

Big Things Come in Tiny Packages

Connect with: Carol White

How does a girl from Rochester, NY whose parents both went to Cornell (Dad on a free ride in Chemical Engineering) wind up in rural Palatka, Florida? She was a jock in high school (yes, little petite Carol). She was on volleyball, softball, lacrosse & swim teams! Because the town was on Lake Ontario, public schools required swimming lessons be a gym class! In my day, a girl with brainiac parents that also excelled at multiple sports would have been defined as Ms. Popularity. Yet when it came time to choose a college, Carol says “because she wasn’t very popular”, she wanted to go WAY away...like California. Parents nixed that idea so she went as far as they would permit, Missouri Valley College in Missouri! There she majored in Math & Chemistry! Guess the brainiac gene traveled to offspring.

At “Valley” as they called it, she met her husband, Ralph, who was from South Florida. Together, they enjoyed the far distance from parental supervision & engaged in typical college kid antics. One story was of six of them off camping by a lake. Of course, poor college kids had only one tent, so they all piled in like kittens & got a great nights rest! Next day they rented a small boat (for all 6 of them) to fish. Once out in the middle, several exclaimed, “My feet are wet!” Yup, there was a hole in the boat. Two manned oars, one manned the bucket in the boat (a big clue missed earlier) & the others cheered them. It took all afternoon to get to shore & it was not the shore where the boat was rented. To make the walk to the rental shop more interesting, one friend who smoked a pipe, put it in his pocket before it was out & caught on fire. Once in the car... you guessed it, out of gas & all had to push to nearest gas station.

Carol was in a sorority, eventually became president. In these groups, initiation type pranks can be common. In this sorority, the “sisters” would kidnap the upcoming president & sneak her to an undisclosed location with little to no survival provisions, leaving her there for the weekend. (Diane, start hiding provisions in your car now!). As current president, Carol served as ringleader, *leading* her into the unintended Dean’s *ring*. The victim was known to desperately want to see a musical group that was performing in a neighboring town. They lived in dorms back then & needed parental permission to escape campus, which the girl’s parents had refused. Carol & the “sisters” forged the parents’ signature, kidnapped the gal at night, in her pajamas. They covered her head with a pillowcase, put her in the car, drove her to the next town & dropped her off at the concert! The victim had the best time ever, even in pajamas. But the others were all in big trouble not only with the school but with the parents!

Antics aside, Carol did well academically & continued playing volleyball & softball. Ralph, while pursuing a degree in physics played football & wrestled. (This is where Carol’s 54-year connection with wrestling began, but more on that later.) Toward the end of senior year, she & Ralph headed to a family wedding back east. At the rehearsal dinner, Ralph opened a box, shoved it toward Carol & said, “Well, do you want it or not?” Ha. She says this is as romantic as he, a physics major, ever got. She picked up the ring, slid it on her finger & said, “Yes, I do.” And get married they did, thus beginning their adult lives.

They headed back to South Florida where they had no jobs & nowhere to live. Staying in a relative’s apartment for three months, Carol got a job in a bank & Ralph became a high school teacher of

science & physics & launched his wrestling/football coach career. They had one car, so Carol walked to work, over three miles, in her “banker look” of stockings & high heels. Once her two sons were born, she carried them to daycare on her walk to work.

On their 9th Anniversary, Ralph came home & declared, “We are moving to Palatka.” Carol said (what all my friends have said), “Where the heck is Palatka?” Because Carol was short of the five-year eligibility for full retirement at the bank, she stayed with the boys in Hollywood, FL while Ralph blazed their trail here. Once arriving here, Carol got a job in HR at the courthouse for “three miserable months”! The first enemy she made was a judge who was refusing compliance with the new “Maternity Leave” state law. When confronted by this smart pipsqueak with official declarations of law in her hand, he backed down & maternity leave began in Putnam County! She then assuaged her boredom on the job dissecting the list of employees on the Insurance Policy roster. Seems there were 25 nonemployees whose insurance was being covered by the county. She removed them, saving tax dollars, but also creating ill will with the insurance company as well as those removed. After making these two momentous improvements in three months, Carol quit.

She next worked for Sheffield Steel at the barge port in accounting. Ralph began working in the shop because of his ability to read the blueprints. Here, the space shuttle launchpad 39B was built along with the steel walkway to it. Exciting, but the company was sold & Carol went to work for Danny Sheffield in his building, plumbing & pool construction business. In time, that business dissipated & she moved on to Georgia Pacific working ten years in the Research & Development building. Curious what was done there, I asked. Carol & her team tested GP’s paper products for such things as softness & (get this...) flushability! They had “three commodes” in the building for just that! Hilarious. There were the potties right out in the open used only for flush testing. The team also helped develop automatic towel dispensers. Many flushes later, Carol moved to Converting, then to Vital Supplies to be responsible for determining absolutely everything needed to run the mill. She then worked in the Traffic Department, followed by becoming Logistics Supervisor in Shipping. At a point during this long career of filling needed positions, she worked with & became friends with Julie Thompson.

Now we see how Carol might have come to Pilot Club. Under Julie’s years-long persuasion to join, Carol did attend some Program Meetings. However, she was a working wife & mother of two very active sons. She attended the sons’ USA tournaments weekends in the school year & ran wrestling tournaments all over the state in summers. She was really left with no time for a girls’ club, regardless of the mission.

It was tragedies & suffering that made Carol’s life eventually less busy. Her youngest son, Seth, became ill with Ewing Sarcoma at 17 years old & went to heaven in 1995 at an age of almost 20. The family bravely fought it for that time with massive all body radiation after brother, Josh, donated bone marrow for a transplant. Horrifyingly, Carol was then forced to fight another long battle against her husband’s Lewy Body Dementia. Ralph joined Seth in heaven in 2018. Despite living with such unfair devastating losses, Carol perked up & said, “I still have Josh, an amazing son who has brought me a loving daughter-in-law & incomparable granddaughter!” Josh teaches at the high school & of course, coaches wrestling & swimming. His daughter, Emma, teaches two-year-olds at Peniel Academy & is working toward a degree online. She is recently married, so may one day fill up Carol’s free time with a grandchild.

In 2019, Julie, still trying to recruit Carol to Pilot, gave her a ticket to Bunco! Carol attended, had fun & said, "Sign me up". Julie was so excited she completed the paperwork & paid Carol's dues that night! Carol has attacked her membership with the same vigor her life story demonstrates, taking on tasks right away, resulting in quickly becoming president. We are all beneficiaries of her fearless & tireless work ethic.

In closing I asked for any words of advice for the rest of us to which Carol said, "Live every day. Don't look forward & don't look at the past. Just live each day. Whatever happens will happen & it will all work out."