



Meet Shirley: Encourager of the Year

Shirley was born and raised in Portsmouth, VA, as the next to last child in a family of nine. Growing up on a farm during the Great Depression, she developed a strong work ethic and a love for physical activity.

Shirley met her husband on a blind date, though he first noticed her impressive soccer skills in grade school. After dating for five years, they married in 1953. Influenced by her physical education teacher, Shirley attended Madison College, graduating with a B.S. ED in Health and Physical Education. She was the first in her family to attend college.

Initially unsure of her career path, Shirley later discovered her passion for mental health studies. In her early 50s she returned to school at George Mason University, where she earned a master's degree in counseling specializing in geriatric studies. She later worked in a nursing home, as a mental health counselor, at a women's center, and later was an advocate for children and adults in a municipal court.

Shirley's Christian faith has been a cornerstone of her life, leading to various church roles and to the Stephen Ministry program, where she provided emotional and spiritual support to women. Shirley's personal motto, inspired by George Eliot, is to help make life less difficult for others. This thought resonates with her religious faith, as it aligns with biblical teachings about compassion and support for others. Her favored Bible verses are, "Therefore encourage one another and build each other up as you have been doing." (1 Thessalonians 5:11) and Hebrews 10:24, "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds," which reflect the essence of her guiding principle.

Six years ago, Harold and Shirley moved to the Culpeper to be closer to family. They enjoy the balance of independence and family connection. Their relationship continues to thrive as they reminisce about their 72 years of married life. Harold has been the most influential person in her life.

In the community, Shirley leads the TLC (Talking, Laughing, Caring) group, serves on the Resident Council, visits other residents, and volunteers with residents who, each week, arrange fresh flowers to adorn dining room tables.

Shirley said that she has lived a satisfying life and is trying to remain peaceful during these trying times. She is especially proud of their children, grandchildren and the almost 4-year-old, great grandchild, Jonah, who is the current family star.

Shirley doesn't see herself as an influencer but rather as someone who hopes to be encouraging to other people. "Truly", she said, "when I think I have been of help to someone I feel joyful. I have done what I was meant to do." Her husband praises her compassion and concern for others, qualities that made her our Encourager of the Year.

Thank you, Shirley, for your unwavering support and inspiration