, he too would wish for a break from my Marine Band harmonica. Larry often warned me “Do not play AT the cat. It's not nice and they do not like it.”

Vicky's own musical journey centers around the ukulele, which she plays with the same enthusiasm she brings to everything else. “It's impossible to be sad while playing ukulele,” she insists.

Together, they embody the unexpected richness of retirement—finding new passions, building community, and proving that the later chapters of life can be as vibrant and varied as the earlier ones. When newer residents wonder about the social possibilities of Sun City, I often suggest they watch for Vicky and Carol's next backyard concert. “Just bring something to drink,” I tell them, “and leave your preconceptions about retirement at the gate.”

#

Dave and Robyn arrived in Sun City as part of the more recent wave of transplants, but they wasted no time becoming integral to the community's fabric. Dave, in particular, embodies the spirit of civic engagement that keeps places like ours thriving long after the developers have moved on.

At Morning Drop-in tennis, Dave's game reflects his personality—solid, reliable, with occasional flashes of brilliance that catch opponents off guard. He plays with the focus of someone who understands that community, like tennis, requires both personal skill and collaborative effort. After matches, he's often the last to leave, gathering stray balls and making sure the courts are ready for the next group.

Within months of arriving, Dave had already volunteered for the Sun City Sheriff's Posse, driving evening patrols through our neighborhoods with the diligence of someone who understands that security is built through consistent presence rather than dramatic intervention. But it was in the Tennis Club where he found his true calling.

As Club President, Dave took on the increasingly complex challenge of preserving tennis in an era when pickleball's explosive growth threatens court space at every recreation center. "It's not that I have anything against pickleball," he explained to me once after a particularly contentious RCSC meeting. "But tennis has been part of Sun City's heritage since Del Webb first broke ground. We need to protect that legacy."

His advocacy has required diplomatic skills as finely tuned as his forehand. For four years, he's navigated the bureaucratic labyrinth of the Recreation Centers of Sun City, building alliances, presenting data on court usage, and patiently making the case for tennis's continued relevance. When rumors circulated that Mountain View courts might be converted, it was Dave who organized the response that ultimately preserved them.

Behind every successful president stands an indispensable right hand, and for Dave, that's Robyn. While he serves as the club's public

face, she assists him managing the politically complex infrastructure of web pages and newsletter production tools, each with its associated lobbyist, that keeps a modern club functioning. The club website, member communications, tournament registrations—all benefit from unseen-Robyn’s capable hands.

“I couldn’t do this without her,” Dave admitted to me. “I can talk to people face-to-face all day, but the moment someone mentions web pages and newsletters, I’m lost.”

In an age when many retire to focus exclusively on personal pleasure, Dave and Robyn represent those who understand that community requires stewardship—that the courts we play on today remain available only because someone yesterday cared enough to protect them.

As Dave often reminds new members at club meetings, “Tennis at Bell Center didn’t just happen by accident. It took people showing up—not just to play, but to serve.” In Dave and Robyn, we’ve found two people who truly embody that principle.

The reader stopped, “What makes a community?” he asked, not expecting an answer. “Is it the facilities? The activities? Or is it people, who showed up day after day, bringing their whole selves to keep them there?”

He replaced his glasses and went on

#

Mel & Jane

If there’s a tennis conversation happening at Bell Center, Mel is likely at its center. The most talkative player off and ON our courts, his running commentary creates a soundtrack for Morning Drop-in sessions—self-critique of each stroke, general observations on technique, gentle ribbing about missed shots, and an endless stream of stories that somehow never interfere with his game.

“The way I see it,” he’ll call across the net after a well-fought point, “tennis is just another way of having a good conversation!” His perma-

gent smile suggests he finds joy in simply being alive, a perspective that proves contagious to those around him.

Jane, by contrast, brings a quieter energy to the courts. Her measured responses and thoughtful pauses provide the perfect counterbalance to Mel's exuberance. When he launches into one of his more elaborate tennis analyses, a subtle glance from Jane can gently steer him back to the game at hand. It's a partnership of complementary temperaments that works as well on the court as it does off.

While Mel plays widely—Morning Drop-in, Thursday Night Social, weekend tournaments—Jane tends to stick with her regular group of women players who've developed their own shorthand over years of shared matches. Yet both are fixtures at the Thursday Night Social, where their different social styles create a welcoming atmosphere for newcomers and long-timers alike.

Mel's tenure as Tennis Club President coincided with perhaps the most challenging period in the club's history—the COVID years. When courts were suddenly closed, then reopened with complex restrictions, it was Mel who navigated the constantly shifting landscape of public health guidelines while keeping members informed and engaged.

"We had to reinvent everything," he explained during a water break. "Sign-up procedures, court spacing, equipment sanitizing. Some days I spent more time on the phone with the Recreation Centers than I did on the courts."

What many club members didn't see was Jane's critical role behind the scenes. While Mel handled the public-facing aspects of leadership, Jane quietly managed the digital infrastructure that suddenly became essential—updating the website's photos, and helping prepare emails and newsletters.

"Paperwork and computers aren't exactly my strong suit," Mel admitted with his characteristic laugh. "Without Jane making sure all the i's were dotted and t's crossed, we would have been in real trouble."

Their commitment to community extends well beyond tennis. Nearly every other week finds them traveling to visit grandchildren scattered across the country—a few days in Denver, a few days in Chicago, a week in Boston. These aren't mere vacations but active grandparenting duties, complete with school pickups, soccer game cheering, and late-night story sessions.

"We flew about 30,000 miles and put as many on rental cars last year just visiting grandkids," Jane mentioned once, the pride in her voice unmistakable. Somehow, despite these frequent absences, they remain among the most reliable volunteers for club events, often planning tournament schedules around family commitments months in advance.

When Saturday tournament day arrives, it's typically Mel at the registration table, clipboard in hand, organizing brackets with the efficiency of someone who genuinely enjoys bringing order to chaos.

Together, they represent the best of what makes our tennis community thrive—the visible enthusiasm that draws people in, and the attention to detail that keeps things running smoothly. Their different approaches create a whole greater than the sum of its parts, much like a well-played doubles match where each partner's strengths cover the other's vulnerabilities.

In Sun City's constellation of characters, Mel and Jane shine as examples of how retirement can become not a withdrawal from engagement, but a deepening of it—finding new ways to contribute, connect, and create community for others to enjoy.

Two tall people were standing, one speaking fast with a smile, she quiet with a light smile with a trembling lip; who are you? I should know because you are so familiar, your chatter is, so...

He continued on

#

Tim & Karen

They strike a perfect seasonal balance—six months in Sun City’s constant sunshine, six months in the cultural richness of Lenox, Massachusetts, where the Berkshires provide a dramatic seasonal backdrop to their northern life. This rhythmic migration between desert and deciduous landscapes offers them not just climate variety but two distinctly different communities.

On the tennis courts of Bell Center, Tim and Karen have established themselves as reliable players whose presence enhances both the Morning Drop-in sessions and Saturday tournaments. Tim approaches the game with the same methodical precision he brought to his career as an insurance underwriter with Mass Mutual—studying opponents’ weaknesses, calculating risks in shot selection, and maintaining consistent form even under pressure.

Karen brings her own distinctive energy to the courts, standing out among the women players not just for her skill but for her willingness to regularly join the men in their Drop-in sessions. This preference speaks to both her confidence in her abilities and her understanding that playing with stronger hitters can elevate her own game. Her presence in these sessions reflects the kind of quiet determination that has marked her leadership roles in the Tennis Club.

Her years of service on the Club’s Board of Directors demonstrate a commitment to community governance that extends well beyond recreational participation. Karen approaches administrative duties with the same focused energy she brings to her tennis—identifying needs, proposing solutions, and working collaboratively to ensure the Club serves its members effectively. Her leadership style reflects someone who understands that successful organizations require both vision and the patience to work through details.

What many fellow tennis players most remember about Tim and Karen, however, are their legendary backyard parties. During special occasions like Mardi Gras, their pool area transforms into Sun City's version of a southern celebration—complete with music, dancing, and that particular variety of merriment that comes from neighbors celebrating together. These gatherings reveal another dimension of their contribution to community life—the willingness to open their private space for collective joy.

#

Deb & Ron

Bell Center tennis has its seasonal rhythms—the flow of snowbirds arriving and departing, the shifting attendance as summer heat drives some up-North. But few seasonal transitions are felt as keenly by the regular players as when Deb and Ron pack up for their annual summer retreat to Colorado.

Deb's impact on our tennis community extends far beyond her own capable game. As a USPTA-certified coach, she has been the welcoming gateway for countless beginners at Bell Center tennis. Her classes have become something of a rite of passage—a blend of technical instruction, tennis etiquette, and subtle introduction to the social fabric of our courts. Under her patient guidance, nervous novices with awkward grips and tentative swings gradually transform into confident participants in the drop-in sessions and social events that form the backbone of our tennis community.

"Everyone starts somewhere," she often reminds longer-term players who might forget their own humble beginnings in the sport. This simple philosophy has helped create the inclusive atmosphere that distinguishes Bell Center from tennis environments where newcomers might feel intimidated or unwelcome.

Beyond her coaching role, Deb brings another healing talent to our aging tennis bodies. Her skilled hands have become legendary among

players who discover that tennis at our stage of life often comes with an assortment of muscular complaints. My own body has developed a particularly accurate calendar for their Colorado departures—the accumulated aches and tightness that Deb’s massages keep at bay begin their slow, insistent return within days of her heading north.

“You’re carrying all your tension right here,” she might observe during a session, finding precisely the knot that has been affecting both comfort and performance on the court. Her approach combines technical knowledge with an intuitive understanding of how the body compensates for weaknesses and injuries. Many of us count the days until her fall return brings relief back within reach.

Ron’s contribution to our tennis community has taken a more administrative path, though his regular presence at Morning Drop-in sessions makes him far more than just a behind-the-scenes figure. His tenure as Club President and Secretary coincided with a period of significant growth and change.

On the court, Ron plays with the steady reliability that seems to mirror his approach to organization—consistent, strategic, and adaptable to different partners and situations.

Together, Deb and Ron represent the ideal of contribution that helps communities like ours thrive—each finding ways to share their particular talents while participating fully in the activities they help sustain. Their seasonal absence to enjoy Colorado’s summer climate creates a palpable gap in our tennis ecosystem, both on the courts and in the social fabric that surrounds them.

Those of us who remain through Arizona’s challenging summer months develop a particular appreciation for the returning “snowbirds” like Deb and Ron. Their arrival each fall brings not just additional players to our sessions but a renewal of energy and connection.

#

There's a rhythm to Doc's arrival at the Bell Center courts each morning that you could set your watch by. At precisely 8:45 for a 9:00 start, the lean figure emerges from his meticulously maintained sedan—always parked in the same spot when available—tennis bag slung over one shoulder, a basket of service practice balls in hand, with the practiced ease of someone who has performed this exact motion thousands of times.

Before joining the drop-in play, Doc follows his immutable warm-up ritual: 5 minutes of solo practice against the backboard, followed by five minutes of service practice. One basket of balls, each toss identical to the last. Only after this precise preparation does he approach the cabana and seats down to add himself to the rotation.

"The body is a machine," he once explained when I asked about his unwavering routine. "Proper maintenance is non-negotiable." Coming from a retired orthopedic surgeon now in his early eighties, the statement carries the weight of both professional expertise and personal testimony—his remarkably preserved mobility serving as evidence for his philosophy.

What most players don't realize is that Doc's tennis session represents only the second act of his daily routine. The first begins much earlier when he positions himself at his home office desk, multiple monitors aglow with stock charts and market data. A successful day trader in his retirement years, Doc approaches the financial markets with the same precision he once brought to the operating room and now brings to the tennis court.

"The market opens at 6:00 our time," he mentioned during a rare moment of personal disclosure. "By 8:30, I've either made my money for the day or cut my losses. Either way, it's time for tennis." There's something admirable about the discipline this schedule requires, a reminder of a generation that valued structure and consistency.

Doc's tennis game reflects his surgical background—economical movements, strategic placement, and an almost clinical analysis of op-

ponents' weaknesses. He doesn't overpower the ball; he dissects the court with carefully placed shots that seem to find the precise spot that handicaps the return.

Despite his skillful play, Doc's most notable characteristic has become his little patience for deviation from established protocols. When someone suggests altering the rotation system or implements a new court assignment method, the change visibly disturbs him. On the more tense days, perhaps due to a down market, he strides off the court, packs his racquet, and leaves without ceremony.

"Doc walked off again," would be the observation among the drop-in regulars, delivered with the collective shrug and a call of "Next" to summon the next in rotation to play. Typical of Sun City, there's no malice in these responses—just acceptance of a quirk in someone who's otherwise respected for his participation and his friends' determination to live and let live. Tomorrow will be another day; Doc surely will return and will be welcomed to enter the court when we shout "Next".

#

Cal B.

Cal's presence on the Bell Center courts is as reliable as sunrise. Rain or shine, cool winter morning or blistering summer heat, he's there for drop-in tennis with a consistency that puts the rest of us to shame. His powerful groundstrokes make him one of the strongest hitters in the 3.5 group—when Cal connects with his forehand, the satisfying crack of the ball echoes across the courts, often followed by opponents shaking their heads in resigned appreciation.

"Tennis every day keeps the doctor away," he explains with the broad smile that has become his trademark. That smile, combined with his genuine interest in everyone he meets, has made Cal one of the most well-liked figures in our tennis community. New players find themselves quickly welcomed by his easy conversation between points and his natural ability to make people feel welcome.

Cal and Roy happen to be the only Black players in our tennis club, but what's remarkable—and perhaps what speaks most eloquently about the unique social environment of Sun City—is how utterly unremarkable this seems to everyone. In our community, the sorting happens along entirely different lines.

During a rotation turn conversation, Cal once observed, “When I moved here, I wondered if I'd feel out of place. Took about two days to realize nobody cares about anything except whether you can hit a backhand, prefer beer or wine after matches, and if you're here year-round or just for the winter.”

He's right. The tribal divisions in Sun City follow none of the usual American fault lines. Instead, we notice activities (tennis players, golfers, swimmers), social preferences (dancers, card players, hikers), transportation choices (golf cart, bicycle, auto), and residency patterns (full-timers versus snowbirds). These affiliations are relevant, while race, politics, religion, and other typical dividing factors fade into irrelevance.

“Last week,” Cal related while walking off the courts, “I was chatting with three other guys. Different backgrounds, different parts of the country, different everything. Nobody asked who I voted for or what church I attended. Instead, we spent two hours discussing whether Lakeview or Riverview has the better golf course. That's Sun City for you.”

In my twenty-five years as either a part-time or permanent resident, I've witnessed something in our community that approaches what was someone's dream—a place where people are judged not by the color of their skin... (perhaps the quality of their tennis). During periods of increasing social polarization in the broader society, this is an achievement.

Cal's friendly demeanor and athletic skill would make him welcome anywhere, but there's something particularly meaningful about the acceptance that characterizes his place in our tennis circle. We have

no rules actively trying to make us inclusive—it's that the divisions that seem important in other communities don't register here. We seem to be driven by a live and let live mindset to govern the end of our days. The country at large might learn something valuable from how Suncitizens concentrate on the positive and shared passions and ignore the differences.

He looked up at the audience, "I wrote these sketches," he admitted, "partly from fear that I would forget. That we all would forget. That these remarkable people would someday be reduced to just names, or worse, to nothing at all." He looked up, meeting the eyes of those he had described. "But I see now that I needn't have worried. You're all still here. Still unforgettable."

#

Patty M.

If reliability had a face at Bell Center, it would be Patty's. The Morning Drop-in tennis session might occasionally see fluctuating attendance depending on weather, season, or competing activities, but Patty remains the constant—her presence so dependable you could almost set your watch by her arrival time. Rain or shine, blistering summer heat or those rare chilly Arizona mornings, she appears with racquet in hand and ready to play.

Fitness seems to come naturally to Patty, though those who know her understand there's nothing "natural" about it—her conditioning reflects disciplined effort and consistent dedication. On the court, this translates into an impressive combination of endurance and power. Her groundstrokes carry surprising punch also as a result of continuous practice with AJ to improve her technique.

With her level of skill, Patty could easily secure a spot on the Women's Team, yet she seems to prefer the more relaxed atmosphere of

the mixed drop-in sessions. The competitive nature is still there—you can see it in her focused expression during points—but the casual camaraderie of rotating partners and opponents appears to better suit her temperament. She plays each point with intensity but walks off the court with an easy smile, regardless of the outcome.

This preference for drop-in sessions holds true only until there's a need for substitute players during team practices. Then, alongside AJ, Patty is among the first names called. Her versatility makes her valuable in either setting—she can step into Women's Team practice and immediately elevate the level of play, or join the Men's practice session without missing a beat. In both environments, she comfortably holds her own near the top of the skill hierarchy.

Beyond her contributions on the court, Patty dedicates time to supporting the Tennis Club's infrastructure. When the Board of Directors needs additional assistance with projects or initiatives, Patty volunteers without hesitation, bringing the same energy to administrative tasks that she does to her tennis game.

What makes Patty special in our tennis community isn't just her skill or dedication—it's how she carries these qualities with understated grace. Patty simply shows up, plays well, helps where needed, and seems to be always genuinely content.

For newer members trying to understand the culture of Bell Center tennis, Patty represents the ideal balance that many strive for—competitive without being overly intense, supportive without being intrusive, and committed without making a show of it. Her approach to both tennis and community involvement embodies the spirit that makes our recreational ecosystem thrive.

#

The Men's Team

The reader paused as if remembering a long string of matches. He continued. "And then there is the Men's Team..."

They move differently across the courts—a collective energy that distinguishes them from the recreational players. The Men's Team represents Bell Center's competitive edge, gathering the hardest hitters and fastest movers our club has to offer. Under Chuck L.'s exacting coaching, they form a unit that ventures beyond our familiar courts to test themselves against other well-aged teams throughout the Valley.

The standing members arrive with a purpose in their stride, tennis bags heavy with multiple racquets—tools for different tactical situations. Around this core group orbits a constellation of “helpers” whose roles are equally important if less official. Some are former team members now benched by knee surgeries, shoulder limitations, or simply the unforgiving mathematics of age versus recovery time. Others, like myself, are welcomed specifically for the variety we bring—the different spin of a left-handed server or the unorthodox shot selection that helps prepare the team for whatever they might encounter in competition.

The format reflects men's apparent preference for perpetual motion over conversation—a rotation system — a new server at every point rotating clockwise, called by “Next!” with players moving across courts ensures that we all get variety of players to contend with. The court becomes a constantly shifting chessboard of partnerships and opponents. Yet beneath this seemingly casual structure lies Chuck's strategic mind, observing interactions, evaluating strengths, and assessing chemistry between potential doubles pairings.

As practice sessions near their conclusion, Chuck's voice cuts through the morning air with a different authority. “Let's set up specific matches now,” he announces, and the fluid rotation system gives way to intentional pairings. This is the crucible where competitive partnerships are forged—Chuck placing his strongest players against each other in configurations that will test weaknesses and highlight strengths.

From the sidelines, the dance becomes more fascinating. Technical skill remains important, but now the interpersonal dynamics of doubles emerge—which pairs communicate effectively under pressure,

which players complement each other's styles, which combinations produce results greater than the sum of their parts. Chuck watches it all with analytical detachment, and while playing with Dave O, his most frequent competitive match partner.

The team possesses its own culture, distinct from the more social atmosphere of drop-in sessions. Here, friendly banter still exists but takes second place to focused purpose. Points are played with heightened intensity, and celebrations are more muted—acknowledgment rather than exuberance. These are men who have competed throughout their lives and understand the psychological balance between confidence and complacency.

What makes this group remarkable isn't just their tennis prowess, impressive though it remains for their age bracket. It's their continued willingness to put themselves to the test—to subject their games and, by extension, their self-perceptions to the objective measure of competition. In an era of life when many seek mainly comfort and validation, these players still choose the path of challenge and potential disappointment along with possible triumph.

For those of us who orbit their practice sessions as helpers and sparring partners, there's a certain satisfaction in contributing to this endeavor. We may no longer be in the competitive arena ourselves, but we play a role in preparing those who are—providing the varied looks and playing styles that sharpen their responses for the matches that matter.

As their practice concludes and they gather equipment, conversation finally blooms—analysis of what worked, what didn't, and adjustments needed before their next competition. Their tennis may be serious, but there's an undeniable camaraderie among them—the special bond of those who share both the struggle and the joy of testing themselves long after many of their contemporaries have set aside such challenges.

In many ways, the Men's Team represents something essential about our tennis community—the understanding that while age may modify

our expectations, it need not diminish our engagement or our willingness to pursue excellence within our changing capabilities.

#

Chuck L.

To step onto the court with Chuck is to receive a master class in tennis, whether you asked for one or not. His game exists on a plane that most Bell Center players only glimpse occasionally in their better moments. Chuck lives there permanently, and he's happy to give you a tour of what you're missing.

If he sets his mind to it, Chuck can dismantle even solid 4.0 players without seeming to exert himself. His signature playing style involves a deceptive mixture of short and deep shots that gradually wear down opponents both physically and mentally. One moment, he's dropping a delicate shot just over the net; the next, he's sending you scrambling to the baseline with pinpoint accuracy. All the while, he remains unruffled in his impeccably pressed shorts and collared shirts that somehow stay crisp even in the Arizona heat.

"Chuck is toying with me today" is a common lament heard around the courts, usually delivered with a mixture of frustration and reluctant admiration. The observation is often accurate—there's a glint in his eye when he's orchestrating a point, a subtle enjoyment in the strategic challenge of moving opponents precisely where he wants them.

As a longtime coach of the Men's 3.5 Team, Chuck has shaped dozens of players' games over the years. His coaching style mirrors his playing style—precise, demanding, and occasionally surgical in identifying weaknesses. During practice sessions, he positions himself at the net with the court awareness of someone who seems to have eyes in the back of his head, cataloging every technical flaw for later correction.

"Your backhand follow-through looks like you're waving goodbye to your grandmother," he might observe dryly to a team member. The

sarcasm carries a sting, but embedded within it is always a nugget of genuine insight that tends to stick in players' minds far longer than gentler advice might. When they fix the issue and earn a rare "That's better" from Chuck, it feels like receiving a congressional medal.

On the court, Chuck possesses a remarkable equanimity. While tennis can bring out childish tantrums in otherwise mature adults, Chuck remains unflappable regardless of the score or stakes. This composure makes him the natural arbiter of disputes — when disagreements flare over line calls or scoring, he steps in with calm authority that somehow leaves both parties feeling they've been treated fairly, even when one hasn't gotten their way.

"Chuck said it was out, so it was out," is the final word in many potential arguments. Something in his demeanor—perhaps the confidence that comes from knowing he could beat either disputant with one hand tied behind his back—lends his judgments an air of indisputable authority.

What makes Chuck more than just an intimidating presence is the genuine teacher that lives beneath the occasionally cutting remarks. When he sees a player truly working to improve, his guidance becomes more detailed and encouraging.

"Learn to control the ball before you try to kill it" is one of his frequent refrains, delivered with the weight of someone who mastered that discipline decades ago. His own game exemplifies this philosophy—power precisely deployed rather than wastefully displayed.

In a community of characters, Chuck stands out as someone who commands respect not through self-promotion or dominance, but through the quiet excellence he brings to everything he does on the court. When newer members ask who that intimidating figure is directing traffic on Court 3, longtime players often respond with knowing smiles: "That's Chuck. You'll learn a lot from him—whether you want to or not."

#

Dave O.

Dave moves around the tennis court with the quiet efficiency of someone who has spent decades anticipating where the ball will go before it's even struck. His slim, wiry frame belies his years, and despite slowing knees, his uncanny court sense more than compensates. He seems to start moving toward the right spot seconds before his opponent even decides where to hit the ball—a sixth sense developed through thousands of hours as both player and coach.

As a former elementary school teacher and tennis coach, he also guided the Women's 4.0 Team for years. Dave approaches every interaction on the court as an opportunity to improve someone's game. His educational background reveals itself in his patience—that rare quality of being willing to explain the same concept multiple times in different ways until it clicks for the student.

“Tennis is just physics and geometry in motion,” he once explained while working with me on a particularly stubborn backhand flaw. “But the human body needs time to translate understanding into muscle memory.” Despite my frustratingly slow progress, Dave never showed a hint of impatience—the hallmark of someone who taught pre-teens for decades before retiring.

What truly sets Dave apart in our Bell Center community isn't just his willingness to help fellow players improve—it's his unique approach to equipment. He has a racquet stringing machine and continuously varies materials and tensions to get optimal performance matched to the player and the frame. He strings friends' racquets for the cost of materials if they are stubborn, or for free in most cases, refusing compensation whatever. He wanders garage sales across the Valley looking for old racquets that he can buy, restring, and gift to friends.

But Dave's process goes beyond mere restoration—he mentally catalogs each racquet's unique characteristics, waiting for the perfect

match between player and equipment. When he approached Darlene and me, presenting racquets that seemed to have been designed specifically for our playing styles, it felt like receiving a custom-fitted instrument from a master craftsman.

“This one has a slightly larger sweet spot but maintains control—perfect for your game,” he explained, handing me a freshly restrung Head that immediately felt like an extension of my arm. For Darlene, he selected a lighter model with a grip size that accommodated her hand perfectly and proudly announced, “It’s a Magnum, the biggest permissible dimensions of length and head size allowed by US-TA, a monster sweet spot”. Darlene never went back to any other. Both our racquets revealed his careful observation of our playing styles and physical needs.

When offered payment for his time and materials, Dave gently always refuses with the same response each time: “Just ‘pay it forward’, do something kind for someone else when you get the chance.” This philosophy of forward-giving has become his ethos—a practical application of random acts of kindness that ripples through our community in ways both seen and unseen.

Dave’s temperament makes him the perfect doubles partner for Chuck when they team up for competitive matches against other clubs throughout the Valley. Where Chuck brings intensity and tactical precision, Dave contributes steadiness and an unflappable positivity that balances their partnership. Opponents facing them encounter a formidable combination of Chuck’s strategic shot-making and Dave’s consistent reliability—a tennis version of fire and water working in harmony.

Each summer, when the Arizona heat becomes too oppressive even for the most dedicated tennis enthusiasts, Dave retreats to Colorado’s high country. There, his passion shifts from tennis courts to mountain lakes, where he pursues trout with the same patient observation he brings to tennis. The skills transfer surprisingly well—reading water

currents requires the same anticipatory intelligence as reading an opponent's intentions on the court.

"Fish and tennis players have a lot in common," he joked after returning from one such trip, tanned and rejuvenated. "Both tend to telegraph their next move if you know what to look for."

In a community filled with accomplished individuals, Dave stands out not for seeking recognition, but for consistently demonstrating how retirement can become a time of giving back rather than just taking it easy. Through his coaching, his racquet stringing, and his everyday interactions, he embodies the principle that the most meaningful purpose often comes from helping others find their own path to improvement, whether on the tennis court or beyond.

The author looked up. A man standing with a smile, looking up to him —Who was he? — said" ...you too made impressions far beyond your tennis skills." Who was he? What did he mean? But he seemed Sun City-friendly, so he must have meant well.

He continued reading...

#

Jesse & Debbie

The moment Jesse steps onto the tennis court, there's something in his posture—shoulders back, chin slightly raised—that signals his background before he speaks a word. Once a midshipman at Annapolis, always an officer and a gentleman, retired as a Captain. His crisp movements and courteous demeanor reveal military discipline that decades of civilian life haven't erased.

Jesse's childhood unfolded across the world as his father's career in oil exploration took the family from Saudi Arabia to Indonesia, and more. "Home was wherever Dad's company needed a new well," he once explained between sets. This nomadic upbringing gave him an adaptability that served him well through his Naval career and beyond.

After retiring from the Navy, Jesse settled in Houston, establishing himself in the structured world of accounting that seemed a natural extension of his ordered military mind. Even now, at 73, he works in a small CPA practice that consumes his attention during tax season. As we get closer to April, his tennis appearances become less frequent as he disappears into the world of deductions and depreciation schedules.

On the court, Jesse plays with the tactical precision of a 3.5 player who understands his strengths and limitations. His serve, delivered with the same motion every time, carries the consistency of someone who values reliability over flash. But it's his footwork—quick, measured steps that conserve energy—that reveals his athletic past.

For thirty years, Jesse maintained a punishing physical regimen, playing tennis and handball daily with an intensity few could match. Handball was his true athletic love—the fast reflexes, the enclosed court, the direct competition of player against player with nowhere to hide, no tools, just bodies and one ball; a friendly version of Thunderdome.

"I still dream about handball," he confided recently. "The echo of the ball, the sting on your palm when you connect." His eyes still scan the Bell Center complex occasionally, assessing who might be willing to join him for a match in the handball courts tucked behind the check-in desk.

A few months back, feeling nostalgic for the game and forgetful of our ages, Jesse convinced me to revisit our handball days. We both carried memories from college and Navy days when we could strike the ball barehanded or with a fist, absorbing the impact with youthful resilience.

Reality proved harsh. Despite double gloves, our hands after just twenty minutes looked and felt as though they'd been run over by an SUV—swollen, red, and throbbing. As we sat nursing our injuries, holding onto ice bags, Jesse delivered the perfect epitaph for our handball resurrection: "We are still playing, but we are not as good as we

once were.” But we promised that after healing, we would try it again. Memories of youth never die.

He had said it with no bitterness, just the wry acceptance of time’s passage that characterizes the best of our generation’s aging.

Off the court, Jesse and Debbie have been regulars at community social events, particularly the costumed balls where their coordinated outfits cannot be missed. Jesse’s costume as a beleaguered Dalmatian puppy to Debbie’s evil Cruella de Vil from “101 Dalmatians” has become their signature—his dignified bearing providing the perfect counterpoint to her theatrical villainy.

Their true shared passion, however, is ballroom dancing. On the dance floor, they move with a synchronicity that comes from countless hours of practice. Jesse approaches dancing with the same methodical precision he brings to tennis and accounting—learning the steps by the numbers, mastering the technical elements before adding flourishes.

Debbie, while matching his precision, adds an expressive flair that complements his structured approach. Together they create something greater than either could achieve alone—a perfect metaphor for their partnership in life as well as dance.

Recently, health challenges have forced them to reduce their dancing schedule, a limitation they’ve accepted with reluctance but characteristic grace.

In Jesse and Debbie, our tennis community sees not just a skilled player and two committed dancers, but a reminder of how to meet life’s challenges with dignity and mutual support. While they may not be what they once were—none of us are—they exemplify how to focus not on what’s been lost, but on what remains to be enjoyed in the present moment.

#

Mike A.

Mike's journey to the courts of Bell Center began far from the Arizona desert, in the snow-laden streets of Buffalo, New York. There, he spent decades behind the wheel of city snowplows and maintenance trucks, clearing paths through winter storms that would paralyze most Southwestern residents. Those years of predawn starts and long, cold shifts instilled in him a work ethic that would later serve him well in an entirely different challenge.

When he talks about Buffalo, which isn't often, it's usually in connection to his grandkids. "My daughter sent me this yesterday," he might say, pulling out his phone to show a video of a hockey game or school concert happening thousands of miles away. The pride in his voice is unmistakable, as is the underlying note of wistfulness at the distance that separates them.

Mike arrived in Sun City carrying far more weight than he needed—the accumulated result of years of sitting in truck cabs, irregular shift meals, and the particular challenges of staying active in a city buried under snow for months each year. Rather than accepting this as permanent, Mike approached weight loss with the same determined pragmatism he once brought to clearing Buffalo's streets.

The transformation has been remarkable to witness. Month by month, there has been visibly less of Mike on the tennis court, his body reshaping itself through disciplined eating and constant movement. Whenever I saw him after a spell, saying "Wow, Mike, where did the other half of you go?", he'd reply "Down another few pounds," he'll understate casually, marking another milestone in his ongoing project of self-reclamation.

As the weight dropped away, Mike's tennis game evolved into something formidable. Despite never having taken a formal lesson, he's developed into a strong contributor to the Men's 3.5 Team. His playing style is delightfully unorthodox—a collection of funky slices, unexpected drop shots, and sharply angled returns that seem to defy conventional geometry.

"I don't know what the right way is supposed to be," he once explained with a shrug, "so I just hit it where they ain't." This intuitive approach, combined with his increasingly surprising quick movement around the court, transformed him from a solid recreational player into something of a secret weapon during team competitions.

Mike's presence at Thursday Night Tennis Social is reliable—he rarely misses the weekly combination of competitive play and casual socializing. However, he's less frequently seen at other community gatherings. His wife, a devoted Jehovah's Witness, observes religious restrictions on certain social activities, and Mike accommodates these limitations in their shared life.

There's a quiet dignity in how he navigates this aspect of his marriage—never complaining, never making excuses, simply balancing his enjoyment of tennis camaraderie with respect for his wife's beliefs. When he does participate in evening gatherings, he's fully present and genuinely friendly, though not one to dominate conversation.

What few people realize, unless they specifically ask, is that behind Mike's steady presence and continued improvement on the court lies a more serious battle. He's facing kidney issues that would sideline many players and needs a transplant. Yet this significant health challenge remains largely invisible—not because Mike is hiding it, but because complaining simply isn't in his nature.

The same quiet determination that helped him shed pounds and develop his unorthodox tennis style now supports him through medical appointments and uncertainty. He shows up to play with the same friendly demeanor and focused approach, his health challenges detectable only in the occasional missed week or brief mention if directly asked.

Mike communicates more through actions than words. When the nets need adjusting, he's there before anyone needs to ask. When a newer player struggles with the rotation system, Mike quietly guides them through it without making them feel foolish. His contributions

to the team and community happen without fanfare, much like those pre-dawn snowplow runs that kept Buffalo moving through countless winters.

In Mike's ongoing transformation—both physical and athletic—coupled with his dignified handling of serious health concerns, there's an inspiring reminder of resilience.

#

Dick & Veronica “Ronni” F.

Dick's imposing presence at the net during Men's 3.5 Team matches is something opponents quickly learn to respect. His height and surprising quickness combine to create what feels like an impenetrable wall, while his strategic court sense allows him to anticipate and intercept shots that would get past most players. There's a calm efficiency to his game—no wasted motion, no unnecessary theatrics, just the methodical dismantling of his opponents' offensives.

What makes Dick's tennis accomplishments truly remarkable, however, isn't visible on the court. Behind his powerful serves and precise volleys lies one of the most extraordinary health journeys anyone at Bell Center has experienced. Years ago, Dick underwent a liver transplant—itself a life-altering procedure—but complications from the surgery affected his intestines, necessitating an ileostomy and adaptation to life with an ileostomy bag.

For many, such challenges might have meant the end of competitive sports. For Dick, they were merely obstacles to navigate. He returned to the courts and continued playing at a high level, the medical device unnoticeable beneath his tennis attire. Later, when doctors recommended complete removal of his colon to prevent cancer, he faced another surgery and recovery with the same quiet determination.

“You work with what you've got, or no longer have” he sarcastically smiled matter-of-factly when I asked about his journey back to tennis after these procedures. It wasn't offered as inspiration or life wis-

dom—just his practical approach to the hand he'd been dealt. This stoic absence of self-pity or dramatic narrative makes his resilience all the more powerful as a living lesson in perspective.

Off the court, Dick's creative pursuits reveal a man determined to experience life fully despite physical challenges. As a published novelist with several books to his credit, he channels his observations and imagination into stories that have found appreciative audiences. When he discusses his writing, the same unassuming attitude prevails—he speaks of his books not as grand achievements but simply as stories he felt compelled to tell. There is no brag, you have to go to Amazon to find that there are twelve published works, some fantasy, some serious medical research.

Music provides yet another outlet for Dick's energy and talents. His guitar skills have made him a valued member of a local band. For one memorable Tennis Club Annual Dinner, he collaborated with Rory and other musically inclined members to form a one-night-only ensemble that transformed the usually sedate event into a lively dance and nightclub.

Through all these accomplishments—athletic, literary, and musical—Dick maintains an unshakable good humor and an eye for the enjoyable aspects of any situation. His leadership role on the Tennis Club Board of Directors comes naturally, not from seeking authority but from his evident commitment to enhancing others' experiences.

While Dick commands attention through his presence and achievements, Veronica "Ronni" creates her own significant but quieter impact on our tennis community. A regular at Morning Drop-in sessions, she recently assumed the role of newsletter producer for the Club's Board of Directors, bringing a fresh approach to communication that has been widely appreciated.

Like Dick, Ronni has musical talents, harmonica playing. There's a special quality to Ronni's supportive presence in Dick's journey—not as a caretaker or advocate, but as a partner.

Together, Dick and Ronni exemplify the meaning of partnership. They navigate health challenges, creative pursuits, tennis competitions, and community service with a rare combination of determination and lightheartedness. While Dick's medical journey might be the most dramatic chapter in their shared story, their entire approach to life offers lessons in resilience, balance, and finding joy in whatever circumstances present themselves.

In a community filled with remarkable individuals, Dick and Ronni stand out not because they call attention to themselves, but because they continue to expand the possibilities of what life after serious health challenges can encompass. Their story isn't about overcoming obstacles so much as refusing to be defined by them—choosing instead to be known for their tennis, their music, their writing, their service, and most of all, their unwavering appreciation for each day's opportunities.

As he read on, the atmosphere in the room had transformed through many stages. It started as curious attention, evolved into curiosity about him. Then they found an appreciation for the community his eye had been able to see and understand. Then they saw themselves as part of that community, something unique. Then they realized he was the witness that had documented it for all to see, not just today but forever. They had become part of something forever. Friendship and humanity are forever; they were in it. Forever. In a tiny town, in an unimportant corner of the universe, he had given them eternity. Their lives were now written forever, for as long as humans would tell stories.

The reader turned the page and went on

#

If you want to understand Roy's tennis game, just watch him chase down a shot that would be a clear winner against almost anyone else. While many of us at Bell Center have adapted our play to accommodate aging knees and diminishing speed, Roy seems to operate in a parallel universe altogether. His ability to sprint across the court—crossing its entire width in what appears to be three lightning-quick steps—makes him a formidable presence on the Men's 3.5 Team. On the “speed for tennis” stage, he mixes with his team like Sammy Davis Jr. did with the Rat Pack; he is his own unique version and out of this world.

“I thought that was past him for sure,” is a common lament from opponents who discover too late that with Roy, nothing is truly out of reach. His combination of exceptional speed and powerful hitting transforms seemingly lost points into spectacular returns, often leaving both opponents and teammates shaking their heads.

What makes Roy's athletic prowess even more remarkable is how it contrasts with his demeanor off the court. There, he speaks with such gentle quietness that sometimes you need to lean in to catch his words. His soft-spoken nature creates an almost meditative calm around him—a striking counterpoint to the explosive energy he displays during play.

“Good shot, good shot,” he might say after a well-executed point, the repetition not for emphasis but perhaps as a thoughtful accommodation for the many players whose hearing isn't what it once was. This subtle consideration for others characterizes Roy's approach to both tennis and life.

Beyond the courts, Roy brings the same thoughtful attention to his passion project—an internet-based jazz radio station he operates with his wife, Joy. “Jazz Joy & Roy” has become a favorite among certain Bell Center regulars who appreciate the carefully curated playlists that reveal both deep knowledge of jazz history and an ear for complementary musical journeys.

The station reflects Roy's personality—understated yet substantial, eschewing flash for genuine quality. Just as he doesn't need to announce his athletic abilities on the court—he simply demonstrates them—his radio programs let the music speak for itself, with minimal commentary interrupting the flow of carefully selected tracks.

For a period, Roy and I embarked on a shared project to improve our serves, using video analysis to refine our techniques. We recorded each other's service motions and studied them alongside professional examples, looking for adjustments that might add power or consistency. Roy, with his natural athletic gifts, quickly incorporated the lessons, his already formidable serve becoming even more dangerous.

My progress proved more modest—a reality Roy acknowledged with his characteristic gentleness. "That's better, that's better," he would say when I managed even small improvements, never highlighting the still-considerable gap between my service game and his own.

What makes Roy special in our tennis community isn't just his exceptional physical abilities or his cultural contributions through music. It's how he carries these gifts with such genuine humility. In a setting where accomplishments are often discussed openly, Roy lets his actions on the court and his music on the airwaves speak for themselves.

Joy, his partner in both life and broadcasting, complements his quiet energy with her own warmth and organizational skills. Together, they create harmony that extends beyond their radio programming to enrich our tennis circle through their consistent presence and gentle encouragement of others.

In Roy's quick feet and soft voice, there's a reminder that strength doesn't always announce itself loudly, that some of the most impressive talents come wrapped in the quietest packages. When newer players join our sessions, I often suggest they pay attention to the unassuming man who moves like someone half his age. "Watch Roy," I tell them. "Not just how he plays, but how he carries himself." Both lessons are equally valuable.

#

Bill L.

Bill is the kind of presence on the tennis court that makes the game better for everyone around him, not just through his considerable skill but through his genuine willingness to help others improve. He's a man of few words, but those he shares are invariably thoughtful and constructive, offered with a friendly demeanor that makes even critique feel like encouragement.

When I was invited to be part of the warm-up team for the players of the Men's 3.5 Team, besides Dave, Bill was one of the first to take an interest in helping me improve my game. While others were polite and welcoming, Bill took the extra step of occasionally pausing after a point to offer a quiet suggestion about footwork or racquet position. "Try opening your stance a bit more on that backhand," he might say, demonstrating with a quick adjustment of his own feet.

Like me, Bill prefers the later morning sessions when the earliest birds have already had their fill. We often find ourselves arriving at the same time, exchanging brief nods of recognition as we step into rotation. There's a comfortable rhythm to these late-morning sessions.

Bill's path to tennis excellence followed an unconventional route. For most of his working life, he sat behind the wheel of long-haul trucks, crisscrossing the country. Those years on the road built in him a patience and steadiness that translates perfectly to his tennis game—he rarely seems rushed or flustered, maintaining a calm presence even during the most competitive points.

The truck-driving career allowed him to retire earlier than many, trading deadlines and dispatchers for the year-round sunshine of Arizona. While some retirees struggle with the sudden abundance of unstructured time, Bill seamlessly transitioned to a life centered around tennis, home projects, and regular escapes to his cherished condo in Maui.

These Hawaiian sojourns serve a purpose beyond mere relaxation. Bill's son, a college-level tennis player with formidable skills, vacations with his father and improves his game with merciless drills. Their practice sessions on Maui's courts have transformed Bill's play, elevating him to become one of the standout members of the Men's 3.5 Team.

"My son doesn't let me get away with anything," Bill once shared after particularly successfully executing a new technique during a doubles match. "Last time in Maui, we worked three hours a day on just that shot." This dedication to improvement, even after reaching an age when many would be content to maintain rather than advance their skills, speaks volumes about Bill's character.

What's most impressive about Bill isn't just his tennis abilities or his willingness to help others improve—it's how he carries these qualities with such genuine humility. Unless you ask, there's no boasting about his son's talents or his own achievements on the court. He simply shows up, plays his best, offers assistance when appropriate, and enjoys the game for what it is: a chance to challenge himself and connect with others who share his passion.

In a tennis community filled with diverse personalities and approaches to the game, Bill stands as a quiet reminder that excellence and kindness aren't mutually exclusive. His presence on the court makes everyone around him a little better, both as players and as sportsmen—not through grand gestures or inspirational speeches, but through consistent example and small, thoughtful actions.

When newer members ask about whom to watch to improve their own game, I often point to Bill. "Notice how he's always in position before the ball arrives," I'll say. "And pay attention to how he helps his partners without overwhelming them." In both his play and his demeanor, Bill offers a model of what tennis at its best can be—competitive without being cutthroat, skilled without being showy, and above all, genuinely enjoyable for everyone involved. Playing doubles with Bill is one of my true pleasures; against him is a resizing of my ego.

#

Dick H.

Dick's game on the court reflects his approach to life's bigger challenges—methodical, strategic, and marked by quiet determination. As a regular on the Men's 3.5 Team, he brings both skill and steadiness to matches, his consistent play making him a valued presence during competitions.

What most opponents wouldn't guess while facing him across the net is the more serious battle Dick has waged off the court. His journey through prostate cancer—from initial diagnosis through surgery, recurrence, radiation, and finally remission—has given him a perspective that transcends tennis rivalries.

There's a particular bond that forms between those who have faced similar health challenges. When Dick learned of my own concerns with scans and biopsies, a different kind of conversation opened between us—one where medical terminology and the psychological weight of uncertainty didn't need translation or explanation.

"The waiting is the hardest part," he mentioned once as we discussed the peculiar limbo between medical tests and results. "The actual treatments, you just get through them. But those days waiting for the phone to ring..." He let the sentence trail off, both of us understanding the unspoken remainder.

Our connection extends beyond medical parallels. As a former high school economics teacher, Dick maintains an active interest in financial and economic trends that matches my own deep interest. We've developed a habit of exchanging articles that catch our attention—research papers, opinion pieces, or news reports that offer insights into the economic forces shaping our world.

These exchanges often lead to thoughtful discussions during water breaks between sets, conversations that drift from yield curves to inflation pressures to the economics of healthcare, a topic with personal rel-

evance for both of us. Dick approaches these discussions with the same patient, clarifying manner that must have benefited his students during his teaching years.

Dick's Minnesota upbringing reveals itself in unexpected ways. Though he left behind the snow and ice of his youth for Arizona's desert landscape, he brought with him a lifelong love of skating. Unable to pursue ice hockey in our climate, he adapted by taking up inline skating with impressive skill, maintaining that connection to his northern roots through wheels rather than blades.

His enthusiasm for this activity led to one of our more memorable interactions when he offered to lend me his inline skates. I planned to combine skating with my wing-kite to create a landlocked version of kitesurfing across smooth pavement.

"Just start slow," he advised with a hint of concern as he handed over the skates, clearly wondering if he was enabling a disaster. His instincts weren't wrong.

After returning his equipment unscathed (though not for lack of trying), I was inspired enough to purchase my own skates and continue the experiment. The resulting spectacular wipeout in my driveway nearly fulfilled Dick's unspoken worries about my survival. So, Darlene confiscated my newly purchased skates despite my protests and promises to practice holding onto a shopping cart for stability—End of kite-skating... for now.

Dick's presence in our tennis community represents something beyond his athletic contributions or even his health journey. He embodies a thoughtful approach to life's second half—maintaining physical activity, intellectual engagement, and human connection while navigating the health challenges that inevitably arise with advancing years.

When newer members join our morning sessions, Dick is often among the first to make them feel welcome, offering the same measured encouragement that characterized his teaching career. What he passes along isn't just tennis tips but something more valuable—a model for

approaching life's challenges with grace, resilience, and the occasional well-placed slice shot.

#

Ken H.

There's a particular quality to Ken's presence on the tennis court—a calm, steady energy that seems to smooth the edges of even the most competitive moments. Originally from Minnesota, he carries that distinctive Midwestern sensibility where understatement is an art form and genuine kindness never appears as weakness.

Like me, Ken occupies that particular niche in the Men's Team ecosystem—not quite a roster regular, but a valued practice partner who helps the team sharpen their skills. We're the journeymen of Bell Center tennis, the warm-up specialists who show up to help others prepare for the matches that matter. For Ken, this role comes despite having a game that, were it not for the limitations of aging knees, would easily earn him a standing position on the competitive squad.

His groundstrokes remain textbook perfect—clean, consistent, and placed with intentional precision. It's only when quick lateral movement becomes necessary that you see the slight hesitation, the careful calculation of whether certain balls are worth the joint pain that would follow an all-out sprint. The mind still maps the perfect court coverage; the body negotiates more conservative terms.

What makes Ken's company particularly valued during our sessions isn't just his tennis skills but his conversational style. Waiting for our rotation back onto the court becomes an unexpected pleasure when Ken is sharing the bench. He listens with genuine interest, responds thoughtfully, and possesses that increasingly rare ability to discuss any topic with honesty and civility.

"Well, you know, I see it a little differently," he might begin when perspectives diverge, his tone suggesting not disagreement but simply

another angle worth considering. In a time when many conversations become pitched battles, Ken maintains the art of actual dialogue.

Our roles in the practice sessions have their distinct purposes—Ken is there for his solid hitting skills that challenge the team to elevate their game, me included primarily because they benefit from practicing against a left-handed server whose spin moves differently from what they typically encounter. We're specialists of a sort, each offering something the regular team members need for their development.

There's dignity in this supporting role that Ken embodies perfectly—the understanding that contribution to a community takes many forms, and that helping others improve carries its own satisfaction. His presence elevates not just the tennis skills of those who practice with him but also the overall tone of the sessions, bringing a measured perspective and genuine camaraderie that make even rigorous practice feel somehow more enjoyable.

In Ken's approach to both tennis and social interaction, there's a template for graceful adaptation to life's changing circumstances—the wisdom to adjust expectations without surrendering engagement, to find new ways to contribute when previous paths become less accessible. His presence at Bell Center reminds us that the measure of our involvement isn't always found in tournament results or team standings, but sometimes in the quality of connection we create simply by showing up consistently and bringing our best selves to each interaction.

#

Arnold J.

A regular in the Morning Drop-in, AJ stands among the elite players at Bell Center, but what truly sets him apart isn't just his skill with a racquet—it's his genuine desire to help others improve their game. While many accomplished players keep their techniques and in-

sights to themselves, AJ seems to find as much satisfaction in a friend's progress as in his own victories.

"Try this," he'll offer quietly, demonstrating a slight adjustment to grip or stance that somehow transforms an awkward stroke into a fluid motion. He has that rare eye to see and ability to identify the one small change that will make the biggest difference—a talent that could easily translate into a lucrative career as a private coach. Yet he offers his expertise freely, seemingly motivated by the pure pleasure of seeing others succeed.

Darlene's game improved tremendously under his guidance. Occasional tips followed by more focused coaching helped her develop consistency and a strategic awareness that has made her make strides toward the player she knew she could be. My own game has benefited as well, though perhaps not as dramatically—some students simply are slower than others, a reality AJ accepted with a smile.

Despite his qualifications to be a standout on the Men's 3.5 Team, AJ recently channeled his energy in a different direction by taking on the coaching role for the Women's 4.0 Team. This decision reveals much about his character—a willingness to prioritize helping others advance over showcasing his own abilities. Under his guidance, the women's team has developed a more focused approach to doubles strategy, with particular emphasis on court positioning and anticipation.

"It's not always about hitting harder," he explains to his team during practice sessions. "It's about being in the right place at the right time." This philosophy—that intelligent positioning often trumps raw power—has become a hallmark of his coaching style and has transformed the team's effectiveness in competition.

AJ's path to Sun City included a fascinating detour through Hollywood, where he built a career in the specialized world of audio dubbing. This background in technical precision and timing translates visibly to his tennis, both in his precise shot making, and in his ability to help others sequence their movements more effectively. I always want-

ed to learn more of his projects for major films or technical challenges overcome under pressure—an aspect of movies that is unseen, but to a geek like me is curiosity addictive.

There's an intriguing contrast between AJ's typically calm, measured demeanor on the court and certain other aspects of his life. The same man who patiently demonstrates proper footwork for a backhand volley can be spotted cruising through Sun City in his imposing late-model Corvette—a road monster that seems to vibrate with barely contained power even at neighborhood speeds. Similarly, those who have seen him dancing at The Copper Penny or Dominic's Bistro witness a different side of AJ—a gentle, suave dance partner to a willing dame.

These apparent contradictions make him all the more interesting as a community member. They remind us that people are rarely just one thing—that the patient tennis coach can also be the car enthusiast with a taste for American muscle, that the meticulous technician can also lose and give himself in music on a dance floor.

What remains consistent across all these settings is AJ's fundamental generosity of spirit. Whether he's offering technical advice to improve a serve, sharing stories from his Hollywood days, or simply participating in community events, he approaches interactions with a genuine interest in making connections and contributing positively to those around him.

In a retirement community filled with accomplished individuals from diverse backgrounds, AJ exemplifies the best of what this life chapter can offer—the opportunity to share accumulated wisdom freely, to pursue passions without the pressure of professional advancement, and to form meaningful connections based on shared interests rather than career objectives.

His presence at Bell Center enriches our tennis community in ways that extend well beyond the scoreboard—creating a culture where improvement is celebrated, assistance is freely offered, and the joy of the

game remains central to why we show up, day after day, to hit a little yellow ball back and forth across a net.

#

Lorraine & Neil

Some people shape a community not through dramatic gestures but through consistent presence. Lorraine and Neil fill this essential role at Bell Center. They arrive for Morning Drop-in with quiet reliability. The tennis courts feel more complete when they're there.

Lorraine possesses that rare quality of noticing newcomers. While others focus on the game, she watches for uncertain faces at the court-side. A quick smile, a casual invitation to join the rotation—small actions that transform outsiders into participants. She does this without fanfare. The newcomer feels welcomed rather than rescued. This subtle distinction matters.

Her organizational talents extend beyond social connections. For years, she has supported the Tennis Club's Board, helping with the invisible necessities that keep communities functioning. She completes these tasks without seeking recognition. The work itself satisfies her.

Neil complements her welcoming nature with his steady calm on the courts. His game lacks flashiness but shows consistency. He returns shots others miss. He rarely comments on others' play but offers quiet acknowledgement when someone makes a good shot.

Together, they create a comfortable presence that stabilizes the social dynamics of morning tennis. They rarely initiate conversations but engage fully when included. They remember details about others' lives—grandchildren's names, recent trips, health challenges. This attentiveness makes people feel valued.

Their participation extends to club events beyond regular play. They attend tournaments as participants or spectators. They join social gatherings. They volunteer for setup and cleanup without being asked.

Their contributions accumulate like small deposits in the community's goodwill account.

In a community where some personalities naturally command attention, Lorraine and Neil provide the necessary counterbalance—the steady background presence that allows others to shine while ensuring everyone feels included.

Tennis at Bell Center would continue without them, but it would lose something essential—that particular feeling of being in a place, like the bar in “Cheers”, where someone notices you, remembers you, and genuinely cares that you came.

#

Rounding up the Morning Drop-in

The reader's voice softened, taking on a more contemplative tone as he turned the page.

“Beyond the teams and the more prominent personalities that dominate conversations and memories, there exists an equally important constellation of tennis friends whose presence forms the essential fabric of the Bell Center community. These are the quieter participants, the more private souls who share less about their backgrounds or personal lives yet contribute an irreplaceable quality to our collective experience.

Morning Drop-in sessions depend on these steady presences—players who arrive without fanfare, play with consistent good spirit, and depart without drama. They create the reliable foundation upon which our tennis community builds its sense of continuity and belonging.

Clyde C. arrives each morning with minimal conversation but maximum reliability. His economical strokes and strategic court positioning reflect a lifetime of thoughtful play. He rarely speaks of his past; instead, he focuses on the present, like organizing the Thursday Night

Social tennis during the summer months for the few die-hards that remain in town.

Ruth D. brings a particular grace to the courts—both in her playing style and in her unfailing courtesy toward partners and opponents alike. Her game features an old-school eastern forehand grip and classic strokes. While she shares little about her personal life, her consistent kindness creates a wake of goodwill that extends far beyond the baseline.

Butch's game reflects a natural athlete's intuitive understanding of movement and timing. He does not speak much about life beyond tennis, but his reliable participation and willingness to play with partners of varying abilities make him a cornerstone of the morning sessions.

Mark H. approaches tennis with an engineer's analytical mind. Was he an engineer? He speaks rarely but listens intently.

Betsy O. brings a determination to every match that inspires partners and opponents alike. Her height makes her a defensive wall at the net.

In the long accounting of tennis friendships, these more private individuals might provide fewer anecdotes or personal revelations to share. Yet their consistent presence, reliable sportsmanship, and quiet contributions to the community's spirit remain profoundly valuable. They remind us that meaningful connection doesn't always require extensive personal disclosure—that showing up regularly with genuine goodwill can itself be a significant gift to a community, and I could not be more grateful that our paths crossed with these more reserved friends.

#

Rounding up the Women's Team

If the Men's Team plays with notable power and competitive drive, the Women's Team embodies a different kind of tennis excellence—one

built on determination, strategic precision, and a remarkable organizational cohesion born of having played together for a long time.

“That’s a tough bunch of determined athletes” becomes the common refrain from anyone who has faced them across the net or witnessed their focused practice sessions with Dave for years and now with Arnold. What impresses observers isn’t just their skill with racquet and ball, but the mental fortitude that allows them to elevate their game when the stakes increase.

Within this formidable assembly, in addition to others mentioned earlier, there exists a core of quieter forces—women whose contributions extend beyond their playing abilities to organize and motivate and shape the culture of tennis at Bell Center.

Linda A., the leader and organizer of the team, has been its backbone for a long time. She does not play as often as others, but without her, perhaps nobody would be playing at all. Her ability to identify each player’s strengths and weaknesses made her the tactical advisor whose observations often prove decisive in close matches. Off the court, her organizational skills ensure that tournament registrations, travel arrangements, and match schedules proceed with clockwork precision.

Jeanette D-J, a former State Patrol officer, possesses that rare combination of competitive fire and nurturing patience that makes her a formidable opponent. Her law enforcement background gives her a language for keeping cool when fighting to regain the upper hand.

Alma S., a still practicing physician, brings to the court an obvious joie-de-vivre. Occasionally, her Hispanic heritage will explode in ‘hay hay Caramba’ after a questionable shot.

Together, these women form a core that extends the Women’s Team’s influence far beyond match results. Their combined efforts create not just competitive success but a model for how communal endeavor can enhance individual experience.

For those of us who observe from the bleachers, the Women’s Team offers a powerful reminder that excellence takes many forms and re-

quires diverse talents. Their collective presence enriches our tennis community not just through the matches they win, but through the example they set of dedicated commitment to a shared passion.

#

“And so, it goes for tennis players,” he said softly, “here we are. This is the Bell Center Tennis group that I have grown to love. Not just characters in search of an author, but people who found each other as friends. The real story wasn’t on these courts or even in these pages. It was in what happened between points—in conversations on sidelines, in Thursday night socials, in moments of kindness and encouragement that had nothing to do with keeping score. A community defined by kindness and mutual respect. A true gift for the tail end of our lives.”

Beyond the Courts

While the tennis courts of Bell Center provided the stage for many of our strongest connections, Sun City's rich tapestry of relationships extends far beyond the baselines and net. Our community pulses with activity from sunrise to well after sunset—a retirement that defies the stereotype of quiet decline and instead embraces a second youth of sorts.

Sun City is indeed driven by activities: tennis, pickleball, golf, softball, lawn bowling, swimming, gym, and for the oddest cats among us (myself reluctantly included), even kite sailing. But the true magic happens when the games end and the social life begins—a transformation of our retirement years into something resembling an adult version of summer camp, complete with new friendships, shared meals, and late-night conversations.

The traditional fraternal organizations—Elks, Eagles, Moose, American Legion—have found renewed purpose here, their halls filled not with the middle-aged members of earlier generations but with energetic seniors eager to continue the day's interactions. These gathering places hum with conversations dissecting the day's tennis matches, golf scores, or pickleball tournaments, the activities providing endless material for good-natured ribbing and occasional boasting.

Dancing emerges as perhaps the most universal social connector across Sun City. From formal ballroom events at recreation centers to the lively floor at Dominic's Bistro, Little Bite of Italy, Charly's on The Lake, or The Copper Penny—our generation proves we haven't forgotten how to move. Some dance with the same partners they've had for decades; others find new joy in learning steps with newfound friends. The music might occasionally be turned down a notch from our younger days, but the enthusiasm remains undiminished.

It was across these dining tables and dance floors that many of the tennis characters you've just met revealed dimensions of themselves in-

visible on the courts. Here, breaking bread together, we shared hopes and worries, beamed with pride over children's accomplishments and grandchildren's first steps, and occasionally confided fears we'd never voice during the competitive environment of morning drop-in.

The faces you'll encounter in these next pages are connected not by forehands and backhands, but by something perhaps more enduring—the shared understanding that the final chapters of our lives need not be epilogues, but rather might contain some of the most meaningful connections we've ever known.

Social & Next Gen Club

Bill P.

Bill's influence extends far beyond any single recreational pursuit in Sun City. His sporting passion lies in the precise, strategic world of lawn bowling. As a master of this quintessentially retirement-community sport, Bill has elevated both his personal game and the organization of tournaments to something approaching an art form.

However, it's not his athletic pursuits that have made Bill a household name throughout Sun City. His renown stems from his role as our community's unofficial but undisputed historian. No one possesses a more comprehensive understanding of Sun City's origins, development, and governance philosophy than Bill. His involvement with the Sun City Museum—both as an organizer and longtime docent—has transformed him into a walking encyclopedia of local knowledge.

Conversations with Bill about Sun City's history quickly reveal the passion behind his expertise. His eyes light up when discussing Del Webb's original vision, the Boswell family's contributions, or John Meeker's architectural innovations. What might seem like dry historical facts to some become, in Bill's telling, chapters in an ongoing story of community-building that continues to unfold.

Bill's background as a union leader before retirement equipped him with both organizational skills and a direct communication style that brooks little nonsense. When he speaks at community meetings, his words come unvarnished and to the point, carrying the weight of someone who has studied the issues thoroughly and formulated clear opinions.

His retirement to Sun City was no accident but rather a deliberate choice based on deep admiration for the community's foundational principles of self-governance and active living. This commitment has led him to serve two separate terms on the Recreation Centers of Sun

City Board of Directors, positions that required enduring countless hours of procedural minutiae and administrative debate.

When a critical moment arrived—a time when many felt the community was losing touch with its founding principles—Bill emerged as the natural leader of a grassroots movement to reassert resident control over management decisions. His living-room strategy sessions and carefully organized information campaigns mobilized longtime residents and newcomers alike around the core values that had initially attracted them to Sun City.

If records were kept for attendance at RCSC Board meetings—those marathon sessions that test the patience of even the most civic-minded residents—Bill would surely hold the all-time mark. His willingness to sit through hour upon hour of procedural discussions and budget presentations demonstrates a level of dedication that few can match.

In a very real sense, Bill has positioned himself as the torchbearer for Sun City's founding vision. While developers and corporate entities might see only the business aspects of retirement communities, Bill consistently advocates for the human element—the sense of shared purpose and resident-driven governance that distinguished Del Webb's original concept.

When future residents look back on Sun City's evolution, they may well place Bill's name alongside those early visionaries who shaped its identity. His consistent, principled advocacy for community control and resident involvement represents not just a connection to the past but a bridge to whatever Sun City will become in its next chapters. Bill's advocacy will always be remembered for maintaining the special character that makes Sun City more than just a collection of homes and amenities, but a true community with a distinct identity and purpose.

#

Lynda arrives at the tennis courts like sunshine breaking through clouds—her smile a constant, warming presence that seems to have been passed down through generations. Those who knew her mother, Happy—still painting vibrant canvases at 93 in 2017—recognize the same irrepressible joy that appears to be a family trait.

On the court, Lynda plays with skilled determination, her strokes reflecting years of practice and natural athletic ability. But it's when tennis concludes that her other passions emerge, particularly her deep connection to nurturing growing things. A visit to Ken and Lynda's home reveals a garden that would make Monet reach for his brushes—carefully tended beds overflowing with colors and textures that change with the seasons, creating an ecosystem that attracts hummingbirds, doves, lovebirds, and even families of quail whose chicks scurry about like animated cotton balls.

"The baby quails came back again this year," she might mention with quiet satisfaction after a tennis match, her pride in these wild visitors equal to any grandparent showing photos of their newest family member.

Her Italian heritage reveals itself most deliciously in her cooking—traditional recipes prepared with both skill and love. The olives she cures herself from a huge tree in her backyard have become legendary among friends lucky enough to receive a jar, the result of maintaining connections to cultural traditions while creating new ones within our desert community.

If Lynda brings warmth and nurturing energy to their partnership, Ken contributes a different but equally remarkable set of gifts. His career as an IT executive with American Express took him around the globe, building the worldly perspective that shapes his conversations and interests. Yet, despite this high-powered professional background, it's at the grand piano in their living room where Ken's true spirit emerges most clearly.

Ken plays entirely by ear, his fingers finding melodies and harmonies without the constraint of written notes. There's a lightness to his touch on the keys that creates an almost ethereal quality—music that flows like water, each note perfectly placed yet seemingly effortless. For someone formally trained only on the accordion, his musical intuition of the piano borders on the miraculous.

While his role as President of the Piano Club involves organizing monthly recitals that feature challenging classical pieces performed with serious intent, Ken's own playing ventures into more varied territory. When he settles at the keyboard during casual gatherings, the room might fill with anything from jazz standards to Broadway show-stoppers to operatic melodies, all rendered with that distinctive touch that makes listeners smile not from appreciation of technique, but from a place of pure emotional connection.

Perhaps the most revealing aspect of Ken's musical gift is his weekly visits to play for Alzheimer's patients. In that challenging environment where recognition fades and connections become tenuous, he sits at the piano and creates moments of clarity and joy for those whose good days have become increasingly rare. He never speaks of this volunteer work as a sacrifice, but rather as a privilege—the opportunity to witness how music can briefly part the clouds of cognitive decline and allow authentic human connection.

I was so moved watching Ken play once that it inspired a poem during the early, uncertain days of the COVID pandemic:

"My Friend's Hands, April 9, 2020

It's a time of global sorrow when too many will not see tomorrow.

We all need hope and warmth from friends present, and old ways gone.

In that mood, I get a gift.

The music streams life from his piano

I get to watch in time suspended

As magic hands dance on the keys

Death statistics paint a stillness that my soul resents
His hands are alive and sing of joy that will return in time
For now, I get to watch as fingers dance from black to white
as if on a rainbow that speaks of sunshine after the rain”

Ken and Lynda’s expansive view of the world continues through their frequent travels. Their daughter, a cruise travel agent, ensures they never miss an opportunity to explore new horizons on the seas. Meanwhile, their son’s career with the State Department provides destinations that change with his assignments, giving them windows into cultures and regions they might otherwise never experience.

When my thirtysomething family friend Ashlie, a professional opera singer, visited, Ken’s eyes lit up at the prospect of accompanying her. The impromptu concert that followed—his intuitive playing supporting her trained mezzo-soprano that could indeed vibrate windowpanes—created one of those magical moments when age differences dissolve and pure artistic connection takes precedence.

Ken’s generous offer to teach me piano basics reveals another dimension of his character—the desire to share his gifts rather than showcasing them. Like the best of friends, Ken and Lynda enrich our community not just through their considerable talents and engaging personalities, but through their fundamental understanding that life’s greatest pleasures—music, gardens, good food, friendship—grow more meaningful when shared with others.

#

Nancy & Jack

If you’re looking for the heart of Sun City’s social scene, follow the laughter to wherever Nancy happens to be. As the tennis club’s undisputed social butterfly, she transforms every gathering from a simple sporting event into a celebration of community and connection. Her calendar defies the conventional image of retirement as a slowing

down—for Nancy, it represents an opportunity to accelerate into a life filled with activity and engagement.

A typical day in Nancy's world would exhaust someone half her age: tennis in the morning, followed by a session at the fitness center or laps in the walking pool, pickleball in the afternoon, and dancing in to the evening. This relentless schedule has earned her the affectionate nickname of "Sun City's Energizer Bunny," a comparison that makes her laugh but seems entirely apt to anyone who has tried to keep pace with her.

"I'll sleep when I'm dead," she often quips when asked about her seemingly inexhaustible energy. Even Darlene, known for her own considerable vitality, occasionally shakes her head in amazement at Nancy's capacity for continuous motion and engagement.

By her side through this whirlwind of activity stands Jack, her supportive sidekick and partner in social adventure. Though his knees no longer allow him to join the tennis crowd on court, his golf game remains strong, and his enthusiasm for being part of the club's social fabric never wavers.

Their trip to Indian Wells remains a talking point—Jack thoroughly enjoyed the experience and would happily return, while Nancy holds a lingering disappointment that Serena Williams didn't play during their visit. This good-natured disagreement exemplifies their relationship—different perspectives amicably maintained within a fundamentally united partnership.

Jack's path to Sun City followed the quintessential American entrepreneurial journey. After earning a business degree in the early 1970s, he began in retail before taking the leap to establish his own printing business, Speedy Print. What followed was a masterclass in small business perseverance through changing economic landscapes and technological revolutions.

"I never worked for anyone else after that," he recounts with quiet pride. "Always wrote the payroll checks for my employees before my

own.” This principle—putting his workers first—encapsulates the midwestern values that guided his business. He intentionally kept the operation scaled to his direct management, serving as the key person in all aspects of the operation—a decision that brought both strengths and limitations.

As digital technology transformed the printing industry, Jack navigated the challenges with pragmatic adaptation. Rather than overextending with investments in expensive new equipment that might never pay off, he made strategic adjustments to maintain profitability while riding the existing business model toward a natural conclusion.

“Smart move,” he acknowledges with characteristic midwestern modesty when discussing his approach to the technological disruption. “I decided to just ride the old business to the end.” When retirement beckoned, he offered his customer list for sale; finding no takers, he decided to continue to serve long-standing clients with “enough business to pay for golf,” an arrangement that brings him evident satisfaction. There’s pride in his voice when he mentions maintaining relationships with customers who’ve been with him for decades—connections that transcended mere business transactions to become genuine friendships.

Together, Nancy and Jack have found their perfect rhythm in Sun City—she the perpetual motion machine of social activity, and he, the grounded counterpoint with his golf games and selective business endeavors. At The Elks Club or The Copper Penny, they’re fixtures on the dance floor, moving with the ease of partners who’ve found their complementary steps through years of practice.

Jack’s recent involvement as a founder of the Next Gen Club reflects his ongoing commitment to community building, bringing his business acumen and practical wisdom to an organization focused on ensuring Sun City evolves to meet changing needs while honoring its foundational principles.

In a community defined by its active retirement lifestyle, Nancy and Jack stand as exemplars of how to embrace this chapter of life with

enthusiasm and purpose, finding joy in activity, connection in community involvement, and continued meaning in selective professional engagement. Their friendship has enriched our circle with both exuberant energy and grounded wisdom, a combination as valuable off the courts as it is within our tennis community.

#

Dave & Sherry

The seasonal rhythm of Sun City becomes particularly evident when considering couples like Dave and Sherry, whose presence brightens our community for months at a time before they return to their Minnesota roots. Unlike many who make the permanent transition to desert living, they maintain a deliberate balance between Arizona's winter warmth and their beloved lake cabin in the northern woods—a place where family connections remain their ultimate anchor. When they are “locals,” they are active members of the NextGen Club.

Dave's path to Sun City followed a varied career that began with military service as an Army officer with discipline and leadership qualities that remain evident in his approach to community involvement. His subsequent professional life centered around power systems for data centers—a specialized field requiring precise understanding of the complex environmental and electrical demands of mainframe computers.

What makes Dave a particularly engaging presence in our social circles is the remarkable breadth of his interests and knowledge. A conversation that begins with golf might seamlessly transition to 1970s rock music, then pivot to environmental technology, detour through American history, and conclude with philosophical reflections on community governance. This intellectual agility makes him a sought-after companion since his perspectives frequently challenge conventional thinking.

Dave is, in rotation, a host for Cigar Night, a distinctive niche in Sun City's social calendar—men's gatherings that transcend the simple enjoyment of a fine smoke to become forums for wide-ranging conversation among diverse participants. Though my own participation has shifted from active smoker to observer since developing an unfortunate cigar allergy, the camaraderie remains equally enjoyable, a testament to how Dave, like Jack, has created a truly enjoyable diversion.

Sherry approaches Sun City with genuine appreciation for its offerings, particularly embracing the social aspects of our community. Yet, a perceptive observer would notice a wistfulness in her expressions when conversations turn to grandchildren or family gatherings—a subtle reminder that her heart remains primarily in Minnesota.

"The FaceTime calls are wonderful," she once mentioned during a happy-hour gathering, "but it's not the same as being there." This sentiment reflects the bittersweet reality many seasonal residents navigate—the trade-off between Sun City's perfect winter climate and the distance from family back home.

Together, Dave and Sherry embody a thoughtful approach to retirement that refuses false dichotomies. Rather than choosing either Sun City or their northern roots, they've crafted a life that embraces both, finding value in our desert community's active lifestyle while honoring the pull of family connections and the cabin that represents continuity across generations.

Seasonal residents like Dave and Sherry serve as important bridges between Sun City and the broader world, helping maintain our connection to diverse experiences and perspectives.

#

Tom & Mary

While tennis courts often serve as my primary lens for observing Sun City's characters, the remarkable presence of Tom and Mary emerges from a different athletic arena—the softball diamonds that

draw their own passionate community of players and supporters. Their influence extends so broadly across this domain that understanding Sun City softball culture becomes nearly impossible without acknowledging their contributions.

Tom's approach to softball transcends mere participation or casual organization. He has become the gravitational center around which much of the community's softball activities orbit—recruiting and balancing teams, coordinating tournaments, and advocating tirelessly for facility improvements with the Recreation Centers administration. When budget constraints delay necessary upgrades to the fields or equipment, Tom often quietly bridges the gap from his pocket, prioritizing players' safety and enjoyment over financial considerations.

"We need this done right," he'll say matter-of-factly when questioned about his personal investments in community facilities. "Life's too short to play on bad fields." This straightforward philosophy—identifying needs and addressing them without fanfare—characterizes his approach to both softball and friendship.

Tom's recent professional life as a general contractor specializing in home remodeling has equipped him with an exceptional network of skilled tradespeople and suppliers throughout the Valley. This expertise becomes a community resource as he generously offers guidance, inspections, and advice to neighbors facing renovation challenges or maintenance emergencies. What would be a billable consultation anywhere else becomes friendly advice offered freely over a beer or during seventh-inning stretches.

"Just don't tell my wife I'm taking on another project," he jokes when offering to help someone navigate a plumbing crisis or find a reliable electrician. Yet this self-deprecating humor masks a genuine generosity of spirit that has made him an invaluable resource for countless Sun City residents.

Mary complements Tom's practical skills with her own remarkable talents, particularly her exceptional eye for spatial relationships and

design possibilities. Where others see only existing walls and fixtures, Mary visualizes transformed spaces that better serve both functional needs and aesthetic desires. Her suggestions come not with the insistence of a professional designer but with the helpful enthusiasm of someone who genuinely enjoys helping others reimagine their living environments.

Her organizational abilities find their most impressive expression in the legendary team picnics she orchestrates single-handedly throughout the softball season. These feasts—there’s no more accurate term for the abundance she provides—would challenge professional caterers, yet Mary produces them with apparent ease, remembering individual preferences and dietary restrictions across dozens of players and spouses.

“It’s just a little something I put together,” she’ll say modestly as teammates marvel at elaborate spreads that could comfortably feed twice the number present. Her joy in nourishing the community through food creates an atmosphere where softball games naturally extend into social gatherings, strengthening bonds beyond the playing field.

Together, Tom and Mary embody a particular philosophy of retirement that focuses on community building rather than mere leisure. Their approach to life in Sun City centers around creating infrastructure—both physical and social—that enhances collective experience. Whether improving softball facilities, helping neighbors reimagine their homes, or literally feeding the community they’ve helped build, their contributions consistently prioritize shared enjoyment over individual recognition.

What makes their substantial contributions especially remarkable is the light touch with which they’re offered. Their “live and let live” attitude creates space for diverse personalities and approaches within the groups they help organize. There’s never a sense of controlling or dic-

tating how others should participate—only a genuine desire to create conditions where everyone can find their own best experience.

In Tom and Mary, we see retirement reimagined not as withdrawal but as deeper engagement—using skills honed through decades of professional and personal experience to enrich the community they’ve chosen for this chapter of life. Their generous spirits and practical impacts are reminders that the most valuable currencies in our community aren’t financial but relational—the willingness to contribute, connect, and create together.

#

Carolyn & Roy

Though my narrative naturally centers around the tennis courts of Bell Center, some of the most remarkable characters in our Sun City story move in different orbits entirely. Carolyn and Roy represent the wonderful serendipity of retirement communities—friends we might never have encountered in our working lives, whose paths now enrich ours through entirely different shared interests.

Originally from Omaha, they’ve made the full commitment to Sun City, transitioning from seasonal visitors to year-round residents who brave much of the summer heat that sends many fleeing to cooler climates. They still escape to Omaha for short stints to visit family.

Roy moves through water with the same quiet, determined efficiency that characterized his dual careers—first in military service and later as a civilian employee reviewing immigration cases for the federal government. The discipline required for long-distance swimming seems a natural extension of the precision and persistence his previous work demanded. Each morning finds him methodically logging laps at the Bell Center pool.

When not in the water, Roy is a regular golfer, part of a posse, approaching the game with the same patient thoroughness he brings to all endeavors. His military background reveals itself subtly—not

through stories or references, but in his impeccable punctuality, his careful maintenance of equipment, his diligent note taking on any subject he touches, and his attentiveness when others speak.

Carolyn brings an entirely different energy to their partnership—her enthusiasm for pickleball is a total commitment. As one of the sport's devoted ambassadors in Sun City, she delights in introducing newcomers to what she calls "the perfect game for our second youth."

What truly distinguishes Carolyn, however, is her seemingly limitless capacity for caring. Her regular volunteer work at a hospice home reflects a special compassion for those navigating the turmoil and uncertainty at the end of the road. She seems to delight in the opportunity to bring moments of connection and comfort to strangers that in need, in the end, become friends to hold by the hand.

This same spirit extends throughout her community interactions. Darlene found in Carolyn not just a walking companion but a true friend whose supportive presence made their morning walks as nourishing for the spirit as they were for the body.

Evenings often find Carolyn and Roy hosting small gatherings in their brand new, beautiful home, centered around card games and board games—occasions that transform simple entertainment into deeper connection. These game nights, punctuated by shared meals and flowing conversation, create the kind of relaxed social environment where true friendships develop.

"Carolyn is the person who drops everything when someone needs help," Darlene often remarks, recounting instances when a neighbor's illness or a friend's emergency brought Carolyn immediately to action—organizing meal deliveries, arranging transportation, or simply providing a calm, capable presence during difficult moments. This reflexive generosity isn't something she discusses or draws attention to—it's simply her natural response to others' needs.

Although motivated by different interests, Roy and Carolyn embody people who do not make headlines but whose reliable presence and consistent kindness form the essential foundation of community well-being.

In a community defined by the diversity of backgrounds and experiences gathered in one place, Carolyn and Roy represent something essential—the extraordinary value of ordinary kindness consistently extended over time.

#

Camey & Jim

Among the many remarkable life stories that unfold in Sun City's social tapestry, Camey and Jim's narrative stands out for its elements of serendipity, reconnection, and second chances that seem almost scripted for a heartwarming film rather than real life.

Camey's journey to her current happiness followed a path marked by both profound loss and unexpected joy. Not long ago, she lost her spouse—that particular sorrow familiar to many in our retirement community, but never easier for its commonality. During this period of mourning and adjustment, fate intervened through the modern miracle of social media, reconnecting her with someone from the furthest reaches of her past—her kindergarten sweetheart, Jim.

Their reunion story emerges in pieces during NextGen gatherings, shared sometimes with wonder at life's strange circuitry. "We were five years old the last time I liked him," Camey might remark with amused disbelief, the decades between then and now compressed by the familiar comfort they've rediscovered in each other's company.

As the close friend and confidante of Lorna, NextGen's president, Camey has become a central figure in the club's social network. Her natural sociability and adventurous spirit make her a catalyst for activities and outings—always ready to try new restaurants, explore Arizona landmarks. This enthusiasm for experience seems amplified now, as if

her reconnection with Jim has awakened a renewed appreciation for life's possibilities.

Jim brings his own distinctive energy to their partnership and to our social circle. With a perpetually cheerful demeanor and a smile that suggests he might be privately enjoying a joke not yet shared with the room, he moves through gatherings with easy congeniality. His readiness to both hear others' stories and share his own creates natural connections with new acquaintances, though few can match the remarkable tale he occasionally reveals.

One is an anecdote so improbable it would strain credibility coming from anyone else. Years ago, Jim's brother, finding himself about to be arrested and carrying no identification, impulsively claimed to be Jim. This momentary decision by a cornered sibling cascaded into serious consequences for the innocent Jim, creating a criminal record attached to his name that he knew nothing about until unexplained difficulties began arising during routine interactions with authorities.

The way Jim recounts this story reveals much about his character. There's appropriate indignation at the injustice and frustration with the wrongdoer, but remarkably, he seems to hold little bitterness toward his brother. "Family's complicated," he'll say with that characteristic mischievous smile when listeners express outrage on his behalf. This capacity for forgiveness, or at least for placing family bonds above grievances, speaks to a fundamental generosity of spirit that makes him widely appreciated in our community.

Together, Camey and Jim exemplify something beautiful about this chapter of life—the possibility of new beginnings even after significant endings. Their evident happiness together serves as a gentle reminder that joy can arrive in unexpected packages and that connections formed in the earliest innocence of childhood can sometimes find their way back to us when we most need them.

In Camey and Jim's story, many find hope, not just for romantic possibilities, but for life's capacity to surprise us with good fortune even after difficult passages.

#

Lorna & Steve

The social ecosystem of Sun City reveals its vitality not just in long-established relationships but in the new connections that form when life circumstances change. Lorna's story parallels her friend Camey's in important ways—both women faced the profound transition of losing their spouses, and both have discovered that new chapters can open even after such significant loss.

Lorna brings to her role as NextGen Club President the same organizational precision and strategic thinking that marked her professional life as an accountant for a successful startup within a larger corporate structure. That particular career path—navigating the entrepreneurial energy of a new venture while working within established systems—seems to have prepared her perfectly for guiding NextGen through its growth and evolution.

When she speaks of her former career, brief glimpses emerge of a woman who thrived in environments requiring analytical rigor and adaptability. "In a startup inside a big company, you're constantly translating between two different worlds," she once explained during a happy hour conversation. This ability to bridge different perspectives now serves her well as she balances the diverse expectations and needs of NextGen's expanding membership.

Despite the demands of club leadership, Lorna maintains an active travel schedule that keeps her world expanding beyond Sun City's boundaries. These journeys—sometimes solo adventures, sometimes trips with friends like Camey—reflect her fundamental self-confidence and openness to new experiences.

The newest chapter in Lorna's life involves Steve, a relatively recent addition to both NextGen and to her personal story. Where Lorna fills rooms with her presence and energy, Steve moves with a quieter demeanor that complements rather than competes with her more ebullient personality. There's a comfortable rhythm to their interaction—her animated narratives balanced by his attentive listening, her social initiative matched by his steady support.

What makes Steve particularly interesting in our social circle is his apparent comfort with being more question-asker than story-teller. In an environment where most people arrive with decades of stories, they're eager to share, his preference for learning about others before revealing himself creates a different presence. "What brought you to Sun City?" he might ask a new acquaintance, or "What did you do before retiring?"—genuine curiosity that focuses conversation on the other person.

This reticence about his background has created a mild aura of mystery that seems both unintentional on his part and somewhat intriguing to others in our group. He recently observed with a knowing smile, "In this community, being mysterious isn't a sustainable strategy. Everyone eventually knows everyone else's business." And indeed, we live in a small world where secrets and lost threads are unexpectedly discovered. Lorna says, "Even though we lived exactly a mile apart in Sun City, we never ran into each other. Our mutual friends in NextGen introduced us. Then we discovered that we both were raised in Wisconsin in small towns about 2 hours away. In addition, Steve was born and raised about an hour from my Wisconsin cottage. When he went back with me last summer, he took me to his hometown to show me all his youth hang-outs. Before we left, he wanted to go to the cemetery to clean his grandparents' graves. To our amazement, we discovered that my grandpa is buried in the same cemetery about 200 yards from his grandparents! What a small world!"

Indeed, the friendly interrogations that follow new relationships in Sun City will likely soon fill in the outlines of Steve's story.

For now, though, what we see clearly is the positive influence Lorna and Steve have on each other. Together, they represent another variation of how relationships in retirement can form and flourish—not as a continuation of lifelong partnerships but as new connections made with the wisdom and self-knowledge that decades of living provide.

#

Life Long Friends and Other Characters

The reader paused, looked up as if summarizing thoughts in his mind. “Some friends have been in our lives for a lifetime from Seattle, some from our first arrival in Scottsdale in 1996, some happened recently in Sun City, dining and dancing at Dominic’s Bar & Grill. They are not connected to tennis, or pickleball, or the Next Gen Club. They are another key part of our life now in this community and have enriched our lives immeasurably.”

He turned a page...

#

Jim & Pam

“Some friendships transcend typical categories—they become the framework upon which entire chapters of life are constructed. Such is our connection with Jim and Pam, our longest-standing friends who finally followed our path from Seattle to Arizona.”

The relationship between us two couples spans nearly half a century, beginning when Darlene and Pam raised their children together in the Pacific Northwest. Those shared early parenting years forged bonds that would withstand decades of life’s inevitable changes—the children growing up, careers evolving, and eventually, retirement plans taking shape.

“We have countless stories with them through the years,” he continued, his voice warm with recollection. “Pam was Darlene’s and my Good Fairy who put us together. Next to our parents, I owe Pam the most in our lives.”

This casual acknowledgment hints at a profound truth—that Pam’s intuition about our compatibility led to a life partnership that might otherwise never have formed. Such pivotal interventions create debts

of gratitude that can never truly be repaid, only honored through continuing friendship and appreciation.

When Jim and Pam made their transition to Sun City West a few years ago, it represented the closing of a circle that began decades earlier in Seattle. Their beautiful home quickly became a gathering place; its backyard transformed through careful design into something resembling a five-star resort—an oasis of comfort and beauty that perfectly suits their talent for hospitality.

Evening gatherings at their home have established new traditions to replace those left behind in the Northwest. Card games and Mexican Train dominoes stretch late into the night, fueled less by the trash-talking competition between Darlene and Jim. These good-natured exchanges—filled with exaggerated claims and mock outrage over lucky plays—create the soundtrack for companionable hours where the real victory lies in the shared laughter rather than the eventual winner.

Jim's passion for recreational shooting has created another dimension to our friendship—regular excursions into the desert where plastic jugs become targets and conversations flow freely between shots and between friends. These outings combine Jim's extensive knowledge of firearms with opportunities for both of us to reminisce about our shared history. "He teaches, I learn, and we both remember events we've shared for 35 years."

This reference to our professional connection adds another layer to the friendship—Jim managed Planning and Logistics for his family's grocery store chain in North Seattle and Snohomish County, while my company handled IT consulting and systems management for the business. This working relationship provided another context for our developing friendship, creating shared experiences and challenges that deepened our connection beyond purely social interactions. In fact, my life would have been dramatically different were it not for having stumbled into a consulting job whose consequences I could have never imagined.

But that's another story, a story of pain, and resilience, and optimistic adaptation that created an end not even Hollywood could match.

He looked up: "That's the love story of Darlene's and me," he smiled. "Perhaps some other night," he winked.

What makes the presence of Jim and Pam in Arizona particularly meaningful is the element of choice it represents—the decision to maintain proximity despite the many options retirement presents. "How lucky could we be that they followed us to Arizona."

In the rich tapestry of Sun City relationships, Jim and Pam represent something unique—the friends who have known us through multiple chapters of our lives, who carry our history in their memories, and who remain part of our ongoing story. Their presence enriches retirement not just through current companionship but through the perspective they bring from shared decades—a living connection to earlier selves and experiences that might otherwise fade from active memory.

#

Dan & Diane

Technically, D&D are not part of Sun City because they live in Willowbrook, but with Diane, we go back to 1997 when we first moved to Scottsdale and met her and her husband Mitch on a volleyball team. We became extremely close friends, holding her hand through the misery of her divorce and in the joy of watching her flourish when she found a new love with Dan.

After connecting with Diane, Dan became a very close friend. He retired after 40 years at Fry's Grocery as Director of Logistics, then they started a wine bar, then returned to his passion, the food retailing industry, to build the premier cart retrieval service for Arizona retailers. He is a legend in the Arizona Food Marketing Association's industry for his long career, and as a no-handicap golfer and organizer of countless tournaments for his colleagues.

Dan is also the guy who cajoled me into helping with his company's computer system needs; he got me to re-discover my past career as a software developer in the 1980's through 2000's. The software I designed and built for his company continues to run his business to this day, it is my version of Sudoku, and it keeps me actively thinking and hopefully of sharp mind. We like to joke that, together, we have retrieved over two million stray grocery carts throughout Arizona.

We connected with Diane because Darlene, part Canadian herself, has a passion for Canadian accents and had to make first contact when she heard Diane speak. We played volleyball and tennis with her and Mitch until he split for an office romance, an experience we could relate to. Through the pain that she lived through, over the years, we became the closest of friends while she reinvented herself as a single mom of two young children, a professional accountant, and operations manager. Diane is a Canadian from Alberta. In her younger years in Calgary, she worked at Shell Oil full-time while raising two kids, playing professional squash, and studying for a business degree. One heck of a determined lady. Over several years as a single mom, she successfully reinvented herself professionally a number of times while being a committed parent and then a grandma. When she met Dan, she fell in love again with a guy who adores her. She recently retired from her accounting and admin management job at a major golf club, so, once again, she is on a new quest to find the next chapter of her life in music, painting, sports (scratch golfer, pickleball, tennis). We cannot think of Arizona without Diane.

#

Dominic & Debbie

In a community filled with chain restaurants and predictable dining options, Dominic's Italian Bistro stands as a testament to authentic entrepreneurship and genuine passion. Since opening their doors in 2011, Dominic and Debbie have created something far beyond a mere

restaurant—they've established a cultural institution that serves as Sun City's living room several nights a week.

Dominic himself embodies the dual role of restaurateur and entertainer, moving between chatting patrons and center stage with practiced ease. Most evenings find him behind his keyboard, where his musical repertoire spans the classic American songbook with particular emphasis on Rat Pack standards. His renditions of Sinatra, Martin, and Bennett classics draw appreciative crowds that often fill every table, transforming ordinary weeknights into special occasions.

Where Dominic truly distinguishes himself, however, is through his authentic Italian musical heritage. When he shifts into traditional Neapolitan songs, his dialect pronunciation achieves a perfection that transports this Italian-born listener instantly back to the old country. On particularly magical evenings, Dominic sets aside his keyboard to embrace a massive accordion for his signature performance of Jimmy Roselli's "Statte vicin'amme pe'natra sera" (Stay close to me for one more night). The rich, resonant tones he coaxes from this instrument create a sonic experience I haven't encountered since leaving Italy decades ago—a musical authenticity impossible to replicate through recordings or larger venues.

His regular percussionist, Jesus, adds subtle bongo accompaniment that complements rather than competes with Dominic's performances. Their musical synergy creates the perfect backdrop for couples who take to the modest dance floor, transforming into their own versions of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, if only for a few cherished minutes.

While Dominic commands the spotlight, Debbie commands the entire operation with military precision. Her management style becomes most apparent when observed from the high-top tables near the bar, where I witnessed the full scope of her battlefield command. Most of the evening finds her in perpetual motion—adjusting table arrangements, conferring with servers, smoothing over potential issues before diners even notice them.

The most revealing moments, however, come during those brief interludes when she pauses near the kitchen entrance, surveying the dining room with the calculated assessment of a field general. In that position, she made me think of reading about famous generals and their battles: Napoleon at Austerlitz, Patton at the Battle of the Bulge, Hannibal at Cannae, Rommel at El Alamein. Like all of them, she has “the eye” for trouble spots and the calm but instant reflex to go fix it, or send whomever appropriate to ensure victory. Quite a sight. She was only missing Rommel’s riding crop grasped in her hands behind her back, but that too got fixed in time.

Together, Dominic and Debbie have created an establishment that feels simultaneously professional and personal—a place where consistent quality meets genuine warmth. The Italian-American cuisine satisfies without pretension, providing the perfect complement to the musical entertainment and social atmosphere that truly distinguish the venue.

For Sun City residents seeking more than mere sustenance, Dominic’s Italian Bistro offers that increasingly rare combination of authentic food, live entertainment, and an atmosphere conducive to both celebration and conversation. Its presence just minutes from our community represents one of those small but significant blessings that elevate daily life—a place where evenings become events and where the owners’ passion for hospitality transforms dining out into a complete experience for both body and spirit.

#

Doris & Jim

Fate has a peculiar sense of humor in how it brings people together. Our friendship with Doris began, ironically enough, through mutual interest in the same lakefront property—a house that she “stole” from us through the perfectly legitimate process of convincing the seller, an old friend of hers, to sell to her despite our higher offer.

What could have remained a missed opportunity marked by lingering resentment instead blossomed into one of those unexpected friendships that seem to validate Sun City's particular magic. The woman who claimed our dream home eventually became my self-appointed "Fairy of Dawn Lake," generously offering her dock whenever favorable winds called to my sailing instincts. There's a particular warmth in how she seems to genuinely enjoy watching me make a fool of myself on the water—her laughter carrying across the lake surface as I learned to navigate with my kite-propelled hydrofoiling board.

Doris's journey through Sun City included that particularly poignant chapter so many here eventually face—the loss of a spouse, her first love and husband, whose absence created the kind of void that only time and community support can begin to address. For several years, she embraced the independence that followed, first in Prescott, then back to Sun City, creating her rhythms and relationships with a newfound freedom.

When Jim entered her life, the connection transformed both their stories. They discovered a shared love for dancing that became their most visible expression of partnership. Regular appearances at Dominic's Grill, The Elks, Copper Penny, Little Bite of Italy—anywhere offering music and enough floor space—revealed both their enjoyment of movement and their comfort in each other's company. Their dancing reflected their relationship: complementary, adaptable, and characterized by a rhythm that worked for them alone.

Where Doris brought warmth and animation to their partnership, Jim contributed a quieter, more reserved presence. He tended toward listening rather than eager conversation; it initially suggested a personality, but later revealed a learned adaptability of someone whose childhood as a "USAF brat" required new beginnings every two years, teaching him detachment as a survival skill.

That perpetual relocation shaped him in ways both challenging and formative. Growing up in a small Colorado town created one set of so-

cial expectations; being suddenly transplanted to the Anacostia USAF Base in Washington, DC, presented entirely different ones. The rough hazing he encountered in school there might have broken a more fragile spirit, but instead forged in Jim a remarkable determination to persist with his choices once made.

When his father's career took another turn and he moved to Japan with a new partner, Jim and his mother returned to Colorado, beginning yet another chapter of adaptation and rebuilding. This pattern of separation and of creating a home in changing circumstances, adapted him to over thirty years of bachelor life. The physical manifestation of Jim's disciplined approach to life appears in his remarkably fit appearance—"buff" by any standard, particularly for his age. His commitment to regular gym sessions and his evident enjoyment in walking Ellie, Doris's dog, around the lake speak to someone who commits to physical fitness.

One evening with Rich and Paula unlocked something in Jim's usually reserved demeanor—perhaps the right combination of comfortable setting and receptive listeners created space for him to share more of his story than usual. Whatever the catalyst, the man who emerged in that conversation revealed both the habit of thirty years of being single and the genuine joy he found in the "matched groove" with Doris.

Yet even relationships formed in this chapter of life remain subject to changing circumstances and priorities. Jim's recent decision to relocate to Florida reflects another universal theme in our community—the pull of family connections, particularly when grandchildren enter the equation. His daughter's family created a gravitational force that ultimately proved stronger than the bonds he'd formed here in Arizona.

This transition brought its own unexpected grace, as Doris welcomed back a version of the independence she had previously known and enjoyed. Their relationship has evolved rather than ended—phone

calls and texts maintain a connection while allowing each the freedom to shape their lives no longer together.

There's wisdom in how they've navigated this change—the recognition that relationships too, sometimes need to come and go. At our stage of life, we understand that calling things exactly as they are, without elaborate justifications or unnecessary drama, represents its own form of emotional maturity, letting new chapters unfold while remembering the best of what was shared.

#

Rich & Paula

If there's one thing everyone knows about Rich and Paula, it's that they love to dance. This simple fact bears repeating because it's not merely an activity they enjoy—it's an art form they've mastered and a metaphor for how they move through life. At any social gathering with music, they create a gravitational pull on the dance floor that draws admiring glances and occasionally inspires others to attempt similar moves, usually with less success. The gravitational pull is not just a figure of speech: Rich is a big guy; by comparison, Paula looks like a featherweight. When they dance, you have the impression of watching a happy smiling laughing spinning moon, totally slave to his gravitational force. "It's like watching a moon circle Jupiter," as one observer aptly described it—his size and stability creating the perfect counterpoint to her fluid grace and energy.

Paula brings to these performances a remarkable youthfulness that defies conventional expectations of aging. Her stylish dresses—always perfectly chosen to complement both her figure and the occasion—could easily belong to someone decades younger, yet she wears them with an authenticity that eliminates any hint of trying too hard. The effect is simply someone comfortable in her own skin, enjoying the body she's maintained through disciplined care over the years.

My connection with Paula harbors an intriguing possibility of paths crossed long before Sun City. During my software consulting business days in Seattle around 1982, I attended the Comdex Computer Show, where Paula was managing industry show logistics for Borland International. That year featured a particularly memorable party for Borland distributors held in the Las Vegas Museum of Natural History—an inspired setting where, along with tech industry pioneers, I got to mingle beneath reconstructed dinosaur skeletons, creating an unsubtle juxtaposition of emerging technology against extinct giants. While we can't confirm with certainty that we were both present at this singular event, the possibility adds an interesting dimension to our current friendship.

Rich brings to their partnership an impressive range of talents and interests that reflect his approach to life—when something captures his attention, he pursues mastery rather than mere competence. His photography transcends hobby status, approaching professional quality through careful study of technique and equipment. His woodworking reveals similar dedication, producing pieces with craftsman-level precision and artistry. As a golfer, he approaches the game with the same disciplined focus that characterizes all his endeavors.

Our musical connection has created some of my most enjoyable moments in Sun City. Rich plays guitar with the confident touch of someone who has spent countless hours with the instrument. Our jam sessions, especially when enhanced by the professional-level skills of our friend Jack (of the local professional duo “Jack and BJ”) or Rich's California friend Gary with his years of professional band experience, create those rare moments when time seems to suspend in the pure pleasure of collaborative creation.

Behind Rich's affable, easygoing presence lies a complex personal history that occasionally surfaces in conversations. His upbringing in a Mormon family left him with complicated feelings about religion and the culture it created around him. Childhood poverty formed another

formative influence—his father’s frugality contrasting with his mother’s generosity as she ran a small diner where Rich began working at age 12, a makeshift crib in the office serving as his childcare when needed.

Though he attended Brigham Young University, Rich developed a critical perspective on Mormon culture that led to his eventual separation from the faith. “I know it from the inside,” he’ll say when the subject arises, his tone suggesting volumes of unshared experiences that shaped his worldview and perhaps contributed to what one friend described as his “woke” perspective on social issues.

Water skiing at Lake Powell became Rich’s passionate escape for years—a high-energy pursuit he approached with characteristic thoroughness, investing in top equipment and making the substantial commitment to transport their RV and boat to Lake Powell every other weekend during the season. The expense of maintaining these adventures never deterred him during financially successful periods, simply because it meant creating memorable experiences for family and friends.

Las Vegas serves as another recurring destination in Rich and Paula’s life, a place where they indulge their appreciation for jazz, Rich’s enjoyment of gambling, and Paula’s shopping at a boutique run by a gay couple whose fashion sense they particularly trust. These periodic excursions reflect their comfort with a California-influenced lifestyle that embraces pleasures without puritanical constraints—skinny dipping, hot tub socializing, occasional cannabis, and a generally relaxed attitude toward bodies and their enjoyments.

Their home reflects their mutual love of entertaining and cooking—another arena where their “all in” approach manifests in studied technique and quality ingredients. Dinner invitations to their house promise culinary adventures prepared with the same attention to detail they bring to their dancing, photography, or music.

Rich’s technical interests recently led him to study professional sound systems when helping design a recording booth for Harold, a

friend of Dominic's who operates a recording studio. This project, like so many of his undertakings, received the full benefit of his methodical research and implementation, not just doing enough to get by, but learning thoroughly enough to do it right.

Together, Rich and Paula embody a particular approach to retirement—one that views this chapter not as a winding down but as an opportunity to pursue passions with increased focus and freedom. Their energy, engagement, and evident enjoyment of life's pleasures add a distinctive note to our community's composition—a reminder that the later chapters can be among the most vibrant when approached with curiosity, discipline, and a willingness to keep learning new steps for the dance.

#

Jack & BJ

Few figures in Sun City's musical landscape command the same respect and affection as Jack and BJ. Their performances at Dominic's Italian Bistro and venues across the Valley have transformed countless ordinary evenings into memorable celebrations.

Jack, known affectionately as "Jackie Shoes" to regulars, possesses what must surely be Arizona's most extensive collection of flamboyant footwear. What began as a simple stage costume element has evolved into a signature spectacle that audiences now anticipate. For every event, every theme, every special occasion, Jack unveils the perfect pair—sequined loafers catching stage lights during Sinatra classics, diamond-studded patent leather for Motown numbers, crushed velvet slippers for ballads, or technicolor platforms when disco takes over the dance floor. He frequently unveils them at one table at a time with an air of mystery, seeking compliments and amazement.

"Wait till you see what he's wearing tonight," has become the whispered excitement at tables as showtime approaches. These aren't merely accessories but visual manifestations of Jack's understanding that enter-

tainment extends beyond music to encompass every aspect of performance. Longtime fans maintain an unofficial tally of his collection, debating whether they've spotted repeats or genuine debuts when particularly spectacular pairs make an appearance.

Like his seemingly bottomless shoe wardrobe, Jack's musical repertoire appears inexhaustible. His fingers move across the keyboard with practiced ease, whether playing jazz standards, Rat Pack, classic rock, romantic ballads, or contemporary hits. Years of reading audiences have given him a perfect instinct to sense a room's collective mood and select precisely the right musical direction to elevate the energy.

Where Jack brings instrumental virtuosity and visual flair, BJ contributes a voice that stops conversations and turns heads even in the most crowded rooms. Her vocal range allows her to move effortlessly from sultry torch songs that barely rise above a whisper to powerful ones that demonstrate why regular patrons constantly urge Dominic to "turn up BJ's mic!" Her interpretations of classic female vocalists—from Ella Fitzgerald to Adele—carry the rare quality of honoring the originals while adding something distinctly her own.

What elevates their performances beyond mere technical skill is the evident chemistry between them—a partnership built on thousands of shared stages and the wordless communication that develops between longtime collaborators. With nearly invisible mutual cues, they create performances that feel both polished and spontaneous.

Beyond their musical gifts, Jack and BJ bring a generous spirit to their interactions with audiences. Between sets, they circulate through the room, greeting regulars by name, accepting song requests, and making newcomers feel immediately welcomed. This approach transforms the traditional performer-audience dynamic into something closer to a gathering of friends sharing an evening of music.

For Sun City residents, especially those who've developed friendships with the duo over years of regular attendance, Jack and BJ represent something precious—professional-caliber entertainment acces-

sible without downtown Phoenix traffic. Their presence elevates ordinary weeknights into occasions worth dressing up for, worth inviting friends to join, worth stepping onto the dance floor despite knees that might protest tomorrow.

#

Barb & Jeff

Life sometimes rewrites our carefully planned scripts, transforming temporary visits into extended chapters and casual acquaintances into welcome support systems. Barb and Jeff's story embodies this unexpected transition—seasonal visitors whose circumstances suddenly transformed them into semi-permanent residents of our Sun City community.

Their established pattern mirrored many East Coast snowbirds—dividing their year between the distinctive seasonal pleasures of Cape Cod and Arizona's reliable winter sunshine. This rhythm served them well, offering summers of boating along Massachusetts' iconic shoreline and winters of desert recreation far from New England's snow and ice. Their Sun City residence represented a pleasant winter sanctuary, a place to escape the worst of Cape Cod's weather while maintaining their true center in the community they'd built over decades.

This carefully balanced arrangement underwent dramatic revision during what should have been a routine trip to Hawaii to visit their son stationed there with the Army. The joyful family reunion turned suddenly serious when Jeff experienced a heart attack—a medical emergency made more complicated by occurring thousands of miles from their primary healthcare providers and familiar support systems.

The road to recovery presented a geographic dilemma that many retirement-age travelers fear but few face: their Cape Cod home stood prohibitively far away, the lengthy flight representing an unacceptable risk for someone in Jeff's condition. Hawaii, despite its paradisiacal

reputation, offered neither long-term accommodations nor the established medical relationships essential for ongoing cardiac care.

Sun City suddenly transformed from seasonal residence to medical haven—the only viable option offering both appropriate healthcare resources and a familiar living space. Their Arizona doctors stepped into primary roles, while their winter home became an extended base of operations. “Marooned in the desert” became their good-natured description of this unplanned extended stay.

Throughout this medical journey, their thoughts have remained tethered to Cape Cod’s shores and the beloved boat awaiting their return. Conversations inevitably drift toward summer plans despite uncertain timelines—the Cape Cod light on water, the familiar harbors and maritime routines, the distinctive New England community they’ve temporarily left behind. These aren’t mere reminiscences but active planning for an eventual homecoming, maintaining the connection to a life temporarily paused.

While navigating this unexpected extension of their Arizona residence, Barb and Jeff have gradually expanded their connections beyond casual seasonal acquaintances. The circle surrounding Rich and Paula has been particularly welcome, incorporating them into gatherings that offer both social engagement and emotional support during a challenging time. Similarly, evenings at Dominic’s have become not just entertainment but community connection, each familiar face and conversation helping transform their unexpected circumstances into something approaching normalcy.

As they await medical clearance for the long journey back to Cape Cod, Barb and Jeff continue to embrace their expanded Sun City connections. Their experience reveals how quickly the distinction between visitor and resident can blur when circumstances demand, and how community connections formed initially as casual winter acquaintances can deepen into meaningful support networks when unexpected challenges arise.

#

Chris & Jean

While not Sun City residents themselves, Chris and Jean have become familiar fixtures in our social circle through the gravitational pull of shared interests and common friends. They cross the invisible boundary between retirement communities with comfortable regularity, drawn by the particular combination of music and camaraderie found at Dominic's Italian Bistro and the welcoming atmosphere of Rich and Paula's legendary parties.

On the dance floor at Dominic's, they move with the synchronized ease of longtime partners who have found their collaborative rhythm both in steps and in life. Their dancing reflects the ability to move together through changing tempos and styles with mutual awareness and enjoyment.

Chris brings to conversations the particular engagement of someone whose sales career developed not just professional skills but a genuine interest in others' stories and perspectives. His questions reveal curiosity rather than mere politeness, creating exchanges that often uncover unexpected connections or shared experiences. This conversational gift makes him a welcome company at gatherings where meaningful interaction matters more than surface socializing.

Jean complements this energy with the attentive listening and practical empathy that marked her nursing career. The same professional qualities that once reassured patients now make her a valued presence in social settings—the ability to read unspoken concerns, to offer support without intrusion, and to maintain both compassion and boundaries in complex situations. Together, they create conversations that leave participants feeling both heard and enriched.

Their family connections have taken them far beyond Arizona's borders, with perhaps their most meaningful journey involving a trip to Malaysia to visit their son during his Army deployment. This Asian

visit was ultimately connected to another heritage journey as they extended their travels to include Italy, searching specifically for the village of Luzzi near Naples, where family histories suggested ancestral roots. Such expeditions reflect their understanding that retirement offers not just leisure but opportunities to deepen connections to both present family and historical origins.

The entrepreneurial spirit that guided Chris through his sales career has found new expression in their retirement—a Cottonwood Airbnb property that serves triple duty as occasional personal retreat, family gathering place, and income-generating investment. This thoughtful balance of practical and personal considerations demonstrates their approach to this life chapter, finding ways to combine pleasure, family connection, and continued productivity.

In conversations in Rich and Paula's backyard or during breaks between dances at Dominic's, Chris and Jean bring a particular quality of engagement that enhances any gathering. Neither dominating discussions nor fading into the background, they contribute personal insights while showing genuine interest in others' experiences.

#

Rich & Barb

It can get confusing, "too many Rich's around here, Rich the husband, Richy the brother, Rich the cousin," Paula would say. But the tapestry of connections that underlie Sun City's social life often includes threads that began elsewhere. Rich and Barb exemplify this particular type of connection—their presence in our circle beginning with Rich's relationship to Paula as cousins but evolving far beyond simple family obligation to become a part of our extended social group.

His career working reconnaissance systems represents a fascinating chapter of America's Cold War and post-Cold War technological development—work that required both brilliant technical capability and the discretion to rarely discuss specifics. Now retired, he occasionally

shares carefully declassified anecdotes that offer tantalizing glimpses into a career spent creating systems that quite literally changed how nations monitor each other.

His transfer from California to Arizona over five decades ago gave Rich and Barb a front-row seat to one of America's most dramatic urban transformations. They witnessed the Valley of the Sun's evolution from a relatively modest southwestern city into the nation's fifth-largest metropolitan area—a transformation that brought both exciting development and challenging growing pains. Their perspectives on this change provide valuable context for newer arrivals, offering insights into neighborhood histories, development patterns, and the complex factors that shaped the region we now call home.

Barb complements Rich's technical background with her own warm practicality and engaging conversation style. Where his career required careful boundaries around information sharing, she brings an openness and direct engagement that creates immediate connections with newcomers to any gathering. This balanced partnership works particularly well in social settings, allowing conversations to flow naturally between technical topics and more personal exchanges without awkward transitions.

Their regular presence at Rich and Paula's legendary table—whether configured for intimate gatherings of eight or expanded for larger celebrations of sixteen or more—adds a particular quality to these events. As family members who have transcended mere obligatory attendance to become genuine friends to everyone present, they bridge the sometimes-awkward gap between relatives and friends that can occur at mixed gatherings. Their consistent presence creates continuity across different social events, helping newcomers integrate more easily into established groups.

What distinguishes Rich and Barb from merely pleasant acquaintances is their genuine engagement with others around the table. Rather than limiting conversations to familiar topics with familiar

faces, they demonstrate curiosity about new members of the circle, drawing out interesting stories and perspectives from even the most reticent participants. This intentional inclusion transforms what might otherwise be separate conversations happening at the same table into genuine group interactions where everyone feels valued.

Their longtime residency in the Valley gives them a particularly valuable perspective on its evolution and current state. Observations about how specific areas have changed, recommendations for under-appreciated local attractions, and institutional memory about community developments that newer residents might never know enrich conversations and help others better understand the complex region we inhabit.

Despite having their own extensive social networks developed over decades in the area, Rich and Barb maintain their regular participation in our Sun City gatherings—crossing geographical boundaries with the same ease with which they cross the sometimes-artificial divide between family and friends. Their consistent presence at Rich and Paula's events, whether intimate dinners or expansive parties, demonstrates that chosen connections can become as meaningful as inherited ones when nurtured through genuine interest and consistent participation.

In a retirement community where many residents arrived relatively recently from elsewhere, having access to the perspectives of longtime locals like Rich and Barb provides valuable context and continuity. Their willingness to share both historical insights and current recommendations enriches our collective understanding of the region beyond Sun City's boundaries, helping transform geographical residence into genuine belonging within the broader Southwestern landscape we all now call home.

#

Larry R.

Every creative pursuit benefits from a mentor, and in my unlikely late-life romance with the harmonica, that guide has been Larry. Our paths crossed during what Darlene likes to call my “midlife music crisis,” though considerably past what most would consider midlife. In reality, it was a bug I contracted at age twelve that made me experiment and try self-teaching on and off most of my life, with no progress.

Larry’s musical credentials are impeccable—an accomplished professional who performs regularly with the Lone Mountain Arizona Band, bringing blues harmonica techniques to their eclectic repertoire. What truly distinguishes him in harmonica circles, however, is his annual teaching at SPAH (the Society for the Preservation and Advancement of the Harmonica), a gathering where the world’s most accomplished players converge to celebrate this pocket-sized instrument. When Larry mentions casually that he “taught a workshop with Charlie McCoy last year,” those familiar with harmonica royalty understand the significance.

His journey to harmonica mastery followed a considerably different path from most musicians. Originally from Canada’s Okanagan region in British Columbia, Larry spent decades in real estate development for several major ski resorts. Photographs in his home reveal a younger man carving pristine powder on slopes that would intimidate most recreational skiers. Though physical limitations have kept him off the snow these past few years, his eyes still light up when conversation turns to skiing—perfect powder days, challenging terrain, and the particular quiet that falls over mountain landscapes after fresh snowfall.

The transition from ski industry executive to professional musician represents just one facet of Larry’s remarkable reinvention in retirement. When he speaks of his earlier career, it’s with appreciation rather than nostalgia—someone who values what was but holds no desire to return to it. He seems to have mastered that elusive art of carrying forward only what serves while leaving behind what doesn’t.

As a teacher, Larry combines technical precision with surprising patience. “Your embouchure needs work,” he might observe while demonstrating the proper lip position for a clean bend note. His demonstrations make the seemingly impossible suddenly attainable—at least in theory. The gap between his effortless execution and my clumsy attempts provides consistent humility.

Despite my irregular practice habits (which Larry surely detects within seconds of my first notes during lessons), he maintains the encouraging demeanor of someone who understands that for adult students, enjoyment must precede discipline. When I’m satisfied with merely playing along to whatever Pandora serves up on a country station, he accepts this limited ambition without judgment. He brought me from the total incompetence of my youth to the “B minus” level that gives me the pleasure of playing for myself enough to call it playing.

The most memorable advice Larry has offered wasn’t about hand position or breathing technique but about harmonious household relations: “Do not practice at the cat,” he instructed with the seriousness of someone who had learned this lesson personally. He added with equal gravity, “They don’t like it, and it’s not fair.” After a thoughtful pause: “Same goes for Darlene...”

This practical wisdom has become my harmonica mantra. Though we lack felines in our home, I cannot pick up my Special 20 without hearing Larry’s warning. It may be the most valuable skill I’ve acquired in my musical adventure.

My harmonica playing may not be something Larry would list among his teaching triumphs, but our connection has added an unexpected dimension to my Sun City life, proving that even in retirement, new skills and relationships develop in surprising ways. Though my technique remains permanently novice, the joy of coaxing even simple melodies from this deceptively complex instrument provides satisfaction that transcends technical mastery.

In Larry, I found not just a teacher but a model for how retirement can become an opportunity for reinvention rather than retreat—a time to develop talents that busy careers might have left dormant.

#

Dave The Harmonica Player

Even at 93, Dave commands the karaoke stage at The Speakeasy most evenings, his distinctive black leather cowboy hat making him instantly recognizable to regulars. While others clutch microphones, Dave cradles his harmonica, coaxing sounds from the instrument that showcase decades of practice and natural talent. His repertoire spans classic country, blues, and occasionally even rock standards, each transformed through the unique voice of his harmonica.

As a fellow player struggling with the instrument's challenges, I find myself particularly envious of the rich, expressive tones he produces with such apparent ease. There's a depth and confidence in his playing that speaks to a lifetime of musical understanding that can't be taught in a few lessons. Dave represents that special category of performers who inspire both admiration and a touch of good-natured envy in those of us still working to master the basics of what he makes look effortless.

When he closes his eyes during a particularly soulful passage, the years seem to fall away, revealing the timeless connection between musician and music that transcends age. In Dave's hands, the humble harmonica becomes not just an accompaniment but the star of the show, proving that some passions only grow richer with the passing years.

#

At The American Legion Post

The American Legion represents more than just another social venue in Sun City—it stands as a sanctuary where military service

forms the invisible bond between patrons of vastly different backgrounds and life stories. Its unassuming exterior gives little hint of the large and complex social ecosystem thriving within—a place where service, sacrifice, and camaraderie blend with the more ordinary pleasures of affordable drinks and occasional entertainment.

The Post's atmosphere strikes that delicate balance between bar and memorial—slot machines line one wall (their proceeds supporting veterans' programs), while service flags and memorial plaques occupy another. The small dance floor comes alive on weekend evenings when live music draws members and guests from across Sun City, though many regulars seem equally content to claim their usual barstools and observe the proceedings quietly, lost in their thoughts.

What distinguishes the Legion from other gathering spots is the nightly ritual that momentarily transforms the social buzz into something more solemn. Conversations pause, all stand, glasses are raised, and voices join in the toast that connects past to present:

"To those that went, to those that are there still, to those that have not returned, and to those that never will, Cheers."

In that brief ceremony, the true purpose of the Legion reveals itself beneath the casual surface—a place where service is remembered and honored without fanfare or fuss.

Summer, one of the bartenders, moves behind the counter with the focused efficiency that prompted my nickname for her: "Captain." Her ability to simultaneously pour drinks, ring up tabs, maintain conversations with multiple patrons, and keep a mental inventory of who needs what next suggests she could indeed command a ship with similar precision. She accepted the title with amused grace, occasionally responding with a mock salute that acknowledges the ongoing joke between us.

Bill and Josie represent the Legion's most welcoming presence—a couple we initially met frequently at The Copper Penny who have since become fixtures around the Legion's pool tables. Their approach to newcomers demonstrates that particular gift of making instantly clear

that space exists at the table, that conversation is welcome but not required, and that skill level matters far less than willingness to participate. Their genuine interest in others creates small islands of inclusion around them wherever they go.

Not all Legion patrons share this outgoing nature. Along the bar, particularly during weekday afternoons, sit the quieter members—men and occasionally women whose silence seems to contain volumes of experience most civilians can barely comprehend. Their solitary drinks and minimal conversation suggest interior landscapes still being navigated decades after whatever service shaped them. These silent sentinels maintain a dignified presence, neither seeking attention nor entirely avoiding connection, just processing memories at their own pace in a place where such reflection is understood and respected.

At the opposite end of the social spectrum are the Legion's party enthusiasts—the gregarious veterans who treat every gathering as a celebration of survival and continued fellowship.

My peculiar contribution to Legion traditions involves pressing for the renewal of a particular political commentary dating back to 1973: The Hanoi Jane urinal targets that allow patrons to express lingering sentiments about a controversial figure from the Vietnam era. In my early visits, I could not “go kiss Jane” as I had done for many years because most targets were missing. My request to reinstall this tradition was met with quiet approval from longtime members who remembered that good traditions should not die.

In this environment of mixed solemnity and celebration, Sun City's veterans and those who appreciate their service find common ground that transcends the usual social divisions of politics, background, or economic status. The Legion offers that increasingly rare space where shared respect for service creates connection without requiring uniformity of thought—a microcosm of what a functional community might look like in a society that often seems to have forgotten how to disagree without division.

Marty's Gang

The author stopped looking at a new chapter page in his folder, as if surprised by a new detail. “Sometimes you have to step away to see the forest from the trees. I see it now. The friends we have come to nickname Marty’s Gang also have another thing in common. They were all part of our life in Scottsdale from 2000 to 2010 before we moved to Park City, Utah, for ten years. They were all part of the Scottsdale Sea and Ski Club, with whom we used to party on Friday nights in those long-ago working years. They became Marty’s Gang only later, when gradually they migrated to retire in Sun City and surroundings, and Marty became the magnet to bring us all together again.”

#

Marty & Mark

Some friendships mark turning points in our lives—relationships that arrive at critical moments and alter our trajectory in ways we could never have anticipated. Marty represents exactly this kind of pivotal connection, one whose significance has only deepened with passing years.

“Friendship with Marty goes back to 2001, when we were playing Monday night tennis in Scottsdale with this Scottsdale Sea & Ski Club crowd,” the reader explained, referencing those early days when shared athletic pursuits created the initial framework for connection. These Monday gatherings brought together an eclectic group united by dual passions for tennis and skiing—seasonal sports that attracted versatile enthusiasts comfortable on both courts and slopes.

What began as casual sports camaraderie evolved into something far more consequential during a period of professional transition. Marty was instrumental in helping me get a job in 2007 with the Maricopa

College Small Business Development Center. In many ways, she changed my life at a time when I needed it.

This simple statement hints at deeper circumstances—a moment of need for reinvention when previous paths had closed. Whatever the specific challenges, Marty's intervention arrived with perfect timing, opening doors that might otherwise have remained invisible. Such moments of practical assistance during vulnerable periods create bonds of gratitude that transcend ordinary friendship.

Marty was a truly close friend that I could not do without; she is an ongoing presence whose value remains undiminished by time.

Mark entered this established friendship later, bringing his own distinctive background and skills. His career path reveals someone accustomed to adapting to circumstances and finding practical solutions to complex problems—first as a Navy Seabee project manager, then as the owner of his construction company.

When a serious accident created obstacles for his construction business, Mark pivoted yet again, accepting a position with the federal government in Iowa that would secure his retirement. This willingness to relocate and reinvent himself to ensure long-term security demonstrates practical wisdom and perseverance—qualities that make him a valuable friend.

Mark's extensive experience with construction projects, large and small, translated naturally into becoming a "handyman extraordinaire" in retirement—someone capable of addressing practically any home maintenance challenge with skill and creativity. This practical capability complements Marty's more creative and administrative strengths, creating a partnership of complementary talents.

Together, Marty and Mark have become "the glue of Marty's Gang"—a social circle significant enough to warrant its own named identity.

Though they may not be Sun City residents themselves, their presence in this narrative highlights how retirement communities exist

within broader networks of friendship that often predate and extend beyond official boundaries. These connections provide essential continuity between different life chapters, linking past and present identities through shared history and ongoing evolution.

In Marty and Mark's story, we see friendship's transformative potential—how relationships that begin through casual shared interests can develop into life-changing connections that provide support during critical transitions and continue enriching our lives through their steady, reliable presence.

#

Kathy M.

Some friendships serve as constants through changing life seasons, providing continuity as careers conclude, addresses change, and new chapters begin. Kathy represents this kind of enduring connection—a relationship spanning decades that began on Scottsdale tennis courts and has enriched our Arizona experience ever since.

"Another long-standing friend from Scottsdale since 2000," the reader explained, placing her among those pivotal connections made during our early years in Arizona. "We used to play Monday Night Tennis with other members of the Scottsdale Sea & Ski Club."

These Monday gatherings created the initial foundation for friendships that would far outlast the tennis that brought them into being. While many casual sports acquaintances fade when shared play concludes, relationships with genuine substance find ways to evolve beyond their original context.

During her professional years, Kathy worked as an independent sales representative—a career that combined business acumen with interpersonal skills while offering the geographical flexibility to pursue her passion for alpine skiing. "She skied more top-end resorts in the US than I can name," the reader noted, suggesting both the extensiveness

of her skiing experience and the enthusiastic way she must have shared these adventures in conversation.

This combination of professional independence and athletic pursuit reflects something essential about Kathy's character—a self-directed approach to life that values both achievement and enjoyment, refusing to sacrifice either for the conventional security of more predictable paths.

Retirement for Kathy didn't mean withdrawal from adventure but rather its expansion into new territories. "In retirement, she took up international travel with a vengeance, an avid traveler who has seen more of the world than I could ever keep track of."

This vivid description evokes a woman constantly expanding her horizons—someone whose passport pages fill with stamps while her mind collects experiences from disparate cultures and landscapes. She is Carmen Sandiego to me. "When I hear 'where in the world is Carmen Sandiego' I cannot avoid thinking of Kathy".

What makes Kathy's wanderlust particularly interesting is how it balances with her creative talents focused on home and environment. Kathy's artistic bent for painting, decorating, remodeling, and more, and the exploration of the world's diversity alongside the careful crafting of personal space, suggests someone who finds inspiration abroad but expresses it intimately, creating surroundings that reflect both aesthetic sensibility and accumulated experience.

Years of independent life reveal something fundamental about her approach to life—a woman who makes choices based on internal compass rather than external expectations.

Despite her far-flung adventures and self-sufficient nature, Kathy has maintained the connections that matter most. A close friend over many years who made our life in Arizona a joyful experience.

In Kathy's story, we see another variation of how retirement can represent expansion rather than contraction—the opportunity to more fully pursue passions glimpsed during working years while maintaining

the relationships that provide continuity and meaning across life's chapters.

#

Al & Trudi

The threads that connect our Sun City tapestry often begin earlier and elsewhere, weaving their way through previous chapters of life before finding their place in our desert community. Al and Trudy represent another strand from the Scottsdale Sea & Ski Club—that surprisingly fertile ground for relationships that we discovered in the early 2000's.

Al's professional background as a career stockbroker provided him with both financial expertise and the particular conversational gifts that successful brokers develop—the ability to discuss complex concepts in accessible terms, to listen attentively to concerns, and to offer ideas without imposing a viewpoint. These qualities that served clients well throughout his working years now benefit friends who value his perspective on investment strategies and market trends.

"Al was instrumental in helping me get my realtor license relocated to Arizona after returning from Utah," the reader explained, highlighting another instance where professional knowledge shared generously created lasting bonds of appreciation. This practical assistance during a career transition period—navigating the bureaucratic requirements for license transfer between states—represents the kind of meaningful support that transforms casual acquaintance into genuine friendship.

In retirement, Al has redirected the energy once focused on financial markets toward community service, particularly through the Sun City Elks Lodge. His involvement in their various charitable fundraising initiatives reveals a commitment to purpose beyond personal enjoyment—the desire to improve circumstances for others less fortunate while building community connections.

Trudy complements Al's analytical approach with her distinctive warmth, demonstrating what many describe as wearing the "Canadian Nice" label perfectly." As an expatriate who chose American residency, Trudy brings the particular perspective of someone who appreciates both her homeland's values and her adopted country's opportunities. This dual cultural awareness often manifests in the ability to see situations from multiple angles and to mediate different viewpoints with diplomatic skill.

Together, Al and Trudy have established themselves as "great additions to any party"—the kind of guests whose presence elevates gatherings through their conversational contributions, genuine interest in others, and the harmonious energy they bring.

Their active involvement with the Sun City Elks connects them to one of our community's most significant service organizations—a group that combines social enjoyment with meaningful charitable impact. Through fundraising events, the Elks channel resources toward veterans' programs, children's services, and community improvement projects.

Al and Trudy's participation in these efforts speaks to their understanding that retirement communities thrive not just through recreation and relaxation, but through purposeful engagement with causes larger than individual interests.

In the unfolding story of friendships that shape our retirement experience, Al and Trudy stand as examples of how connections formed through shared interests during earlier life chapters can evolve into relationships that enrich our later years in unexpected ways—providing not just companionship but practical support, intellectual stimulation, and models of engaged citizenship within our chosen community.

#

Terry & Marilyn

Terry and Marilyn were not part of the Scottsdale Sea and Ski Club, but represent the kind of serendipitous connection of people who entered our social circle through unexpected intersections.

Their integration into what we know as “Marty’s Gang” demonstrates how retirement communities often facilitate relationship building across traditional social boundaries, where new connections form based simply on mutual interests and compatible personalities.

Terry brings to our circle his passionate engagement with pickleball—not as a casual participant but as a dedicated competitive high-end player who approaches the sport with strategic thinking and athletic commitment. His involvement with pickleball coincided with the activity’s explosive growth in retirement communities across the Southwest, transforming from a niche pastime to a dominant recreational pursuit.

Watching Terry on the pickleball court reveals someone who has mastered the game’s unique demands—the quick reflexes required for “kitchen” play, the tactical awareness of positioning, and the distinctive paddle techniques that differ significantly from tennis. His competitive spirit manifests not through intimidation but through focused preparation and consistent improvement—the approach of someone who respects both opponents and the game itself.

While Terry’s energies flow toward pickleball, Marilyn finds her athletic expression in bowling—another activity where individual skill contributes to team success. Her commitment to competitive bowling requires both precision technique and mental discipline, developing the consistency that distinguishes serious players from recreational participants.

Beyond her bowling prowess, Marilyn brings to gatherings a sociable warmth that helps integrate newcomers and maintain conversational flow. Her pleasant demeanor creates space for others to express themselves while also contributing her perspectives.

Though they arrived later and through different channels than many of our long-term Arizona friends, Terry and Marilyn demonstrate the magic that happens when retirement communities form relationships around shared activities and compatible energies.

Our Wheatridge Neighbors

The reader stopped as if in thought. “It is strange: Over the years, we have seldom experienced a close connection with neighbors. That was never the experience in Redmond, Washington, or Scottsdale, Arizona, or in Park City, Utah. We made many friends in all those places, but very seldom with neighbors. That changed when we lived on Wheatridge Drive in Sun City. And even there, it happened close to the end of our stay there. But it was lucky that we connected with friends who stuck with us despite the now slightly greater distance. You never know when luck strikes.” He flipped a page and continued...

#

Terry & Bonnie

The tapestry of connections that enriches retirement communities often includes threads from unexpected places—people whose life experiences differ dramatically from our own yet who become meaningful presences in our daily landscape. Terry and Bonnie represent this kind of diverse connection.

Terry approaches pickleball not as a casual retirement pastime but as a serious athletic pursuit, demonstrating the high-level skills that come from dedicated practice and competitive spirit. His approach to the sport mirrors his approach to earlier life endeavors—focused, strategic, and aimed at excellence rather than mere participation.

His professional journey took an unusual turn when he achieved early retirement at just fifty, stepping away from a corporate career with chemical giant BASF to embrace entrepreneurial challenges. Rather than settling into leisure, he channeled his energy into building and operating Holiday Inn motels, including a property in Heber, Utah, not far from Park City.

This geographical connection creates a shared reference point in our friendship—conversations about Park City’s evolution, the quality of snow in different seasons, and the transformation of what was once a mining town into a world-class resort destination. These mutual memories of Utah landscapes and experiences form a conversational bridge despite our different paths through that shared geography.

Bonnie brings her own remarkable story to our circle—one that includes a pioneer role as the first woman admitted to the Marine Corps. This groundbreaking achievement speaks volumes about her determination and willingness to challenge established boundaries. The irony that this tough former Marine “certainly kicks ass but cannot swim” adds a humanizing dimension to her impressive background—a reminder that even trailblazers have unexpected vulnerabilities.

For many years, Bonnie embraced her identity as “an unapologetic happy smoker,” approaching her habit with the same forthright attitude she brings to all aspects of life. The eventual conclusion of this chapter—”but all good things come to an end”—suggests a pragmatic acceptance of changing circumstances rather than regret for past choices.

Our connection took an unexpected turn when Bonnie surprised me by purchasing my novel, “The Yoda Machine”—not merely as a gesture of friendship but as a genuine interest in the work itself. Her subsequent request for a dedication transformed a trivial commercial transaction into something more meaningful—a validation of creative effort that transcended the 4 cents royalty I had not expected to earn.

“How nice! – a real sale,” I noted with self-deprecating humor. “Part of my total royalties of 67 cents is due to her. I love my fans.”

Beneath Bonnie’s tough exterior and direct manner lies a grandmother’s heart deeply invested in family continuity. Her daughter’s experiences with miscarriages “weigh heavy on her mind”—a private sorrow she occasionally shares, revealing the vulnerable places that exist within even the strongest personalities.

Her expressed interest in contributing to my current writing project represents another dimension of her supportive nature, offering involvement and encouragement for creative endeavors she values. “Bless her patience,” I noted, acknowledging the particular generosity of attention in a world where time represents our most precious and limited resource.

Terry and Bonnie remind us that retirement communities at their best become gathering places for people whose diverse life experiences—military service, corporate careers, entrepreneurial ventures, creative pursuits—create conversational chemistry impossible elsewhere. Their friendship enriches our Sun City experience not by mirroring our backgrounds but by expanding our understanding of the many paths that lead to this shared destination.

#

Tammy & Jimmy

Some of the most delightful connections in our Sun City experience come through chance encounters and unexpected introductions. Our friendship with Tammy and Jimmy began this way—a fortunate crossing of paths that has enriched our social circle in ways we couldn’t have anticipated.

We met Tammy at a neighborhood Christmas party, and she and Darlene immediately found a connection. In our retirement community, where the average age trend is in the mid-70s, Tammy’s recent 60th birthday was notable—”She is a kid around here,” as many noted with a mixture of affection and mild envy.

What impressed us immediately about Tammy was her vibrant energy and genuine warmth—qualities that make her a natural connector in our community. She quickly formed a walking partnership with Darlene, with their regular circuits around our neighborhood lake becoming a regular event. These walks serve multiple purposes—physical ex-

ercise certainly, but equally important, the chance for one-on-one conversation and developing friendship.

Tammy's defining characteristic might be her instinctive helpfulness—a readiness to assist anyone in need that appears to operate without calculation or limitation. This generous spirit extends beyond her immediate circle to encompass neighbors, acquaintances, and sometimes complete strangers who cross her path at just the moment they could use an extra hand or encouraging word.

Jimmy, closer to my age, faces the physical challenges that many in our community encounter—mobility issues with “bad legs” that restrict certain activities but don't define his approach to life. Despite these limitations, he maintains a regular golf schedule, adapting his game to accommodate physical realities while enjoying the sport and the camaraderie it provides.

His resilient spirit became even more evident following recent heart surgery, after which friends and family noted a remarkable rejuvenation—“a new man” in energy and outlook. This kind of medical intervention often represents a significant chapter in later life stories, sometimes bringing unexpected improvements.

The American Legion provides Jimmy with a place where he can reliably find friendly faces, engaging conversation, and the simple pleasure of trying his luck at the slot machines. Our occasional meetings there have revealed a man of good humor and interesting perspectives.

Behind Jimmy's affable present manner lies a history that includes military service during the Vietnam War—experiences that undoubtedly shaped his worldview in ways that only others who shared similar duty can fully comprehend. “He has a story to tell from his tour of duty in Vietnam,” I've noted to myself, recognizing both the historical significance of these firsthand accounts and their importance to those who lived them.

My intention to record Jimmy's story “in his words” reflects a commitment to creating space for these experiences to be acknowledged

and preserved—part of a personal project to capture the diverse life histories that converge in our retirement community before they're lost to time.

Together, Tammy and Jimmy exemplify how partnerships adapt to the changing circumstances that later life presents—her energy and mobility complementing his while his good spirits and perspective balance her constant activity. Their relationship demonstrates the adjustments and accommodations that allow couples to navigate aging's challenges while maintaining the essential connection that sustains them.

Though our friendship with Tammy and Jimmy is relatively new—"What a lucky encounter," as I've remarked to Darlene—it already feels like a valuable addition to our Sun City experience they bring.

Friends on Dawn Lake

The Quest to Dawn Lake

The reader closed his folder. He seemed almost surprised to remember.

“In 2022, I discovered a new passion, wing foiling, a sport that mixes surfing, sailing, and flying. It is similar to windsurfing, which I have loved for years. It uses a handheld kite for a sail and a surfboard with the addition of a hydrofoil under the board that, at the right speed, lifts the board off the water. When foiling, the sensation is that of instability like standing on a greased soccer ball, but a magic happens, somewhat like in deep powder skiing, the pilot feels like flying, because he is, in fact, flying on a water wing just under the water surface. The speed suddenly increases as the drag of the board on the water and the turbulence of the waves disappear, and an eerie silence ensues. The best description is of riding the magic carpet of Aladdin’s fame that we remember from our childhood fables.

I became addicted to it and decided to move to Dawn Lake where I could do it from my dock whenever the wind was up. Buying a house on the lake was a two years quest that finally happened with the help of many friends along the way.

In my mind, I made it to Paradise while still alive, and every morning, looking at my lake, I am grateful for that gift and Darlene’s willingness to indulge me chasing this dream.

Since we moved to Dawn Lake in April 2024, we have added many new friends (in order by distance from home) in this new chapter of our lives.”

Then he reopened his folder and continued...

#

Sue D.

Among the cast of characters populating our Dawn Lake community, Sue D. occupies a unique position as both our closest physical neighbor and perhaps our most elusive acquaintance. As our “roof-mate”—that peculiar term specific to condominium twin homes where proximity is absolute yet privacy remains distinct—Sue shares our structure while maintaining an almost ethereal presence within it.

Despite being in her spirited eighties, Sue moves through her days with such light footsteps and quiet purpose that we find ourselves noting with surprise, “She is seldom seen, never heard.” This quality seems less about reclusiveness and more about a certain self-contained grace—the practiced independence of someone comfortable in her own company yet connected to a wider world on her own terms.

The glimpses we do catch of her life reveal a woman of delightfully contrasting passions. Her backyard has beautiful roses, her passion. Equal enthusiasm is devoted to Elvis Presley, to whom she listens on a professional jukebox retrofitted to digital CDs.

Sue’s apparent solitude at home belies an active social life that takes place primarily beyond our shared walls. Her children visit regularly, maintaining those essential family connections that enrich later years. Meanwhile, a network of friends escorts her to daily line dancing sessions, revealing a vitality and engagement with life that transcends numerical age.

In Sue, we find a gentle reminder that proximity doesn’t always translate to intimacy and that the quietest neighbors often lead the richest lives just beyond our immediate perception. Her ability to balance privacy with connection and solitude with community engagement represents yet another variation on the theme of successful aging.

#

Sue W.

In every community, certain individuals emerge as its beating heart—people whose energy, commitment, and genuine care elevate

collective experience beyond mere coexistence. In our lakeside neighborhood, Sue W. embodies this catalytic presence, her fiery red hair serving as an apt visual metaphor for her vibrant spirit.

As our closest neighbor, Sue provides that particular comfort that comes from knowing someone trustworthy and generous lives just steps away. Her proximity has transformed from a geographical accident to a meaningful connection through countless small interactions and shared moments that accumulate into friendship's familiar tapestry.

Sue's artistic talents find expression through her work with clay and mosaics—mediums that require both vision and technical skill, the ability to see potential in raw materials, and the patience to bring that vision into tangible form. Her decision to teach these skills at the Recreation Center extends her impact beyond personal creation to nurturing creativity in others, helping fellow residents discover artistic capabilities they may never have explored during working years.

While quick to note that her distinctive red hair should "definitely not be confused with an orange Trumper," Sue brings to political discussions the same thoughtfulness and nuance that characterize her artistic approach—the ability to hear multiple perspectives while maintaining clear personal principles.

What truly distinguishes Sue, however, is her remarkable physical vitality and connection to the natural environment that surrounds our homes. The lake that defines our neighborhood becomes her personal gymnasium—a place where she demonstrates extraordinary athletic versatility that changes with the seasons but never diminishes in enthusiasm or commitment.

During summer months, her daily swim across the lake or to and from the fountains represents not just physical exercise but a form of communion with the water. When cooler weather makes swimming impractical, Sue seamlessly transitions to walking the lake's perimeter,

bicycling its surrounding paths, or navigating its surface via pontoon boat or kayak.

These water excursions serve multiple purposes beyond personal enjoyment. Her self-appointed “trash patrol” reflects a stewardship ethic that benefits the entire community—the willingness to take personal responsibility for our shared environment rather than assuming its care belongs to someone else. Meanwhile, her sunset boat rides with roommate Cindy transform the lake into a social venue where natural beauty and human connection enhance each other.

Sue’s volunteer spirit extends far beyond environmental stewardship to touch virtually every aspect of community life. Whether organizing events, supporting neighbors in need, or contributing to community improvement projects, she approaches each opportunity with the same “eager to assist” attitude that makes her an indispensable presence in our collective experience.

Behind her current identity as the quintessential community-minded neighbor lies her earlier chapter as a “California girl” whose memories of Hobie Cat sailing in San Diego and Orange County emerge in conversations about water and wind. These recollections reveal not just biographical details but the continuous thread of water-love that connects her past to her present, the coastlines of California to the constructed lake that now centers her daily routines.

Sue represents something vital about successful retirement communities—the importance of individuals who bring not just residence but true presence, who transform shared geography into genuine community through consistent engagement and care. Her artistic talents, athletic energy, and volunteer spirit create ripple effects that extend far beyond her immediate circle, enhancing the experience of neighbors who may never take her classes or join her boat rides but who nonetheless benefit from the culture of creativity, vitality, and mutual support she helps sustain.

In the intricate social ecosystem of our lakeside neighborhood, Sue functions as both catalyst and connector—someone whose varied interests and boundless energy create multiple points of potential engagement for others while modeling a retirement lifestyle defined not by withdrawal but by continued growth, contribution, and joyful participation.

#

Cindy B.

The open backyards of the Dawn Lake Condos serve as more than a scenic backdrop to our community—they function as pathways connecting neighbors and facilitating encounters that might never occur in more conventional settings. Against this aquatic canvas, Cindy B. has established herself as one of our lake's most visible and cherished characters, her distinctive pedal-propelled kayak frequently seen as she navigates the shoreline.

Cindy brings to our community the particular blend of compassion and practical capability that marked her professional life as an Emergency Room nurse practitioner. Those years in high-stress ERs—environments, where precision, calm under pressure, and genuine care for others converge—shaped her approach to retirement not as withdrawal from service but as its redirection toward new recipients.

Her friendship with Sue W. started as neighbors, then followed as artists in the clay club, and then to create one of the lake's familiar sights—their frequent sunset boat rides. These evening excursions, with Sue at the helm of her pontoon boat and Cindy providing companionship, transform ordinary weekday evenings into occasions to enjoy the natural beauty surrounding us and the human connections that give it meaning.

While some retirees measure their freedom by how completely they can detach from former responsibilities, Cindy represents a different approach—one that carries forward professional talents into volun-

teer capacities. Her neighbor Jim has become one grateful beneficiary of this continued caregiving spirit, receiving the kind of attentive help that makes independent living possible despite challenges that might otherwise prove limiting.

What distinguishes Cindy's helpfulness is its delivery—the charm and friendliness that accompany practical assistance, preventing recipients from feeling like burdens rather than neighbors receiving natural support. This quality reflects emotional intelligence developed through decades of patient interaction, where maintaining dignity proves as important as addressing physical needs.

Between caregiving contributions to our immediate community, Cindy maintains her connection to the wider world through avid travel. These journeys—temporarily suspended during pandemic years but enthusiastically resumed—reflect her curiosity about cultures and landscapes beyond our lake shores.

Cindy's pedal kayak serves as a perfect metaphor for her approach to retirement—a vehicle that combines leisure with activity, appreciation with engagement. Unlike motorized craft that separate passengers from their environment, her chosen vessel requires personal energy and creates an intimate connection with the water's surface and the subtle shoreline details that faster travel might miss.

In the ecosystem of Dawn Lake residents, Cindy represents the ideal of retirement as balanced engagement—finding the sweet spot between relaxation and purpose, between focusing on personal enjoyment and contributing to community well-being.

#

Bob & Diane

When seeking the true pulse of a place—its history, hidden treasures, and unwritten rules—there's no substitute for the knowledge that comes from decades of residency. Bob and Diane may not claim Arizona native status, but their presence in the Valley of the Sun since

1980 has given them a depth of local understanding that rivals any birthright credential.

“They know Arizona” might seem a simple statement, but it encompasses a wealth of accumulated experience—they’ve witnessed Phoenix transform from a modestly sized desert city to a sprawling metropolis. They’ve seen real estate booms and busts, watched neighborhoods evolve, and developed that particular wisdom that comes from observing a place through multiple cycles of change.

This extensive background makes Bob an invaluable resource for anyone navigating the complexities of local real estate. “Wanna know about real estate? Ask Bob” has become something of a community refrain, acknowledging his willingness to share insights gleaned through decades of market observation. Whether considering property values, neighborhood trajectories, or the subtle factors that influence desirability, his perspective offers a combination of historical context and current assessment that no online listing service could provide.

Bob’s knowledge, however, represents just one facet of his contribution to our lakeside community. Perhaps even more valued is his reflexive helpfulness, captured in the simple observation: “Need help? Bob will be there.” This readiness to assist neighbors transcends mere friendliness to become a fundamental aspect of his character—the assumption that community means mutual support rather than merely shared geography.

Together, Bob and Diane form one of those couples whose partnership seems to enhance rather than diminish their individual qualities. Their charm emerges most naturally during those perfect Arizona evenings when the lake becomes our community’s social center. Few experiences capture the essence of Dawn Lake living better than joining them for impromptu gatherings in the water—”soaking in the lake sitting on a pool noodle with a cold drink, exchanging friendly conversations.”

These casual assemblies transform the lake into what they aptly describe as “a natural hot tub”—a setting where conversation flows as easily as the gentle current, where the day’s concerns dissolve in the combination of buoyant water and buoyant company. As sunset transitions through its spectacular desert palette and darkness brings the illumination of our fountains, these gatherings often extend far beyond their intended duration, a testament to the comfortable companionship Bob and Diane effortlessly create.

#

Tom R.

Every community has its essential pillars—those individuals whose consistent contributions form the invisible infrastructure supporting daily life. At Dawn Lake Condos, Tom R. stands as perhaps our most fundamental support beam, his quiet competence addressing needs many residents might not even recognize until his absence would make them painfully apparent.

“Our condos would fall apart if not for Tom” might initially sound like casual hyperbole, but those who’ve witnessed his comprehensive care for our physical environment know it approaches literal truth. His vigilant monitoring of our buildings and grounds catches potential problems before they develop into costly emergencies. His skillful repairs and supervision of contractors maintain the quality of our shared spaces with a minimum of surprises as would be expected of our well-aged properties.

Most remarkably, Tom delivers this vital community service not as employed maintenance staff but as a fellow resident whose assistance springs from genuine concern for his neighbors and our collective home. “Bless the man who does it all for kindness and love of community” captures both the nature of his contribution and the gratitude it inspires among those fortunate enough to benefit from his generosity.

After a dozen years living lakeside, Tom has accumulated specialized knowledge that no manual could possibly contain—the particular behaviors of our seasonal geese, and coots, and the habits of resident ducks, the quirks of our irrigation system, the peculiar maintenance challenges created by desert heat and lake humidity. This environmental wisdom complements his practical skills, creating a resource for the community that no commercial service could adequately replace.

Tom's path to Dawn Lake traces back to earlier chapters that might surprise newer residents who know only his current role. His youth unfolded in New Jersey by the cold North Atlantic, where he learned to surf by the Jersey Shore's peers with occasional runs to the Outer Banks. Later, he moved to warm Southern California beaches where he surprised the locals by surfing with no wetsuit and amazed them with the news that there was an ocean in New Jersey. But the surfer lifestyle from two opposite coasts imprinted him with his relaxed demeanor and connection to water environments. After a few years of married life, he moved to Arizona, where he missed the Pacific's dramatic waves and replaced them with our more placid lake. But the old surfer's spirit remains in his approach to challenges—the flexibility to adapt to changing conditions, the patience to work with rather than against natural forces.

His professional journey eventually led him into service as a personal assistant to aging individuals in California—work that combined practical support with the emotional intelligence needed to preserve dignity while addressing increasing needs. This experience developed capacities that serve our community well, particularly his attentiveness to the single and more elderly residents who might otherwise struggle to maintain independent living in their lake homes.

What makes Tom's assistance particularly valuable is the spirit in which it's offered—the mischievous smile and light-hearted approach that accompanies even his most demanding tasks. This demeanor ensures that those receiving help never feel like burdens but rather like

neighbors participating in the natural exchange of community support. His surfer's easy-going nature transforms what could be awkward moments of dependency into comfortable interactions between equals.

In communities like ours, where ages and capabilities span considerable ranges, individuals like Tom create essential bridges—not just between residents and the physical maintenance their homes require, but between different generational experiences and needs. His willingness to share both his practical skills and his genuine concern enriches our lakeside life immeasurably, reminding us that community resilience depends not just on formal structures but on the voluntary contributions of those blessed with a giving instinct of which Tom is the poster boy.

#

Dave & Deb

Among our seasonal residents, a delightful couple from Indiana brings more than just their midwestern presence to our community—they carry with them that particular brand of heartland friendliness that instantly transports me back to my years in Indiana. Their warmth and genuine interest in neighbors exemplify what's often called "Hoosier hospitality," proving that geographic traits can travel intact across state lines.

Their contribution to our community takes multiple forms, beginning with their enthusiastic participation in our condos' Welcome Wagon. New arrivals find themselves greeted not just with practical information but with the kind of sincere welcome that helps transform houses into homes and strangers into neighbors. This initial impression sets the tone for integration into our lakeside community, making their volunteer service far more valuable than the modest time commitment it requires.

Where they truly shine, however, is in sharing their passion for astronomy. As active members of the Sun City Astronomy Club, they

bring specialized knowledge of the night sky to our lakeside setting. But they've gone beyond mere membership to become organizers of what have become known as "Starry Night Parties" along our shoreline. Telescopes appear on their lawn, sometimes accompanied by knowledgeable commentary, sometimes simply offered for quiet observation. Neighbors gather with camp chairs and beverages, conversations flowing between earth and sky as constellations emerge in the darkening desert night.

#

John & Sue

Among our most recent additions to the Dawn Lake seasonal community, John and Sue bring the distinctive energy of newcomers still discovering the rhythms and pleasures of our shared environment. Seattle residents for most of the year, represent the classic "snowbird" pattern—escaping the Pacific Northwest's gray winters for Arizona's dependable sunshine before returning to enjoy the Northwest's perfect summers.

John's engineering background manifests in his fascinating approach to recreational equipment. Rather than purchasing standard off-the-shelf products, he applies his technical creativity to design and build truly unique conveyances. His custom recumbent two-wheel bicycle turns heads whenever he pedals through the neighborhood, its unconventional configuration reflecting both innovative thinking and precise fabrication skills.

This same inventive spirit extended to more ambitious projects before their Arizona chapter began, including experimental aircraft that demonstrate his willingness to literally trust his life to his engineering calculations and construction abilities. Such projects reveal someone for whom technical challenges represent not obstacles but invitations to creative problem-solving.

On the water, John and Sue display their characteristic synchronicity in a remarkable folding kayak that transforms through origami-like principles from compact storage to sleek watercraft. Their coordinated paddling at sunset has quickly become one of those pleasant, recurring sights that define our lakeside community—a harmonious partnership silhouetted against the evening sky.

When not navigating our waters, they can often be found on the pickleball courts, embracing the sport that has become practically obligatory for active retirees throughout the Southwest.

Though their seasonal pattern means we share their company for only part of each year, their returns are eagerly anticipated, particularly the casual gatherings where drinks and conversation flow easily among friends floating in the lake. These impromptu water-based social hours represent Desert lake-living at its most distinctive.

#

“Canadian” Bill M.

Among our intermittent lake visitors, Canadian Bill has established a distinctive presence that bridges casual guest and committed resident. His characteristic “Canadian-friendly” demeanor—that particular blend of politeness, self-deprecating humor, and genuine interest in others that seems culturally embedded north of the border—makes his periodic appearances at lakeside gatherings especially welcome additions.

Bill’s primary residence in the Okanagan region of British Columbia represents another connection to water landscapes, though certainly of a different character than our desert lake environment. His secondary home in Prescott has positioned him close enough to participate in our community’s activities while maintaining a certain independence from its daily rhythms—an arrangement that has allowed him to observe and appreciate Dawn Lake’s special qualities from a semi-outsider’s perspective.

This part-time participation has gradually evolved into something deeper, as evidenced by his persistent efforts to secure a permanent place in our lakeside community. “After much cajoling,” his patient campaign to convince a reluctant landlord to sell him his rented unit may finally succeed. The transaction process underway represents Bill’s transition from visitor to vested community member—a shift that promises to bring his distinctive Canadian perspective and warm personality into a more consistent presence among us. But life is always calling for change. Bill has just completed the arduous quest to become a “US citizen by choice”. Will he become American Bill? Not likely, Canadian Bill he is, and that will stick.

#

Fred & Margaret

Every community depends on those rare individuals willing to transform shared needs into personal missions—residents who step beyond simply enjoying communal benefits to actively ensuring their continuation. At Dawn Lake, Fred and Margaret exemplify this essential contributor role, their complementary talents and shared commitment creating a foundation upon which much of our community life rests.

As HOA President, Fred brings to this often-thankless position the particular financial acumen developed during his career as a mortgage banker. This background provides him with both a technical understanding of property management complexities and the diplomatic skills honed through years of navigating delicate financial discussions with clients. The transition from Treasurer to President followed naturally from his demonstrated capability to manage both numbers and the human dynamics that ultimately determine an HOA’s effectiveness.

Margaret’s parallel service on the Social Committee harnesses her organizational talents toward building the connective tissue that transforms a collection of homeowners into a genuine community. Her previous experience as owner and director of a Montessori school in Sno-

homish County, north of Seattle, equipped her with both logistical expertise in event planning and a deep understanding of how relationships flourish.

“Bless the givers of their own time” might serve as an appropriate motto for community governance everywhere, but it applies with particular relevance to Fred and Margaret’s “endless hours” of service. In an era when personal schedules grow increasingly guarded and volunteer positions often go unfilled, their willingness to shoulder responsibility for our collective well-being represents an increasingly uncommon form of civic-mindedness.

When not attending to HOA responsibilities, Fred and Margaret can frequently be spotted enjoying one of the prime benefits of lakeside living—sunset cruises aboard their pontoon boat. These evening excursions combine appreciation for our shared environment with Fred’s enthusiasm for catch-and-release bass fishing, an activity that reflects his conservation-minded approach to lake resources.

The pontoon’s unhurried pace and stable platform create perfect opportunities for the casual conversations and spontaneous gatherings that strengthen community bonds beyond formal events. Fellow residents on the shoreline often receive friendly waves and impromptu invitations to join them on the water.

In communities like ours, such volunteer leadership often goes underappreciated until its absence reveals its true value. Fred and Margaret’s continued willingness to serve, despite the inevitable challenges that accompany such roles, provides Dawn Lake with stability and vision.

#

Noel & Onna

The newest arrivals to our Dawn Lake Condos community bring with them a life story rich in adventure and reinvention. Noel, who just celebrated his 80th birthday, defies every stereotype of octogenarian

limitations—his energy, physical capability, and forward-looking perspective would be remarkable in someone decades younger.

His journey began conventionally enough as a school teacher, but took its defining turn when, at age 22, he accepted a position in Sitka, Alaska—a decision that would shape the rest of his life. What started as teaching vocational education with commercial fishing as a summer supplement gradually reversed in importance as the call of the open water proved stronger than that of the classroom. The transition to full-time long-line fishing represented not just a career change but an embrace of one of the most demanding and dangerous professions available.

Even in more benign South East Alaska, the commercial fishing industry selects for a particular kind of person—self-reliant, physically tough, comfortable with risk, and possessed of both technical skill and intuitive understanding of natural systems. These qualities remain evident in Noel today, though now channeled into the creative restoration and improvement of his Dawn Lake condo rather than harvesting the sea's bounty.

His handyman abilities, honed through decades of maintaining vessels where repair services might be hundreds of miles away, have already transformed his condo through comprehensive remodeling. Most impressively, he's rebuilt his dock—a project that combines structural engineering, material knowledge, and physical labor in ways that would challenge contractors half his age. That he undertakes such projects as a matter of course rather than exceptional achievement speaks to his matter-of-fact approach to continued productivity.

Noel's recent purchase of Jerry's Hobie Cat creates yet another point of connection with me—shared experiences of sailing and wind reading that transcend differences in age and background. His understanding of wind and water dynamics, developed through years when such knowledge directly affected survival and livelihood, brings depth

to casual conversations about sailing conditions that might otherwise remain on the surface level of mere recreation.

Like many Alaska fishermen, Noel and Onna found Ecuador an appealing vacation destination—perhaps drawn by the complete contrast of equatorial climate, or the opportunity to experience Spanish colonial culture so different from frontier Alaska. These extended stays reflect a cultural curiosity and adaptability that enables them to move comfortably between vastly different environments and social contexts—qualities that make them natural additions to our diverse Dawn Lake community.

Onna's background in education complements Noel's adventurous career path, bringing the perspective of someone who maintained consistent professional engagement in nurturing and developing young minds while her husband navigated the more volatile world of commercial fishing.

#

Steve & Diane

Water flows through their lives like blood—a constant presence they seem to need close and visible. Iowa-born, they spent twenty-five years in Scottsdale before retiring to Dawn Lake, a move that surprised no one who knew them.

When summer heat bears down on Arizona, they retreat to their second sanctuary in Huntington Harbor, California. Ocean before them, harbor behind—their lives always anchored to the water's edge.

Their beautiful Dawn Lake home stands where her parents once lived, making them second-generation Dawn Lakers. They designed the structure with future generations in mind, larger than just the two of them would need. Someday, their children will inherit this place. Their grandchildren after that. The family's connection to this shore stretches both backward and forward through time.

Children and grandchildren visit regularly, arriving in waves to enjoy the lake. They paddle kayaks across the calm water or take evening tours on the pontoon boat as sunset paints the sky. The home seems to breathe with their comings and goings—expanding to welcome family, then settling back into comfortable intimacy.

Diane joins Darlene occasionally on the pickleball courts. She claimed to be a beginner when they first played, but her natural athletic ability quickly betrayed this modest self-assessment.

When community events require space, they open their doors without hesitation. The home's large lakeside windows frame the perfect view of water beyond the putting green. Neighbors gather on their spacious patio while music plays and glasses clink in easy conversation. Their house transforms into something both public and intimate—a gathering place that feels welcoming rather than formal. They move through these events with practiced hospitality, pouring drinks and making introductions that turn strangers into friends.

Their generosity carries nothing showy about it. They simply understand what makes community work—that a home means more when shared with others, that connections formed around tables and across conversations create the true foundation of neighborhood life.

#

Iris & John

Among the most distinctive characters in our Dawn Lake community, Iris has earned a unique title that captures her special contribution to our shared environment—the Swan Lady of the Lake. This unofficial role reflects her dedicated stewardship of our resident swans, whose elegant presence adds such grace to our waters.

Behind this nurturing relationship with our waterfowl lies a professional background well-suited to careful observation and precise intervention. As a former anesthesia nurse, Iris developed attention to detail and calm responsiveness to changing conditions that such specialized

medical work demands. These same qualities now inform her approach to monitoring our swan population—watching for subtle signs of distress, ensuring appropriate nutrition, and coordinating with wildlife specialists when necessary.

Her position on the Dawn Lake HOA Board allows her to formally advocate for the preservation of habitat and practices that support our swans.

The depth of Iris and John's connection to water extends far beyond our modest lake, however. Their remarkable sailing adventures have taken them to some of the world's most challenging waters through "barefoot" chartered boats from The Moorings rental fleet. Unlike casual vacation sailors who might venture only into well-traveled Caribbean routes, they have navigated all the Caribbean Isles, and oceans from South America to the Arctic Ocean—a breadth of nautical experience that places them in truly rarefied company.

Despite having experienced some of the world's most spectacular coastlines and harbors, Iris and John have chosen our community as a home base—a decision that brings their global perspective and appreciation for water environments to our daily conversations and collective decisions.

John's quieter presence complements Iris's more visible roles in swan stewardship and HOA governance. His support enables her community engagement while his shared sailing expertise contributes to the remarkable story of adventure that underlies their current, seemingly more settled lifestyle.

Together, they represent the fascinating complexity that makes retirement communities so much richer than outsiders might imagine—people whose previous chapters contain extraordinary achievements and experiences now applying their considerable capabilities to enhancing our shared environment and governance. The swans that glide so gracefully across our lake surface serve as living symbols of the

beauty that can emerge when dedicated individuals channel their passions toward community enrichment.

#

Sue & Gary

At the far eastern end of Dawn Lake's south shore resides a couple whose complementary talents and shared commitment to community service make them essential threads in our neighborhood's social fabric. Sue and Gary represent that particular blessing of retirement communities—individuals who bring professional expertise and organizational skills honed over decades into volunteer roles that benefit everyone around them.

Sue's position on the Dawn Lake HOA Board serves as just the official recognition of her natural role as "organizer extraordinaire" of community events. Behind every successful gathering—whether holiday celebrations, welcome parties for new residents, or fundraising activities—stands Sue's logistics management to ensure connection and enjoyment.

Her thirty years of experience "herding and teaching fifth graders" prepared her perfectly for managing the occasionally similar dynamics of adult community gatherings. The particular talents required to keep ten-year-olds simultaneously engaged, learning, and behaving appropriately translate remarkably well to orchestrating events where adults of varying interests and energy levels can all find meaningful participation and enjoyment.

This classroom-developed skill set manifests in Sue's ability to read a room, anticipate potential issues before they arise, and gently redirect energies toward constructive outcomes—all while maintaining the warm, welcoming presence that makes her approachable to both long-time residents and newcomers still finding their place in our community.

Gary brings an entirely different but equally valuable set of talents to their partnership and our neighborhood. His professional history in “the high-performance screws business” represents engineering precision at its most demanding—designing fasteners for space applications and high-risk industrial settings where microscopic tolerances can determine success or catastrophic failure. This work required not just technical capability but the particular mindset that embraces both exacting standards and creative problem-solving.

In retirement, Gary has channeled these same qualities into the intricate art of wooden cuckoo clock creation. Each timepiece emerges as a masterpiece of precision mechanics, clothed in artistic woodworking, functioning sculptures that represent the perfect marriage of aesthetic beauty and technical performance. The complexity of these projects, with their perfectly synchronized movements and carefully calibrated sounds, showcases the same attention to detail that once ensured astronaut safety through properly designed fasteners.

Their relatively recent marriage brings the particular joy of partners who found each other later in life, with established individual identities now enhanced rather than subsumed by their relationship. Their shared enthusiasm for world travel creates regular opportunities to explore new cultures and environments together, returning with perspectives and experiences that enrich both their lives and our community conversations.

Beyond their HOA contributions, Sue and Gary extend their energies to broader service through active involvement with the Lions Club and their church. These commitments reflect their understanding that community extends beyond neighborhood boundaries to encompass wider circles of responsibility and care—an outlook that makes their presence in Dawn Lake particularly valuable.

Together, they embody a vision of retirement not as withdrawal from productivity but as its redirection toward freely chosen pursuits and contributions. Their home at the eastern edge of our lake may posi-

tion them at the geographic periphery of our community, but their involvement places them squarely at its heart—essential contributors to both the practical functioning and the warm spirit that makes Dawn Lake more than just a collection of houses sharing a water view.

The Great Generation

The speaker looked up, scanned the audience, and murmured: “I am not sure of any of you who may be here, but it was my privilege to know some who I am sure are not.”

A silence settled over the room as the meaning of his words registered. Every Sun City resident understood this particular poignancy—the community’s dual nature as both a vibrant gathering place for the living and a memorial to those who had passed through on their final journey.

“Sun City, you see, serves as a transitional final community for many,” he continued, his voice strengthening. “It becomes filled with past characters—not ghosts exactly, but people who have finished acting their parts and exited the stage, leaving behind memories that remain bright in those of us who knew them.”

He turned a page in his manuscript, but seemed to look beyond it rather than at the words written there.

“These are some of those memories now—people whose physical presence has departed but whose impact on our community lingers like evening light after sunset.”

The audience settled deeper into their seats, recognizing the shift toward remembrance. Many had their own mental catalogs of departed friends, neighbors who had once filled the same recreation centers, walked the same paths, and shared the same celebrations that continued now in their absence.

“These memories,” the speaker said, “remain as alive and real and permanent as the pictures of bison painted in Neanderthal-age French caves—still vibrant after thousands of years. Time may pass, but what these people meant to us doesn’t.”

He paused, gathering his thoughts.

“They taught us how to age with dignity, how to face limitations with grace, how to laugh at circumstances that might otherwise make

us weep. They showed us what resilience looks like when the body begins to fail but the spirit refuses to surrender.”

Heads nodded throughout the room—each listener connecting these words to specific faces and names from their own experience.

“Some led the tennis groups or golf leagues before us. Some built the volunteer programs we now sustain. Some shaped policies and governance structures that continue to serve us well. And some simply showed us how to be good neighbors and friends during challenging seasons of life.”

The speaker’s eyes moved across the audience again, making brief contact with those whose attention seemed most engaged. Who were they? Did he know them?

“Their stories deserve remembering,” the speaker continued, “not just for sentiment’s sake, but because they remain part of the foundation we build upon. The traditions they established, the problems they solved, the relationships they fostered—these elements live on in our current community.”

He closed his folder slowly, seeming to come to a decision.

“So, while I will continue with these tales of the living in a moment, I wanted to acknowledge those who can no longer rise when their names are called, yet whose presence remains as real to some of us as anyone in this room. Their chapter in Sun City’s story may have concluded, but the narrative they helped create continues through all of us.”

With those words, he reopened his manuscript and returned to the chronicles of current residents, but something had shifted in the room—an awareness that they were all participating in a continuum of experience that extended both backward and forward in time, their present moment just one frame in a much longer film

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The author continued, “These are friends of the family, so to speak. Friends of Darlene’s mom and dad who continued to meet regularly for Poker Nights —Nickels, Dimes, and Quarters. Almost old enough to be parents to Darlene and me, while in reality, splitting the time distance between us and our parents. Acquired young uncles and aunts of sorts. Family.”

There exists in Sun City a special category of connection—relationships not formed directly but inherited through family ties, then transformed into meaningful bonds in their own right. The Poker group represents this particular type of community—people who began as Darlene’s parents’ friends but gradually became our own cherished connections, occupying that curious generational middle ground between our parents and ourselves.

Their regular gatherings center nominally around poker, but the cards serve primarily as an excuse for the real purpose—maintaining connections across decades and through life’s inevitable transitions. The stakes remain deliberately small, creating just enough competitive interest without any real financial consequence. What’s truly being wagered and won at the table is continuing friendship despite changing circumstances.

Ardis stood until 2024 as the emotional anchor of this group; it still feels unnatural to speak of her in the past tense. The younger best friend of Darlene’s mother who became a second mom to Darlene herself. Her life story embodies resilience in its purest form—a woman who endured losses that would have broken many spirits, including both her husband and, most heartbreakingly, two of her three children over the years.

What makes Ardis truly remarkable isn’t just survival through these tragedies but her maintained capacity for joy—her smile remains genuine, her personality sunny despite accumulated sorrows. This hard-won optimism makes her presence at the poker table particularly mean-

ingful—each laugh and light moment representing a conscious choice to embrace life's remaining pleasures.

In Sun City, Ardis found an unexpected new chapter through her relationship with **Bob**, proving that heart connections remain possible at any age. Together, they created a seasonal rhythm between Everett, Washington, and Arizona that gave them the best of both worlds—maintaining longtime family connections in the Pacific Northwest while enjoying desert warmth and friends during winter months.

Bob himself contributes a particular masculine energy to the poker gatherings—a wiry, small but strong presence still actively engaged in physical work at 95, handling maintenance tasks for his condo HOA that would challenge men decades younger. “When I had my boat repair business, I could fix anything. Still can,” he says softly. His permanent smile seems less a facial expression and more a life philosophy.

Beyond poker nights, Bob maintains his connection to a wider community at the Friday fish fries at The American Legion—another example of how Sun City residents create rhythms and rituals that maintain social connections and meaningful structure to retirement days.

Mary Ann brings artistic sensibility and conversational depth to the poker circle. Ardis's best friend from Washington, she navigated the downsizing transitions that many Sun Citizens eventually face, reducing both her Washington and Arizona homes to more manageable living arrangements. Despite these physical contractions, her world remains expansive through friendships and creative interests that transcend square footage.

Lois rounds out the poker posse with her characteristic mischievous smile—a visual reminder that playfulness need not diminish with age. Her good-humored approach to both cards and life creates an atmosphere where winning remains secondary to the pleasure of time spent together.

The penny poker gatherings these friends maintain represent something vital about Sun City's social fabric—the importance of regular, structured interaction that provides both continuity and adaptation as circumstances change.

For Darlene and me, these poker friends occupy a unique position in our lives—not quite family by blood but family by choice and circumstance, carrying forward connections that began with the previous generation but have evolved into relationships with meaning and value entirely their own. They remind us that community in places like Sun City isn't limited to peers and contemporaries but can span generational boundaries in ways that enrich everyone involved.

#

Our Sun City Guides

The reader's voice softened, taking on a more intimate quality as he turned to a new section of his manuscript.

"We would not be here but for the accident of two trail guides who discovered the path years ago."

A certain reverence settled over the room as the audience sensed the personal significance of what would follow.

Vern and Char R.

"They were Darlene's parents. Two Canadians who became ferociously attached to America, yet not forgetting their roots—Char in Winnipeg, Manitoba, and Coquitlam, BC, and Vern in Regina, Saskatchewan, and Vancouver, BC. Each had a full life individually, and one symbiotic with their mate."

Char was a woman whose physical stature belied her remarkable inner strength. Small and attractive, she carried herself with the discipline and grace of the dancer she had been since childhood. Her character had been forged in the demanding atmosphere of a mother who recognized her talents early, pushing her to the level of professional tap dance teaching by the age of twelve. Before that, she achieved a skill level that got her an audition in Hollywood during the search for a follow-up actress for Shirley Temple. A car that seriously injured her while crossing the street trashed her audition, but not her spirit. This early immersion in performance and instruction laid the foundation for what would become a lifelong passion for teaching tap dancing.

Her dancing journey came full circle in Sun City, where she claimed a coveted front-line position in the famous Sun City Tip Top Dancers—a group whose reputation extended far beyond our community. To watch Char, perform was to witness someone in her element, executing complex tap routines with precision while radiating the joy that comes from expressing an art mastered over decades.

Beyond her dancing accomplishments, Char moved through life with striking moral clarity. Her judgments came not from rigid ideology but from an uncomplicated commitment to kindness, fairness, and honesty. These qualities made her a natural gravitational center for social circles that formed and flourished around the couple during their Sun City years from 1994 to 2012.

Her innovative spirit manifested in various inventions she developed and proudly shared—practical solutions to everyday challenges that reflected her pragmatic approach to life. This blend of creativity and practicality made her home a place where problems found solutions and where visitors received a warm welcome.

Vern complemented Char perfectly—his quiet, thoughtful presence balancing her more extroverted energy. With a physical resemblance to Clint Eastwood that many remarked upon, he carried himself with the quiet dignity of someone who had built his life through determined work rather than inherited advantage.

His journey began with a decisive break from farm life at fifteen, heading to British Columbia where he found work as a coal-shoveler on steam ships. This physically demanding role eventually led him to similar work on the railroads, where he steadily advanced to the top rank of Train Engineer. His career with Burlington Northern necessitated the family's relocation to Seattle—a move that ultimately led to American citizenship and Vern's service in the U.S. Army during the Korean War to teach GIs how to run a train. He became one of the first diesel-engine certified Engineers.

The railroad work that formed the backbone of their financial security often took Vern away from home in long and regular cycles. During the breaks in between, he developed a second career in home building—an enterprise that revealed his entrepreneurial spirit and practical skills. Despite limited formal education outside the railroads, Vern possessed extraordinary common sense and an intuitive understanding of human nature that would have impressed Dale Carnegie himself. He

knew instinctively how to make friends and influence people without manipulation—simply by offering genuine interest and fair dealing.

In retirement, Vern and Char initially experienced Sun City as winter visitors, living in a fifth-wheeler that allowed them the freedom to return to the Pacific Northwest during summer months. By 1998, however, the community had captured their hearts completely, prompting their purchase of a condo overlooking the Riverview Golf Course. This home quickly became a social hub, “party central” for countless friends drawn by their warmth and hospitality.

Their Sun City chapter continued until Char’s passing in 2012, with Vern following in 2015— “chasing Char to go dancing again,” as he had throughout their lives together. This poetic framing of his passing captured perfectly the devotion that characterized their relationship—a partnership of equals who created between them something greater than either could have achieved alone.

Pia

“Not quite a resident, my mother, Pia, also connected with Sun City during her frequent visits with us and Vern and Char.”

Though never officially a Sun Citizen, Pia created her significant presence in our community through regular visits and her remarkable artistic talents. A sun-baby living in Seattle, she often needed to visit Sun City to de-rust, particularly after she lost the love of her life, my father, Al. Her painting seminars at Lakeview’s Artists by The Lake Club became eagerly anticipated events, drawing both experienced artists and novices attracted by her distinctive style and encouraging teaching approach.

Her artistic career continued with remarkable longevity, ending only at age 94 in 2018 when her final scheduled seminar in Sun City had to be canceled. Yet her creative legacy remains visible throughout Sun City in the homes of friends and collectors who acquired her works through personal connections or at the Sun City Elks’ Annual Charity Art Auction, where her paintings found appreciative buyers.

Many tennis players at Bell Center retain fond memories of Pia as “the little woman bundled in heavy coats” who would join us as a spectator during Thursday Night Socials. Her presence at these events represented a special cross-generational connection—a former player herself who understood the game’s nuances and took genuine pleasure in observing the social dynamics and competitive spirit that animated our community.

These three guides—Vern, Char, and Pia—represent something vital about Sun City’s continued vitality. Each generation discovers this community anew, often through the introduction provided by those who came before.

In honoring these particular guides, we acknowledge a broader truth about Sun City—that its story continues through connections that span generations, each new arrival building upon foundations laid by those who discovered its particular magic in earlier times.

And So, You Have It

The author stopped. Looking at his manuscript, he seemed lost in thought. He slowly closed the binder and let his gaze drift across the faces staring at him in silence. The room held a collective breath, as if sensing this moment where memory, present reality, and the power of memories met in uncertain recognition.

“By now, you might have noticed that I cannot match all these notes with your faces and our shared memories,” he said softly, his voice carrying in the stillness. “Strange, isn’t it? To remember so much as I read and yet so little at the same time. The pages remember.”

He tapped the closed binder gently with weathered fingers. “But does it matter? The memories are still mine and still here—” he vaguely pointed at his heart, “—even if, just now, I cannot remember with certainty which ones you were, which ones you are.”

A few heads nodded in understanding. Some eyes glistened with unshed tears. In that moment, the distinction between audience and subject blurred as everyone in the room confronted the same fragile relationship of memory and memories he had laid bare.

“Thank you for your indulgence,” he continued, his voice gaining strength.

“Thank you for coming to my book reading today, but more importantly, thank you for being part of the story itself—whether I can still connect all the names to all the faces or not.”

He looked out at the gathering one more time, his expression softening into something between blessing and plea:

“I wish for you... ..to have as many friends as I found in Sun City ...to not forget their names and faces...to have memories worth keeping as I have...to write down YOUR memories and make your friends immortal in your writings before those memories may vanish like morning fog.”

The words hung in the air, both gift and gentle command to those still possessing the clarity he was losing.

“Good night,” he concluded, the simplicity of the farewell containing both ending and beginning.

He turned, looking uncertainly around the stage, when a flash of recognition transformed his expression. A great smile appeared on his face, his eyes with a certainty that had been missing moments before. He had seen Darlene coming to join him—the last person, the only person, he would never forget.

THE END

Acknowledgments

This story was made possible by the kindness of the cast of characters who became my friends over the years. I was blessed by your inspiration, your friendship, and your examples of how to live well, through both good times and bad.

Of all the Characters, the biggest one remains unwritten here, my wife, soulmate, and social director, Darlene. It was thanks to her social skills and initiative that I came to cross paths with all of you.

To those whose stories are not included, I ask your forgiveness. Some names were omitted by request, and others slipped away with the passing of time. That, too, is part of the story.

About the Author

Marco Messina is a storyteller with hundreds of memories recorded in diaries and over 300 short stories spanning the past sixty years. Born in Turin, Italy, in the early years following World War II, he legally immigrated to the United States in 1970 after serving three years in the Italian Navy. He embraced the American Dream and totally committed to the Melting Pot—though he still groks like a Stranger in a Strange Land.

He has lived in Bloomington, Montreal, Toronto, Seattle, Scottsdale, and Park City, before finally settling in Sun City. Each move brought new friendships, unforgettable experiences, and a deep gratitude for life's unfolding adventure. Business travels around the world convinced him that the world is not flat.

Throughout his life and business career, Marco was drawn to design, engineering, and computer technology—always chasing the next big thing that would change the world. His first novel, *The Yoda Machine*, explored his dreams of how children would grow up and learn. He published *Lemonade*, a tale of betrayal and resilience rooted in his entrepreneurial past. This book, *99 Characters in Search of an Author*, reflects his gratefulness for the friends and memories of his recent past.

Also by Marco Messina

The Yoda Machine

Lemonade

99 Characters in Search of an Author

