

COMING *of* AGE™

LIFESTYLE MAGAZINE FOR SENIORS

SPRING 2021

Scenic Sights and Hikes

*Short Trails
to Explore*

Everyone Can Use Some Relationship Advice

Start Before You're Ready

Certifying a City

*Making a
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Dementia-
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[FROM THE EDITOR]



Josh Newby
Marketing
Communications
Director and
Editor-in-Chief

Around the office, we use a phrase to describe the majority of our clientele: “the invisibly needy.” This is a subset of the senior population that you don’t really see, but you assume they are taken care of. “They have Social Security and Medicare,” you may say. “There exists for them a social safety net; they’re fine.” We see that same attitude reflected with the recent rollout of vaccines. We like to tout the great success the state has had inoculating elder adults against COVID, but that is a misperception, probably not one that is anyone’s fault. Because while you and I see seniors getting vaccinated on the news—or more broadly, have parents and grandparents living relatively fulfilling lives thanks to safety net programs—it is what you don’t see that reveals the real truth. We don’t know what we don’t know, and for the first two months or so of Florida’s vaccine rollout, it seemed no one knew the truth, except of course those that always know the truth: those who are suffering through it.

Medically and financially vulnerable seniors don’t have a computer, many can’t use a smart phone, and some don’t even have internet. How were they supposed to register? Homebound elders struggle greatly with transportation as it is in Northwest Florida,

so if they were lucky enough to get a vaccination appointment, how were they supposed to get there? These folks are the most at-risk for complications from COVID, so while it looks like the state is serving our most needy, there is an invisibly needy population being treated as an afterthought, as they always are.

I’m glad the administration, when confronted with these truths, took steps to remedy them, through a phone number registration system, vaccination pods in poor communities, and even a pilot program in south Florida for the homebound. But that doesn’t make better the fact that they weren’t considered in the first place, especially after we’ve known for 10 or so months that a vaccine was coming sooner or later.

Let’s make an effort to seek out those living in the shadows, holed up in their homes, unable to reach out. They are counting on us. Sure, your daily life may not depend on them, but their very life depends on you.

I know you understand, I know you look out for us and for them, and I thank you. Give me a call at (850) 266-2507 if you’d like to chat about anything in this issue, or just to chat! And until next time, enjoy life—you’ve earned it!

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LIFESTYLE MAGAZINE FOR SENIORS
COMING of AGE™



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Cover: Bob Zellner
photo by Guy Stevens

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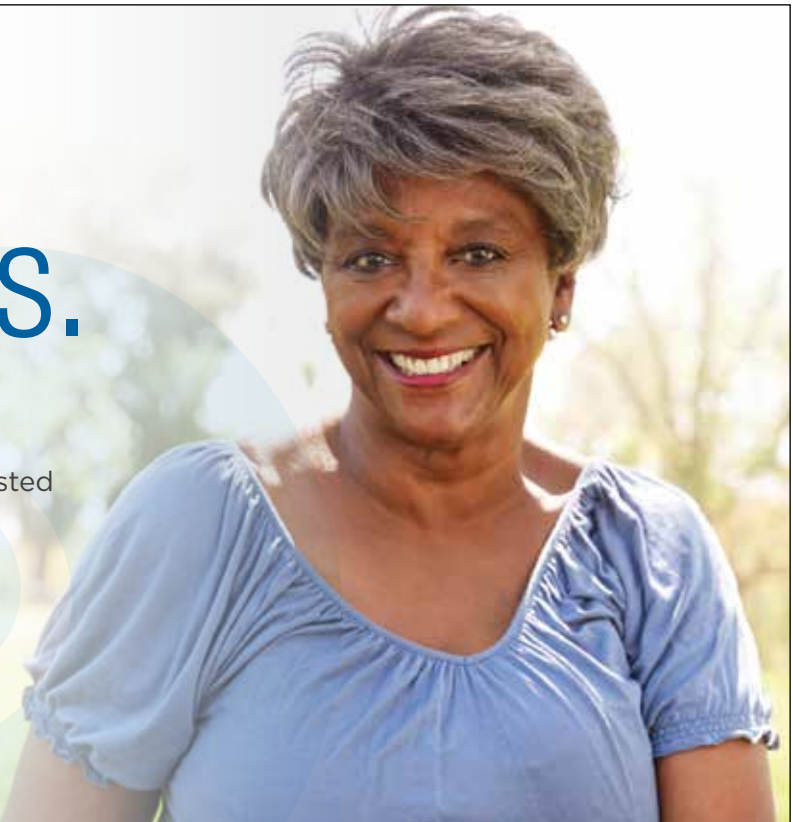
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It only takes one person to slash the statistics.

Did you know that 1 in 10 children Escambia County are victims of child abuse? It's time to change that number. Visit KnowChildAbuse.org to learn to recognize, report and reduce child abuse.

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[.org](http://KnowChildAbuse.org)

PRESENTED BY GULF COAST KIDS HOUSE

Dead Last

by John Clark

A recent column in our local newspaper captured my attention. It was a column near the end of December written by Betsy Tabac, a community organizer, volunteer, and elder advocate in the Tallahassee area. She reported that the “AARP Public Policy Institute reported that Florida ranked 51, at the very bottom, compared to all other states and the District of Columbia, for the care it provides for frail, poor and middle-class old people.” That’s right folks, not 49, not 50, but dead last. This information was reported in AARP’s recently released Long-Term Services and Supports (LTSS) State Scorecard 2020. What are these LTSS?

According to AARP, “LTSS consist of a broad range of day-to-day help needed by people with long-term conditions, disabilities, or frailty. This can include personal care (bathing, dressing, toileting); complex care (medications, wound care); help with housekeeping,

transportation, paying bills, meals; and other ongoing social services. LTSS may be provided in the home, in assisted living and other supportive housing settings, in nursing facilities, and in integrated settings such as those that provide both health care and supportive services. LTSS also include supportive services provided to family members and other unpaid caregivers.” All of these services are often called home and community-based services (HCBS) and locally the Council on Aging of West Florida, Inc. provides most of the aforementioned home and community-based services in Escambia and Santa Rosa Counties. For those wishing to do a “deep dive” into this report and how AARP reached its conclusion ranking Florida dead last, you can visit www.longtermscorecard.org/.

Unfortunately in Florida, there remain thousands of elders on a waiting list who have been assessed as needing some type of home and community-based service. For many, receiving these services can mean the difference between staying in a community setting versus having to go into some type of institutional care, such as a nursing home. The cost savings realized when an elder receives critical

services at home versus nursing home care can be very significant. As just one example, in 2018 an average care plan for an elder cost \$8,418/year in the Florida Community Care for the Elderly (CCE) program. A care plan is a mix of services needed to help a frail low income elder to remain at home. On the other hand, nursing home cost for that same elder could be as high as \$97,820/year. You can easily see the savings.

While he recognizes the difficulty legislators face funding critical programs due to the pandemic, the State Director of AARP, Jeff Johnson, asked for “the help of Floridians in getting lawmakers to embrace a new vision for long-term care in Florida. The state’s long-term care system was struggling before 2020, and now, significant policy change must happen.” One of his key points is: **Help keep older Floridians at home whenever possible.** End the bias in the system to place frail Floridians in institutional residential care facilities. Instead, put the emphasis on empowering and supporting our 2.9 million family caregivers to provide care for elders at home and in their communities whenever possible through funding at home community-based care.



In addition to the critical need to help older Floridians to remain at home, Mr. Johnson notes that another challenge facing Florida is the fact that “thousands of vulnerable older Floridians in nursing homes statewide have been isolated from friends and family since March 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic. Sadly, nearly 40 percent of COVID-19 deaths in the state started as infections in long-term care facilities.” He goes on to state that Florida needs to **rethink layout**. “Currently, most nursing homes and many assisted living facilities are laid out like hospital wards, with residents brought from their rooms for congregate meals and socializing in large groups. This is, and has been, a formula for contagion. Think about how easily the flu, MRSA, staph, and strep infections have infiltrated and spread in those environments before the pandemic. Decentralizing residents and

dedicated staff into smaller groups could limit exposure to infection and promote residents’ health.”

Yes, there is a cost to providing adequate funding for in home care and making changes to institutional care. However, Mr. Johnson says that we should **“demand that taxpayers not fund negligent long-term care.** Florida taxpayers have every right to demand sweeping changes in long-term care. After all, they’re paying for most of it. About 79 percent of the financing for nursing homes in Florida is public funding through Medicaid and Medicare programs.” Mr. Johnson asks Florida Citizens to join AARP in their call to action: Contact your state senator and state house of representatives member and tell them the lives of our older friends and neighbors are at risk if changes are not made to Florida’s long-term

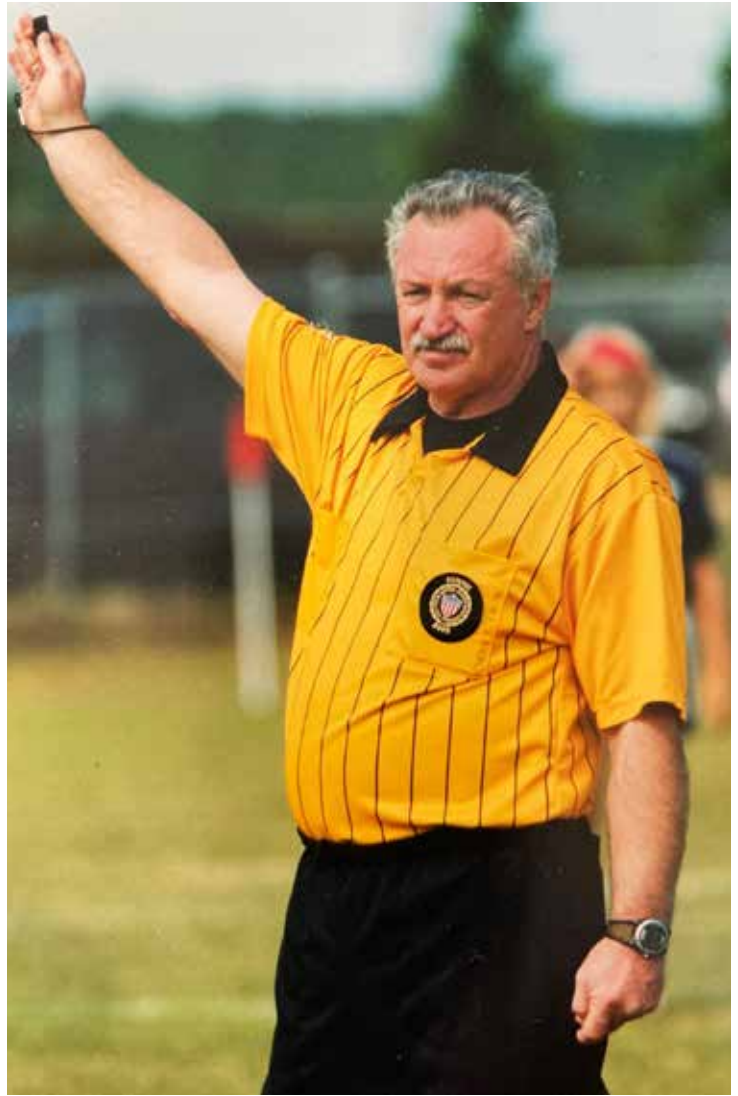
care system. To contact your state senator, call AARP’s Florida Legislative hot-line 1-844-220-5551, and to contact your state representative, call 1-844-220-5528.

Older Floridians have earned a better long-term care system. Taxpayers deserve it. The case for lasting, fundamental reform is irrefutable and overwhelming. Our leaders today should be judged by whether they rise to the occasion. Hubert Humphrey is quoted as saying, “The moral test of government is how that government treats those who are in the dawn of life, the children; those who are in the twilight of life, the elderly; those who are in the shadows of life, the sick, the needy and the handicapped.” We might have a “ways to go.” •

The Legacy of **Mr. William “Bill” Cross**

By Field Cross and Lauren Clark

As the old Irish Proverb goes, “If you’re lucky enough to be Irish, then you’re lucky enough.” Well, if you were lucky enough to know Bill Cross, then you indeed were lucky enough. Though it seems cliché to say he was one of a kind, his legacy is the epitome of this expression. As most noble men, Bill is remembered as someone who was friendly, honorable, compassionate and as unselfish as one could be. He was loyal, hard-working, and above all a leader.



Bill was passionate about serving others and was the much-needed voice for countless citizens of Escambia County that couldn't stand up for themselves. He was a fighter for the underdog, working tirelessly to help those society had written off as undesirables. He believed in holding yourself and others accountable for your actions, but also believed everyone deserved to be treated as human. He believed in accountability, but also in giving grace. He believed that with growth, these humans were to have the same opportunities awarded back to them as anyone else. The hard-work, heart, and selflessness he gave

to the citizens of Escambia County will affect lives for generations to come. Though he took great pride in all his work, one of his proudest accomplishments was working to provide Escambia County with a Veteran's Court.

Although he faced much adversity throughout his career, he always kept his head up.

“You win with class, and you lose with class” was one of his signature sayings, and his children still hold this dear to their own lives today. Being humble is a trait that he instilled in

his children. Because of this, they always knew where they stood with him. When Bill spoke, people listened. He was the type of leader people strive to be. He knew what it takes to push people to not only do their best, but could also encourage and lead them to exceed even their own personal expectations.

Bill was a loving husband, wonderful father, fun-loving “Boppy,” and dear friend and inspiration to many. All that knew him knew if they were ever in need, they could count on him. In his free time he loved anything sports-related. He especially loved watching

his son and later his grandchildren thrive on the soccer field. Nelson Mandela once said, "There is no passion to be found playing small-settling for a life that is less than the one you are capable of living." Bill embodied this daily, and with passion. He knew that living in the moment was better than living in the past. He would not want people to be upset at his passing. He would want people to enjoy the time they get with loved ones.

My dad not only led by example, but from the heart, and for that everyone will remember the joy they had with one of the greatest men that I have ever had the honor to know.

*I could not stay another day,
To love, to laugh, to work or play;
Tasks left undone must stay that way.
And if my parting has left a void,
Then fill it with remembered joy.*

*Remembered by: Field Cross,
son of Bill Cross*

Bill was Council on Aging's first Community Services Director in the 1970s and remained a friend of the agency.

Legacy Giving

Bill Cross did what all of us hope to do: he left the world better than he found it. Most people spend their whole lives aiming to do this and discover so many ways to make an impact along the way. One way that you can be strategic about your legacy is to designate a planned gift to a charity.

Planned giving empowers individuals to ensure that the causes they have advocated for and supported during

“ **There is no passion to be found playing small-settling for a life that is less than the one you are capable of living.**”

their lives will be able to keep serving for many years to come. A financial advisor can help you set up several ways to do this:

- **Bequest** - A gift that is included in your will—the document which details who you want to get your assets, after your death; and who is to oversee carrying out your wishes. This gift can be a specific monetary amount, property or a percentage of your estate.
- **Charitable Remainder Trust** - An irrevocable trust that pays a specified annual amount to one or more people for a fixed period of years. At the end of the term of the trust, the remaining trust assets are distributed to the designated charity.
- **Charitable Gift Annuities** - An irrevocable transfer of property (eg. cash, securities) to a qualified financial institution in exchange for a contract to pay the donor or the donor's designated charity an annuity for life.
- **Charitable Lead Trust** - An irrevocable trust in which annual payments are given to a charitable organization and the principal amount reverts to the donor and/or their beneficiaries at the end of the trust term.

We highly recommend you consult with legal counsel regarding these matters.

Designating a Beneficiary

Planned giving is not just for the upper class- anyone can name beneficiaries on their financial accounts. This ensures that upon one's death, these financial accounts will be passed directly to named beneficiaries, which can be an individual or a charity. Consider naming or updating beneficiaries on:

- Life insurance policies;
- Bank accounts;
- Retirement accounts;
- CDs, Stocks; and,
- Investment accounts.

Be sure to update beneficiaries and all life planning documents after marriage, divorce, or the birth or adoption of a child.

A legacy gift fills the void you leave behind with joy and opportunities. Not just in the charity you donate to, but to those served by it. Through planned giving, your legacy lives in joy and opportunities for generations to come.

Interested in learning more about planned giving? Contact Lauren Clark at lclark@coawfla.org.

“ **You win with class, and you lose with class.**”



Certifying a City

THE EFFORT TO MAKE AN ENTIRE COMMUNITY DEMENTIA-FRIENDLY

By Josh Newby

A **lmost 10,000 people over the age of 65—or a full 10 percent of the senior population—has a probable case of Alzheimer’s or some other related dementia in Escambia and Santa Rosa Counties. With an estimated 580,000 people living with Alzheimer’s disease, not accounting for other types of dementia, and a projection to have over 720,000 individuals living with the disease in Florida by 2025, Florida ranks second in the nation with the highest incidence. We build wheelchair ramps, provide transportation, facilitate in-home care and build TTY networks for our physically disabled, but are we developing a city infrastructure that can also accommodate our mentally disabled? The answer sadly is often no. The Florida Department of Elder Affairs’ Dementia Care and Cure Initiative (DCCI) seeks to change that.**

Started in 2015, the idea behind DCCI is to engage communities across the state to be more dementia-caring, dementia-understanding and dementia-accommodating. By allowing separate communities to tackle the challenge in their own ways, DCCI is custom-fitted to a particular region in a way that will most benefit that area. What works in Miami will not necessarily work in Pensacola, nor should it.

“The DCCI aims to create communities throughout Florida that are sensitive to, supportive and aware of the needs of individuals affected by and living with Alzheimer’s disease and related dementias,” said Laura Copeland, program coordinator for DCCI. “While this initiative is state-directed, it is community-driven, and the real work of DCCI is carried out by volunteer led and run Task Forces, that operate in Dementia-Caring Communities throughout the state.”

Locally, the program began in earnest with an emphasis on first-responders and senior care facilities. Those with dementia see the world and interact

with others differently, so the local chapter consulted with a doctor and other dementia professionals to create a training program that put the audience through various scenarios in order to better understand their situation. A pre- and post-test was also developed to ensure the task force was tangibly improving knowledge in the community.

“DCCI Task Forces are in place to break down barriers and reduce stigma surrounding dementia, create welcoming spaces and hospitable environments, bring dementia sensitivity education and training to all sectors of a community, provide resources and support to families, and advocate for care and cure programs,” said Copeland.



Next, the task force plans to work with restaurants, retail outlets and other service-line companies to improve communications and interactions with those with dementia. Those businesses would then become certified with a decal that would signal to caregivers that the location is a safe, understanding place for them to bring their loved ones. For ex-



- ▲ A local DCCI work group.
- ◀ Part of DCCI includes distribution of scent kits to help locate wanderers.

ample, if given the option between two dining establishments—one of which is dementia-friendly, where the wait staff understands the unique communication needs of the client and knows the importance of patience and simple phrases; and another that is not—most caregivers will choose the former option, even if it is more expensive or out of the way.

“Our administration is committed to working diligently to improve the lives of Floridians living with Alzheimer’s,” said Lieutenant Governor of Florida Jeanette Nuñez, who has

this disease continues to grow, our state must take bold steps to find innovative solutions aimed at assisting these residents.”

Beyond retail and dining, the task force hopes that eventually every frequented private business, as well as government offices, will soon be versed enough in the individual needs of dementia patients that they are able to accommodate them and maybe even make future plans that take them into consideration. It is a moral, just, and economically viable way of doing things. It creates a sense of safety for the client and

caregiver, and a sense of corporate social responsibility for the business.

From there, the state aspires to have truly livable communities for seniors. Florida was designated as “age-friendly” in 2019, the largest state in the nation to do so. But to be truly livable, each community must have affordable housing, reliable public transportation, community support, access to resources, social inclusion, civic and social participation, and accessibly and inviting outdoor spaces and buildings. The first step is the task forces and the businesses, because without the buy-in and increased capital from the economic mobility of the dementia population, nothing else will fall into place. •

Start Before You're Ready

By Jodi Brown



What challenging conversations about aging are you putting off? None of us, myself included, wants to willfully look at the reality of our own diminishing capacity to care for ourselves. None of us.

In my early 20s, I was fortunate enough to get a job working for a tax attorney/estate planner, and it changed my life forever. I watched as informed and educated families put plans into place that addressed illness, incapacitation, death and disposition of assets. On the flip side, I also got to see the colossal mess, arguments and lost money that occurs when people fail to plan. It is not pretty, trust me.

Thirty years have passed since I had that particular job, and life hasn't gotten any easier. In fact, it has

gotten far more complicated. The reality is that those who fail to plan well ahead of when they are going to need assistance, usually end up holding the short end of a shockingly small stick. Without the foresight of good legal planning, your options to have opinions about your outcome shrink dramatically.

In some cases, in order to qualify for government assistance for long term care, you must first use all of your own assets, which makes sense, right? Maybe you want to qualify for some help so that your money will last longer? People who think they are going to sell Momma's house, bank the money for the long haul and get government subsidized care are in for a big surprise. In order to be eligible for assistance and to protect your assets, some states are requiring that the assets be moved

up to five years prior to applying for assistance, making last minute scrambles a moot point.

Plan ahead. Don't wait until it's too late to protect your assets. We are all living longer and making your dollars stretch further takes some planning.

As a professional organizer, I'm working with quite a few people who are organizing for their final season of life. For some, they need help gathering their important documents before making their way to their attorney. For others, they've completed that task and are now needing assistance going through their personal effects and deciding what to do with them. Someone who isn't emotionally involved or attached to their outcome can make the process easier.

Letting go of cherished belongings can be challenging for anyone. Here are three creative ways you can share your treasured possessions with someone you love. Watching them receive and enjoy these gifts can be a joyful event for you both.

THE HAIL MARY

When I was in my late teens, my maiden aunt Mary did something incredibly cool for Christmas. She ended up with a slew of family heirlooms and decided that it was time to let them go. She wrapped and boxed them all carefully and brought them to my sister's house for our annual celebration and gift exchange. All the items were then unpacked and displayed on long tables for us to look over. She gathered up her nieces and nephew and passed a hat between us and we each drew a number. We then took turns choosing the items we wanted. We kept picking (in order) until eventually the tables were bare. We swapped as we wanted to, and it ended up being great fun. She intimated that it just made things easier. By letting folks have what they wanted, she didn't have to sweat over the details. She also loved watching us enjoy the mementos that had given her so much joy, something she would have missed had this all waited until she passed away.

THE BLIND SURPRISE

Have you ever had a friend or family member comment on how much they love a certain item in your house? Why not just make it a random gift to them? You already know they like it, why not give it to someone you are

certain would appreciate and love it? Invite them for lunch, wrap it in a nice package and include a thoughtful card. What a lovely way for you both to enjoy a cherished item.

GIVE IT BACK

A client who had been collecting notes and cards from her nieces and nephews for years decided it was time to do something with these bits of memorabilia. When these kids became adults and started having families of their own, we got together to decide what to do with it all. There was artwork, letters from summer camp, invitations, graduations

and photos all gleaned from events during 30+ years. We went through everything carefully and separated items by child. Photos took a little longer but it all worked out well.

The final step was boxing them in a beautiful creative way and attaching a lovely hand written note. For the next year each adult child got their own box for their birthday. It was a huge family hit.

Going through your treasure can be a fun process. Watching someone else get joy out of these things as well—even better. •



Scenic Sights and Hikes:

Short Trails to Explore

By Dakota Parks

As the freezing cold fronts and Panhandle winter makes way for blooming wildlife and breezy, temperate days, Spring Fever arises in all of us. Suddenly, we're itching for the sun, pollen and fresh air like we are kids in a stuffy elementary classroom again smelling fresh cut grass outside. Spring is the perfect time to soak up the great outdoors before the summer heatwaves make light afternoon exploring a great athletic feat with sweat-drenched clothing. Exploring trails, boardwalks and short hikes are also a great way to get outside and still follow social-distancing protocol. You can even make an afternoon of it by packing a blanket and some sandwiches and fruit to have lunch outdoors at one of these scenic spots! *Coming of Age* rounded up some of the best local spots for short trails to explore. Don't forget to pack a mask as you may encounter fellow hikers on boardwalks and trails. For more local trails, check out floridahikes.com for trailheads, duration and user-ranked difficulty.



Bay Bluffs Park

3400 Scenic Hwy

A passive preserve on the steep bluffs above Pensacola Bay, Pensacola Bay Bluffs Park protects 42 acres of largely sloped landscape. This 0.8-mile boardwalk is a steep climb down to the waterfront, featuring large sets of stairs and gorgeous views of the Panhandle scenery. This trail has many different ways to complete the walk, including climbing down to the beach or walking to the end of the boardwalk and making a loop out of it by walking along the roadside back to the starting parking lot.

Edward Ball Nature Trail

located at University of West Florida

The Edward Ball Nature Trail is a leisurely half-mile boardwalk through Thompson's Bayou, a beautiful hardwood swamp. You may spot a variety of mammals, songbirds, fish and reptiles, including an occasional American alligator at this trail established by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. For the more adventurous, there are three loop trailheads leading off the boardwalk including a 1.24-mile, 1.55-mile and 2.10-mile trail marked with easy to spot color coded signage.

Innerarity Point Park

3835 Cruzat Way

Newly renovated Innerarity Point Park is the perfect place for a short walk down to the waterfront. This four-acre park features a boardwalk and walking paths, large and small covered pavilions, two playgrounds, restrooms with rinse off areas and a shoreline with native vegetation. Covered by lush oak trees for plenty of shade, the boardwalk is just a short walk, under a mile, to the scenic views of the Gulf of Mexico.



Photo by Guy Stevens

Tarkiln Bayou Preserve State Park *2401 Bauer Rd*

At over 4,000 acres, the Tarkiln Bayou Preserve is a haven for amateur botanists to roam with four species of endangered pitcher plants and other rare and endangered plant species. One of the easiest hikes to follow is the Tarkiln Bayou Trail, a 1.5-mile trail, which includes an elevated boardwalk over prairie, cypress and titi forests and crossing a spectacular pitcher plant bog adjoining the bayou. For advanced hikers, there is also the Perdido Bay Trail, a rugged 6.5-mile trail with beach access. Entrance fees are required and collected upon admittance into the park.



Big Lagoon State Park *12301 Gulf Beach Hwy*

Although many of Big Lagoon's hiking trails and boardwalks are closed for social distancing protocol, this 705-acre Florida State Park is still a great place to pack a lunch and slowly make your way through the Sand Pine Trail, a three-mile loop through the lush, tree-covered forest, featuring a pond and lagoon view. If three miles sounds like too big of a journey, many people follow the arrows along the trail until they're satisfied with their walk and turn around to head back to the start of the trail. Entrance fees are required and collected upon admittance into the park.

Jones Swamp Wetland Preserve and Nature Trail

198 Patton Dr Tucked within an urban area along Jones Creek, this 12-mile walkable greenway trail is 40 percent complete. With a freshly opened boardwalk and multiple trailheads through the woods, this trail offers something for everyone, including multiple overhead views of the creek and plenty of wildlife to observe. Once complete, the trail will accommodate a diverse range of visitors for a variety of outdoor recreational experiences including hiking, bird watching, nature photography, picnicking or just to take a stroll.



Johnson Beach

Johnson Beach Road

Johnson Beach is a designated recreational area in Perdido Key on the Gulf Islands National Seashore. Take a stroll on the Discovery Nature Trail, a raised boardwalk that is roughly half a mile and takes visitors through dunes, pine trees and salt marsh outlooks. Entrance fees are required and collected upon admittance into the park.



Pensacola Beach and Perdido Key

Last but not least, we can't forget the beautiful, sand white beaches that are free and readily available for sunrise and sunset strolls, birdwatching and dipping your toes in the water. Kick off your shoes and take a stroll down Pensacola Beach or Perdido Key



EVERYONE CAN USE SOME RELATIONSHIP ADVICE

Marriage Counselors Share Tips for Married Seniors by Gina Castro

If you were to Google “Marriage advice for seniors,” you’ll surprisingly get dozens of results of seniors *giving* marriage advice, not *receiving*. Many assume wisdom comes with age, but no one is ever too old for advice. Because many senior couples have been married for years or even a few decades, people assume that means they must have hacked the code to a successful marriage.

That may be true for some or the majority of couples. As couples age, life slows down. The kids have moved out and started families of their own and retirement has opened your schedule up. It’s during this new phase in life that senior couples may see issues from the past creep back up or see changes in the dynamic of their relationship. *Coming of Age* spoke with a local relationship trainer

and a practicing clinician for advice for married seniors. Both experts have different approaches to guiding clients through relationship issues.

Relationship trainer at Bay-side Marriage Counseling, Julie M. Nise, LPC, LMFT, CT, has been helping married couples for the past 16 years figure out what skills they need to be successful in the long haul. Nise explained that as a relationship trainer, she concentrates on the future of the relationship.

Owner and practicing clinician of Innovative Direction, Counseling and Evaluation Services, Alyssa Warren, MS, LMHC, CFMHE, CCCE, has been helping clients with the most up-to-date psychological techniques for several years. Warren is specialized in divorce, among other topics, and has a decade of experi-

ence working with relationship issues.

Nise and Warren agreed that a frequent issue in senior couples, and majority of couples no matter the age, is communication. Communication is the foundation of any relationship. If healthy communication isn’t established early on in the relationship, this issue can snowball.

“Communication is always number one. A lack of communication, especially when we get into senior ages, you’re looking at really long patterns of maybe not the best communication,” Warren explained.

In Nise’s experience, her senior clients typically come in with an issue related to communication. “They’re either arguing a little bit more than they want to, or they don’t

feel like they’re being heard and conversing well, so they can’t have a nice dialogue,” Nise said.

Warren’s approach to this issue is to introduce the couple to basic communication skills during therapy. One skill she teaches is “I Statements.” This skill prevents placing blame.

“When we use ‘You Statements’ to other people, like ‘You made me feel this way,’ or ‘You did this,’ the other person will tend to get defensive,” Warren explained. “We teach ‘I Statements’ like ‘I feel this way because of this.’ When we use ‘I Statements,’ we own what’s going on. We’re not putting it on the other person. Those basics get people talking to each other in a healthy way.”

One way Nise suggests dealing with communication issues is by remaining both interesting and interested. Sometimes when a relationship has lasted for a long time, couples may stop working to maintain that spark that drew them together to begin with. This lax approach can halt dialogue.

“It’s very important to stay both interesting and interested, as a partner, no matter how old you are,” Nise continued. “Part of that is having things in your life that are motivating you that are adventurous and interesting that you can talk about, deal with and share.”

In short, couples should pursue their own interests and hobbies and encourage each other to do the same. Foster-

ing each other's interests helps keep conversations flowing as couples grow and change.

If there is anything that is consistent in life, it's change. Whether it's once, dozens or hundreds of times, everyone is bound to change. As partners age, they change. The key to using change as a tool to bring a couple closer, rather than drift apart, is flexibility.

"You don't have to exactly change together, but find things that are of interest with each other. Always be respectful, even if the changes are not lining up completely," Warren said.

It's important to allow each other to change. However, Nise explained that married couples must maintain common interests and goals in order to maintain a partnership. Marriage requires teamwork.

"If you have a marriage formed that is a real team, a partnership, then you're always looking out for what is in the best interest of that team or that marriage. The more couples are individuals and kind of go their own way and act in their own best interest, that's how you let distance grow. That's where you start to get

problems," Nise explained. "So, it's not that you couldn't have your own interest in activities. You certainly can. There has to be some commonality of goals and interests. You're not two individuals. You're a team. It's important for couples to have mutually interesting things to work toward out-comes and goals."

One change that sometimes occurs in senior marriages is a change in roles. As these couples age, one's health may decline faster than the other's, which could cause the latter to become the caretaker. Taking care of anyone let alone a loved one is challenging. Nise advises that seniors prepare for this potential scenario as early as possible.

"You have to talk with each other and say, 'Well, what if I end up being the caregiver? What if you end up being the caregiver?' There's all kinds of things that need to happen around that scenario," Nise continued. "You don't want to just, poof, all of a sudden, somebody's sick, and now I've got to change everything. You need to have flexibility."

If an individual is in the situation where they are the caretaker for their partner, Warren

BEST SEX POSITIONS FOR SENIORS

As the body ages, the way we have sex changes. Here are a few ways to have sex with less strain on the body.

1. Spooning

This popular cuddling position can become a version of doggie style but with no pressure on the knees.

2. Lie Back

When both lie on their backs, the female puts one leg over the male's body. Then just find an angle for entry.

3. Add a Chair

With a chair that is low enough that the woman can touch the ground with her feet, the woman sits on the man's lap either facing him or reversed.

advises they don't lose sight of themselves.

"Seek out as much help as you can. Being a caretaker is a job in itself. No matter how much you love somebody, it can take a lot out of somebody. So, having a really good support system is number one," Warren said. "It's okay to vent. Caretakers in general feel a lot of guilt. If you're taking care of a loved one, it is tiring and exhausting. And that's okay, but you have to take care of yourself first. Because if you don't take care of yourself first, you can't be the healthi-

est person you can be for that other person."

Continuing on the subject of self-care, sex is also a part of how we care for ourselves. It's no secret that sex is important in marriage. But, how important is sex in marriage when you're in your 70s? Well, for one, you're never too old for sex. However, there is nothing wrong with getting the green light from the doctor just to be sure.

Sex is different for all couples no matter the age, and communication is always the first step. When Warren was in graduate school, she recalled a panel of seniors discussing their sex life. One senior couple shared that they didn't have an interest in sex anymore, and they both were still satisfied with their relationship. The other couples said they still had sex, and a single senior woman said she, too, still had sex.

"So it really is about what works for that couple. Now, if one partner would like sex and the other one doesn't, it's like any other issue in a relationship," Warren continued. "You have to learn to compromise. Compromising doesn't mean 50/50. Compromising can be 60/40 or 70/30. Make sure you talk to the doctor first, but there are always sexual options no matter what."

No matter the length of a relationship, there is always room for growth and improvement. If you're looking to enhance your relationship or sex life, it doesn't hurt to reach out to a counselor or read books on the topic. Who knows, you may learn a trick or two. •



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Tax Considerations for 2021

By Melissa Straughn

As we move forward from the monumental year that was 2020 to 2021, there is one last lingering task that we must complete relating to 2020—filing taxes. New tax laws and changes are introduced every year, but with the passing of the CARES Act in March of 2020 there are several new tax considerations affecting charitable contributions, stimulus checks, and retirement funds designed to assist and benefit taxpayers.

As they do every year, the tax brackets and standard deduction have slightly changed to adjust for inflation. The highest tax rate remains at 37% for individuals with income greater than \$518,400 (\$622,050 for married couples filing jointly). Other rates are as follows:

- 35%, for incomes over \$207,350 (\$414,700 for married couples filing jointly);
- 32% for incomes over \$163,300 (\$326,600 for married couples filing jointly);
- 24% for incomes over \$85,525 (\$171,050 for married couples filing jointly);
- 22% for incomes over \$40,125 (\$80,250 for married couples filing jointly);
- 12% for incomes over \$9,875 (\$19,750 for married couples filing jointly).

The standard deduction rate (the dollar amount that taxpayers who don't itemize deduct from their taxable income) increased from \$12,200 for single filers in 2019 to \$12,400 in 2020 and from \$24,400 for married filers in 2019 to \$24,800 in 2020.

One of the best tax savings opportunities to come from the CARES Act is the deduction for charitable donations. Charitable donations have typically been a tax benefit only for those that take an itemized deduction on their tax return. Itemized deductions are allowable expenses that will reduce a taxpayer's adjusted gross income if their itemized deductions total more than the standard deduction. Charitable donations are considered an allowable expense for those that itemize; however, the CARES Act allows all taxpayers to deduct up to \$300 in qualified charitable donations as an "above the line" deduction. The donation must be cash and must be made to an organization that is religious, charitable, educational, scientific, or literary in purpose to be considered allowable. The IRS offers a tax-exempt search to see if an organization falls into these categories.

Many eligible Americans received a \$1,200 stimulus check in 2020 that is not taxable and will not need to be included in their income when filing taxes. Single individuals that made up to \$75,000 and couples filing jointly that made up to \$150,000 were eligible for the stimulus checks. The stimulus checks were an advancement of an eligible credit on your 2020 tax form; therefore, if an eligible individual did not receive a stimulus check in 2020, they will be able to claim this rebate on their taxes to receive a credit of \$1,200 to be refunded, or to reduce the taxes that they owe for the year, or even maximize a potential return! If an individual has already received their \$1,200 stimulus

check, they have already automatically taken advantage of the recovery rebate credit and no further action is required on their taxes. The second round of stimulus checks were received in 2021 in the amount of \$600. Though some of us saw the check pending in our accounts as early as New Year's Eve, the \$600 stimulus checks were posted and received in 2021 and will relate to 2021's taxes.

The CARES Act also suspended required minimum distributions in 2020. Previously, whenever someone reached the age of 70, they were required to annually withdraw money from their IRAs and 401(k)s. The IRS does not allow a taxpayer to keep money in their retirement accounts indefinitely because taxes must be paid on the funds. Taxpayers may donate up to \$100,000 of their required minimum distribution directly to an eligible charity and it will be a non-taxable distribution. The CARES Act suspended required minimum distributions for 2020, and the SECURE Act changed the age from 70 1/2 to 72.

As always, it is best to discuss all tax implications with your tax preparer. •





Bob at the Fairhope
Pier Park in Fairhope,
Alabama.

Photo by Guy Stevens

BOB ZELLNER

A WHITE SOUTHERNER IN THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

Interview by Kelly Oden

Born in Alabama in 1939, Bob Zellner has spent the better part of his nearly 82 years in and around the Alabama Gulf Coast. The son and grandson of Ku Klux Klan members, Zellner may have been the unlikeliest of allies to the civil rights movement in the 1960s. However, an ally he was—and is. Guided by his Methodist faith, Zellner felt a spiritual imperative to fight alongside Black Southerners in their march toward freedom, civil rights and equality. For this, he faced vicious hatred, horrific beatings and more than 18 arrests—all at the hands of white segregationists who simply could not accept that a Southern white man would so wholeheartedly support and fight for the civil rights and equality of Black Americans.

As an organizer of The Freedom Rides of 1961 and the first white southerner to serve as field secretary for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), he worked alongside Ella Baker, Martin Luther King, Jr., John Lewis, Rosa Parks, Diane Nash, Julian Bond, Fannie Lou Hamer and many other civil rights leaders. During his time at SNCC, Zellner organized outreach efforts to white students at Southern colleges; organized workshops on non-violence; facilitated demonstrations, sit-ins and marches; helped integrate libraries and lunch counters; and solicited volunteers and

Freedom Schools during the Mississippi Freedom Summer in 1964.

In the late 60s, Zellner left SNCC to work on GROW (Grassroots Organizing Work) in New Orleans, where he lived for more than a decade. Zellner later became involved in the world of filmmaking and worked all over the world on many civil rights films.

In 2009, Zellner released his memoir, *The Wrong Side of Murder Creek* (New South Books), which chronicles his journey as an ally and civil rights activist including his famous battles with the KKK, segregationist lynch mobs and violent police. The movie based on his life and book, *Son of the South*, was recently released to high praise.

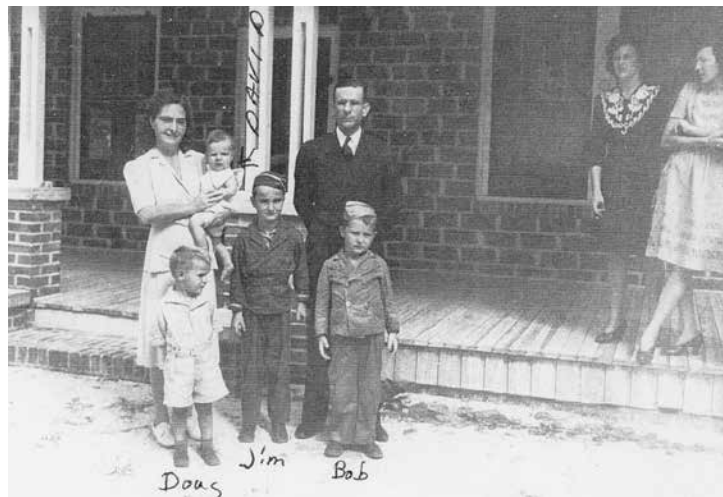
Zellner has made it his life mission to champion civil rights and work to secure equality for all people. While he is rightfully proud of his work in the 60s and beyond, Zellner says he is primarily looking toward the future by helping a new generation understand racial, historical and cultural assumptions and helping them develop the leadership skills necessary to continue building a more inclusive world.

Coming of Age had the privilege of speaking with Bob Zellner about his life's work and his life story. ►

It's interesting to me that you grew up in Brewton, Alabama. What was your boyhood like?

Well, daddy was a Methodist preacher, so we moved a lot. About every three or four years, we knew that we would move to another town. My mother was a schoolteacher. That was my childhood in lower Alabama. Daddy was in the Alabama West Florida Conference of the Methodist Church. I think that in terms of both lower Alabama and Northwest Florida, we've lived all over it—from the Dothan area in the east, all the way to Mobile and the Mississippi Coast.

I was like every other Southern boy—I was very athletic. Being an Alabaman, it is very easy to be athletic because it's practically a religion. We just did a lot of athletics. I was always attracted to the exotic types of training, like pole vaulting. Living in the woods like we did as kids, we'd make our own poles to vault with. We didn't have any money to buy an actual pole for vaulting. We had to learn how to pick out the right hickory sapling and cut it down and cure it properly to make it into a very strong but limber pole that we could pole vault with. So that was my fascination—to do unusual athletic things. Sometimes it would break and that was very dangerous. You had to balance the strength and lightness of the pole with how safe it was going to be. We had to make our own apparatus for putting the bar way up there, sometimes 12 or 15 feet in the air. And then we had to pole vault that high and then land on something soft enough so



you wouldn't break your body just by landing on the ground. So we made big pads to land on. That took a lot of time and effort as a young boy.

The underlying current in your story is that both your father and grandfather were members of the Ku Klux Klan. I understand that your father left the Klan when he became a minister. How old was your father when he had that epiphany?

His original epiphany was in about 1935 or 1936. He must have been 19 or 20 when he had his initial epiphany, which he had in Europe in the middle of the 1930s when he was over there and Hitler had just come to power in Germany. Dad found himself in Europe and his Klan beliefs began to clash with his Christian beliefs. And that's when he started wrestling with his racist past. It wasn't until we were five or six years old — 10 years later or so — before he finally officially broke with the Ku Klux Klan. His mother and father disowned him and his brothers never spoke to him again after that. So that was an early childhood lesson.

What was the conversation around race in your home as a boy?

I had one older brother, so we were both learning about the world and about world history. Being a Southerner, you don't travel very much, so we were fascinated that our father had been to Germany, Poland, Russia, Latvia and Estonia. He had lived in Boston. He had all of these, for the South, very exotic tastes in foods. So we were marginal—in some ways even as little children because we didn't live in a typical Southern family. Daddy was from the Klan side and mother was from Blountstown, Florida. Her heritage was Creek, Indian—the Apalachicola band of Creek Indians. Her father was a Methodist minister also, and he was anti-Ku Klux Klan. So even in my family, we had Klan on one side and anti-Klan on the other side. So that has been a family conversation now that's lasted 80-something years for me. I'll be 82 the month after next.

Do you still have family members that, if they're not members of the KKK, are still explicitly racist? And do you speak with them?

◀ **The Zellner family in Newton, Alabama, about 1943. Little soldiers, Jim and me, standing with Doug. David in Mom's arms. On the porch are Uncle Harvey's oldest daughters, Ruth and Madline. (Zellner Family Collection) From *The Wrong Side of Murder Creek* by Bob Zellner. Courtesy of NewSouth Books.**

Yes and yes. I do have people as close as my own brothers who have gone back to the old ways—not that they've been that way all along, but they have drifted back to the old Klan ways. So, we are on opposite sides of the political question, but we're still a family. We love each other family-wise, but we don't talk politics anymore directly.

That's got to be difficult. It's such a dividing line.

Yes, and it's been an issue for all of my brothers. We're all getting old and I'm the oldest. So, it's something that we think about the closer we get to the closing of our life story—have we been on the good side or the bad side? I always like to err on the side of being soft-hearted, if the only other alternative is to be hard-hearted.

How did you become aware of the civil rights movement?

The first memory that I had about race, which is one of the funny scenes in the movie now, was being taught racial etiquette—just basic Southern racial etiquette that was deemed appropriate in East Brewton at the time. Daddy was serving the East Brewton Methodist Church, and I was about 12 or 13 working in a

little country store. My boss had to tell me how to treat black customers in the store differently from white customers because I treated everybody the same. That was not the Southern way of life, so I had to be taught to practice "proper" racial etiquette. So that was my first conscious knowledge about the practical effects of segregation and racism.

Before I went off to college, a major change in my life occurred when daddy was transferred from the Methodist Church in East Brewton, Alabama, to the church on Broad Street in Mobile, Alabama. Our family moved from the small town to the big town and that was crucial to my development. I switched high schools from W.S. Neal High School in East Brewton to Murphy High School in Mobile. I was just two years at Murphy, but those were the two years that Autherine Lucy was the first black student to go to the University of Alabama. So, in the middle of my high school, there was a discussion every day among high school students about segregation and integration. I saw that I honestly felt differently than the vast majority of my high school classmates. I was curious enough to ask them why they were so fearful of one black student going to the University of Alabama. It was a puzzle to me of how they had been convinced by their parents, who were apparently adults and sane individuals, that that one black student would destroy a historical institution like the University of Alabama. I was interested in challenging them to tell me how one black student could destroy an entire university. The fact was that the adults

were willing to destroy the university rather than have it enroll one black student, and that didn't make good sense to me.

You were heavily criticized for speaking out against that. Tell me about that.

While I was in high school, it was just a tussle between all of us young people. I had a group of young people around me at Murphy High School who were also Methodist, and we were involved in Methodist programs like the Methodist Youth Fellowship. We were being challenged to think about the racial situation and decide which side we were on. So, we were already thinking about that as young Christians. To have this practical experience right in front of us--of everybody talking about integrating the University of Alabama, it was almost imperative that I would get involved in the conversation. Then I was chosen to be a graduation speaker, which was very strange to me because I had been dyslexic as a child and had not learned to read until I was in about the third or fourth grade. So, I didn't consider myself very intelligent, but they told me that I was eligible to be a graduation speaker. The way they were going to decide who would be the speakers was to have a speaking contest. I talked to my fellow Methodists, and they talked me into entering the contest to represent the church people. So, I had a group behind me to begin with. We launched a campaign to enter the speaking contest and become one of the four speakers, and we were successful. To me, that was an example of organizing. We were becoming organiz-

ers, and we were organizing around the question of race and segregation. So, I think my course was set by the time I went from high school in Mobile up to Huntingdon College in Montgomery. Montgomery was really the middle of the kettle in the aftermath of the Montgomery Bus Boycott, and a whole bunch of stuff was happening on the civil rights front. So, it only took me two or three years at Huntingdon to get involved in the middle of the fray up there by meeting Dr. King and Mrs. Rosa Parks and E.D. Nixon and the people that made the Montgomery Bus Boycott. And they finished the work of getting me involved directly in the civil rights movement.



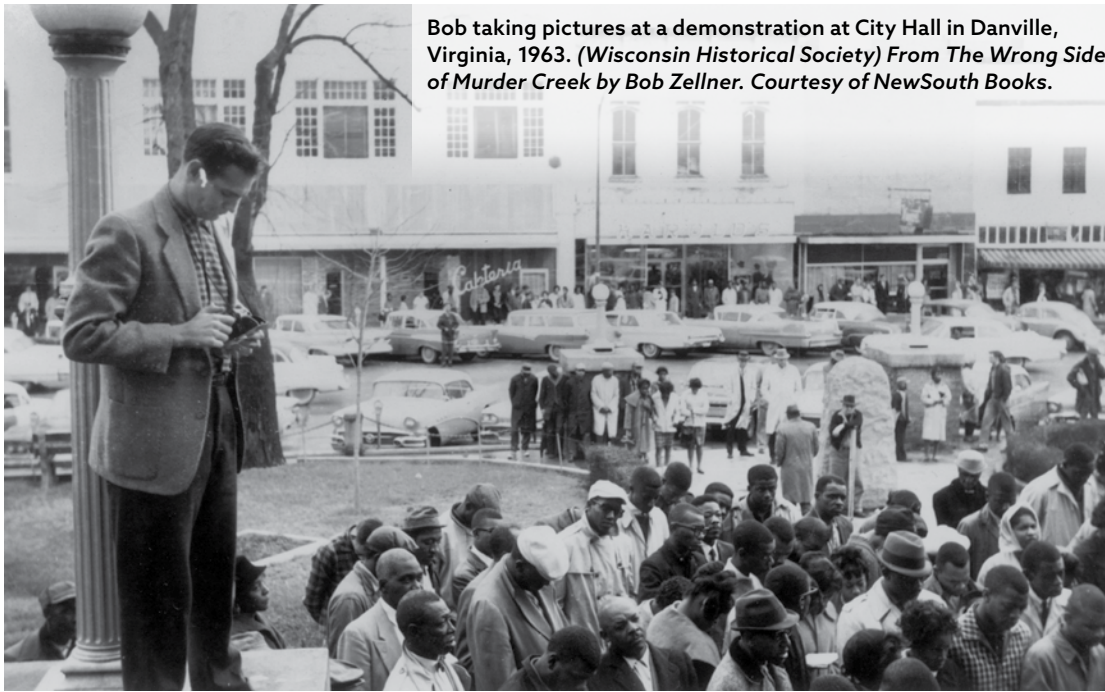
▲ Bob in the Zellners' apartment in fall 1963 while attending Brandeis. (Wisconsin Historical Society) From *The Wrong Side of Murder Creek* by Bob Zellner. Courtesy of NewSouth Books.

Tell me about the first time you met Dr. King.

The first time that I met him, personally, was after we were given an assignment in a sociology course to study the racial problem. I went with four other students from our sociology class to federal court so that we could introduce ourselves to Dr. King, and we could talk to him about our paper.

That was the first time that I met him. We went to federal court where he was on trial along with the *New York Times* and a whole bunch of other people in Montgomery. We had a conversation with him at the federal court building because, in those days, you had to very delicately organize and plan any interaction that white Southerners would have with black Southerners. We asked Dr. King if we could come to the workshop at Reverend Abernathy's Church where he was going to speak, and a lot of the people from SNCC, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, who were doing the lunch counter sit-ins, would be there. And so

that was how I met Dr. King. My first impression of him was that he was very gracious to take up some time with us. I found out later that he spent a major amount of time mentoring and spending time with young people. He was very patient with us. He was already becoming a very great, famous person, but he would still spend some time with us and help us with our paper.



Bob taking pictures at a demonstration at City Hall in Danville, Virginia, 1963. (Wisconsin Historical Society) From *The Wrong Side of Murder Creek* by Bob Zellner. Courtesy of NewSouth Books.

I understand that when you first started working with SNCC, some of the black students involved in it were a little skeptical. Tell me about that.

Yes, they were skeptical and very rightfully so. At that point, I was a very rough character from small-town Alabama and Mobile, and I was very Southern. They were intrigued and a little bit suspicious about why I wanted to work with SNCC. It was obvious that it was an organization led by and for young black women and men. Why did I, a white cat from lower Alabama, want to be associated with a black outfit like SNCC? So, that's what they were suspicious about. The film *Son of the South* makes a big and interesting issue out of that. It's obvious that the young black people would be suspicious of a young white person that comes from the lower Alabama and says that his daddy was in the Ku Klux Klan and his granddaddy was in the Ku Klux Klan.

Eventually, they came to see that you were earnest in your endeavors and you became a field secretary for SNCC.

I became the first white Southerner to be a field secretary. A lot of people think there was only one field secretary, but we started with about 12 or 14 field secretaries. Everybody that didn't work in the national headquarters was called a field secretary. So, that was the lowest rung on the SNCC staff hierarchy.

You started to go around to white schools to talk about the civil rights movement and voting rights. You weren't well received. Tell me about one of your first speaking engagements.

One of the very early campuses that I went to was Huntingdon College because I still had contacts at Huntingdon, and I want to stay in touch with those contacts. It turned out that Huntingdon College was so fearful of my work—and the police, George Wallace and Al

Lingo were so fearful of more young people joining the Freedom Movement—that I was arrested when I went back. On one of my early visits back to the campus, I was arrested, and I was banished from the campus. Later on, they became so fearful of my traveling and talking to white students in the South about joining the Freedom Movement, that they banished me from the state of Alabama—legally. They did a trial and the verdict was that I would henceforth be banished from the state of Alabama, and it would be a jailable offense just to cross the state line into Alabama.

And so what did you do?

I continued to work out of the office in Atlanta, and whenever I needed to come to Alabama, I would drive to the state line and then violate the banishment order. I would enter Alabama. I was quite certain, and my lawyers assured me, that they probably never would have charged me with violat-

ing that rule because then it would automatically be able to be appealed to the Supreme Court. Everybody knew, any resident of the United States could not be banished from traveling into another state. It was obviously opposed to the Constitution and the federal law. They didn't intend to actually prosecute anybody in that case, but it was an intimidation measure by the police state of Alabama.

So, through this time you endured multiple beatings and nearly 20 arrests. I understand that has left some psychological and physical issues for you to deal with.

Yes. I have some physical issues, but the mental ones are more vexing than the physical ones. Part of the mental one is some brain damage that affected my sequencing so that I have to stop and think through a whole procedure to get the sequencing correct. But the post-traumatic stress is stressful for me and also for my partner, my wife. I have a very strong startle response, so we have to have a way of operating in the house so that one of us doesn't creep up behind the other. It could make you jump across the room. But we do approach it with a great deal of humor because when she makes me jump about 10 feet, we both laugh.

As the tide changed regarding civil rights, did you ever have anyone who treated you poorly, or beat you, come back and apologize or say, "Hey, I was on the wrong side of this?"

Yes. Because of the film now, and because of the notoriety,

a lot of people are getting in touch with me from the old days. They were on the other side, and now they switched sides and they are on the side of inclusiveness and equality rather than on the Klan side. I always think that maybe for all the ones that have come forward, there must be some other ones out there who also have been changed or had some influence over their lives. Not just by me, but by the others of the Huntingdon five as well. If they felt then the way they feel now, we would have had a group of not just five—we would have had a group of 25 or 30 people. More people have switched from the Klan side to the inclusive side than the other way around.

You moved around a good bit starting in the late 60s. Where did you go?

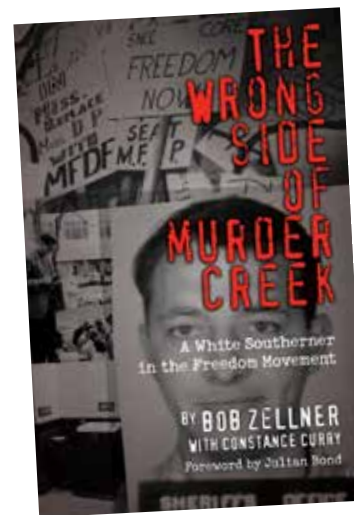
Yes, I did move around quite a bit because after the SNCC years, about 1967, we moved from Atlanta to New Orleans to start the GROW Project—grassroots organizing work. I lived in New Orleans and worked on that project up until around the end of the 1970s. Then I moved to Washington, DC, for a while to see if I could get work as a labor organizer. And then I got involved in film-

making with some people who were making movies about the civil rights movement. Specifically, they were making the movie about Miss Ella Baker called *Fundi*. That was the first movie that I worked on about civil rights. And then for the next 10 years, I worked on films and movies around different parts of the world, Mexico, Cuba, Mozambique, all over the world. I worked on quite a few movies in various capacities, and when we started working on *Son of the South*, I knew a little bit about what was involved in filmmaking. And I know that it's an amazing thing that Barry Alexander Brown and Spike Lee were able to make the movie that they made here in Alabama.

In 2008, you published your book, *The Wrong Side of Murder Creek* (NewSouth Books). What motivated you or inspired you to write a book so many years after these experiences?

Well, the main inspiration would be James Foreman, who was the executive director of SNCC. One of his mantras was to 'write it down, make a record.' So we always had to keep records for the FBI and for making our atrocity reports. Then as SNCC began to wane

The cover of *The Wrong Side of Murder Creek: A White Southerner in the Freedom Movement* by Bob Zellner. Courtesy of NewSouth Books.



at the end of the 1960s, Foreman specifically reminded the veterans, especially the early ones, to write down their history of work with SNCC. That's what I started doing—making notes and keeping the history. A lot of that we did through the *Student Voice*, which was our newspaper. The early staff of SNCC were all trained as photographers and trained to write proper news stories. So, we had some journalistic training and some photography training. We did articles in the *Student Voice*. Everybody had his or her own byline and if you had a photo in the *Student Voice*, you had a photo credit, too. That's the way we kept the record. When I was finished with the GROW Project in 1980 and I started working on films and movies, I met Barry Brown in New York. We were both Alabama boys working in movies in some ways. We became friends and I began to learn his story about growing up in Alabama and going to Lanier High School in Montgomery. I told him all of my stories about the early SNCC days, and he decided that it would make a great movie. We started working on the script back in the late 1970s. Our first draft of the script is dated 1987. So, we started working on the movie script before the book was published. The book wasn't published until 2008.

Was it difficult emotionally to write the book and to relive some of those more violent and emotionally difficult events? Or was it cathartic?

It was both. I was very lucky to have Connie Curry working with me as an editor on the book. After we had about 400 pages or so, which was already 50 or 100 pages more than we could use, she said, "You are avoiding the painful parts of your story. Now get to it. You have to write about the painful parts." And that's when I began to write about the torture in the prison with Chuck McDew and some of the other emotionally difficult experiences. I was as dispassionate as possible about writing those parts of the book. Books are very important, though, and people should write their stories.

In terms of those painful parts, at any point did you think, "This is it. I'm done. I'm going to die. These people are going to kill me." You probably thought that multiple times, but is there one that sticks out?

It did happen a number of times, but the first time was the most informative to me. That was in McComb, Mississippi, Oct. 4, 1961. I was convinced before that day was over that they were going to kill me. They were going to murder me on my first

Signs from Mississippi Freedom Summer, 1964 (BZ). From *The Wrong Side of Murder Creek* by Bob Zellner. Courtesy of NewSouth Books.



demonstration. This was after the demonstration was underway. I was beaten on the steps of the city hall in McComb, Mississippi. There was a big mob, and I thought they were going to kill me in the street. When that first happened, I didn't have time to think about anything other than trying to save myself from being carried out into the street where they would have beaten me to death. So, I was holding on to the rail down the steps of the city hall. I was able to keep from being carried out into the crowd and then I was taken into the town hall where I was turned over by the police chief to members of the mob. They took me out of McComb. I think with the intention of hanging me. They had a hangman's rope. They took me to the tree and they said, "We're going to hang you with this rope from that limb right there." I didn't think there was any power on earth that was going to keep them from doing that. I was very calm

because I thought that I was about to die. That's a common story. A lot of civil rights workers have reached that point where they think they're about to die, and they're very, very peaceful because they've already made that decision that if necessary, they would die for the cause. Growing up as a Christian, when you're about to face death and you don't die, the first thing you think of is, 'Oh, maybe the deity has something more that I'm supposed to do.' So that was part of the lesson of McComb in 1961—that I had more to do.

You mentioned the fear in the South before and during the civil rights era—people didn't speak out because they were afraid of what the mob would do if they got out of line. Do you see some of that happening now?

I do see something happening like that now. And that's people who have some kind of ambition, either of power or

money or both. They see an extreme danger in alienating not just Trump but the Trump base. I think that there is a base of about 20 to 30 percent of the American public that would like to do away with democracy and have an autocracy of some kind. I think that they either don't recognize it themselves, or they wouldn't admit it. But the mobs that attacked the House and the Senate of our Capitol Building on January 6 were not out of work poor Southern people. They were middle class, bourgeois doctors, lawyers, police and professionals of various kinds. That's what's concerning. That's what's worse to me—that there's that percentage of our democratic country who apparently want to do away with democracy and have a dictator. I think we're lucky that the charlatan that came to their rescue was not more intelligent. The charlatan they got was very limited as a human being. How was he able to hoodwink so many reasonable, intelligent and educated people?

Do you think that this generation of young people are exponentially more open-minded, inclusive and tolerant?

Yes, I think so. That's one of the powers that the young people have is that they have not been crippled or corrupted by a lot of what they should have been crippled and corrupted by. Earlier generations have had to just accept what they were told, but this young generation, they don't accept

what they're told. They were told to be concerned about people's sexual identities, and they were told to be concerned about people's racial backgrounds and all of that. They are not concerned about those things to the extent the older people are. So they're free from some of the sickness that the older people have.

Pamela and I have the great honor and privilege of working with a number of youth groups that are being trained for future leadership. So we worked with Shirts Across America. They are one of the best training platforms for young people—educating them about the black struggle and training them to be leaders. These young leaders are going to be active for the next 70 to 80 years. Part of that is for them to learn the black history that's not taught to them in our schools—as well as women's history, labor history and all of the progressive histories that we're not taught in school. Even when they teach the civil rights movement, they teach it in a certain way so that the teeth are taken away from Dr. King's message. They obfuscate what went on in the civil rights movement.

Do you have any advice for white people who want to be allies but don't know where to start?

Yes, I do. I'm not sure that it's the best advice that we'll come up with, but we think about that every day. The movie that we did is primarily about white allyship for the black freedom struggle because the black freedom struggle and racism are at the core of all of the



◀ **Bob and his wife Pamela in Fairhope, Alabama.**
Photo by Guy Stevens.



▲ Bob with then Senator Kamala Harris March 2020 in Selma with Faith and Politics congressional tour. From *The Wrong Side of Murder Creek* by Bob Zellner. Courtesy of NewSouth Books.

ills that our society faces. So, that's what we concentrate on. We do it through Shirts Across America, we do it with Project Power and we do it with Action Academy, which is for college students. We also do it with Project pilgrimage, which does tours of civil rights sites and historical places in the South. And we're here in Alabama, working with the state of Alabama, on all of the museums, historical trails and all the civil rights tourism that they're doing here in Alabama.

If you're serious about being an active ally, you will be able to find something in your area that you can go to and become a part of a group. One is called SURGE (Showing up for Racial Justice). That's in a lot of Southern communities, and it's specifically for white allies and specifically for people who haven't done anything before but who want to do something now. So you get in touch with SURGE. Here in Alabama, get in touch with us, Bob and Pamela, and we will have plenty of things for you to do. There are lots of volunteers that are working on things here in Alabama,

and some very exciting projects that we're going to be doing for the next 36 months. So there's something for them to do, but the main thing to know is that you are needed as an ally, and people will welcome you if you come as an ally, but be prepared to stay for the long run because nobody wants somebody that wants to be an ally for a little while then go back to being a white person.

I wanted to ask a little bit about your Christian faith and how it sort of led you to your life's work. Also, what are your thoughts on the growth of the Christian right or evangelical movement?

Yes. I would like to comment on that because my early impetus to get involved in the civil rights movement was that I understood that what Jesus was saying was that if you see somebody who is hurting and being hurt, you're supposed to go to their aid. You're not supposed to add to their hurt. And people who are Christians, especially evangelical Christians like my father was, for them to use their evangelical Christian religion against people and to

add more misery and hurt to people who are already miserable and being hurt—that's not acceptable to me, but I have to realize that they think what they're doing is right. Very few of them know that they're doing the wrong thing and go ahead and do it. That was part of my relationship with George Wallace because George Wallace was raised as a moderate progressive Methodist, and he cynically decided to be a racist. He cynically decided to do that. So, I know that it's possible for a lot of other evangelical Christian Southerners to cynically use that church structure and that church message to divide and hurt people.

You've had this big life that you condensed down into a book, trying to get as much of it in there as you can. Then you condensed that book down into a movie. Is there anything that you feel got missed or that you wish you would have elaborated on more or illuminated more?

I can't think of anything like that, but one of the interesting reactions to the movie is that almost everybody says that the movie ended when it was about to get started. So people want to hear more of the story. It's the nature of boiling something down to movie size. A book is powerful, and then a movie is exponentially more powerful than that. So that all of a sudden you become a celebrity, which is different from what you really are. That's what I am personally going through right now. A lot of people are reacting to the movie because it's powerful and they're making me into

something that I'm not, which is okay up to a certain extent.

You mentioned you are writing another book. What will this one be about?

It's the second volume of the memoir. We don't even have a working title right now. We're just writing it because the movie ends, really at the beginning of the book. So we have the rest of the book. And then the first book was published in 2008, so it basically ends at the beginning of the 21st century and a lot has happened with me since that time. So, that's what we're writing about now—what's been going on since the end of the *Wrong Side of Murder Creek*. We're bringing it up to date.

What brought you back to Alabama? After all of your travels, why did you choose to settle back in Alabama?

Well, first of all, is the trope that happens with old people who grew up in the South and then went somewhere else to work. There's a huge urge to move back home, and we both had that urge. Pamela has lived in Fairhope at least twice during her life and had raised a lot of her children here in Baldwin County and lower Alabama. So, she wanted to come back to what she remembered about Fairhope and the eastern shore of Mobile Bay. And I wanted to come back, so we talked about it for several years and we moved back here for a little while, and then we moved away and then we came back. Now, we're permanently settled in Alabama. ●


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