

MEET YOUR NEIGHBOR: CONNIE COLLEY



Resident Connie Reid Colley in has probably forgotten more about Houston than most of us will ever know. That is not because she's a native—she was born in Evanston, Illinois. She knows a great deal about Houston because she has made a lifetime commitment to serve the city as a volunteer in many institutions including San Jacinto High School, University of Houston, Daughters of the American Revolution, Museum of Fine Arts, and St. Martin's Episcopal Church.

Connie's father and mother were divorced when she was very young, and

Alice Dean Reid brought her preschool daughter Connie to Houston to join her family here. Connie's beloved "Auntie Jama and Uncle Roy" Leibsle were childless and welcomed Connie and her mother into their spacious home in Riverside, at that time one of Houston's most elegant residential areas. Connie's grandfather, a retired judge, had lived with them since his wife's death, and so it was that Connie grew up an only child surrounded by her loving mother, grandfather, and uncle and aunt to whom she became like their own child.

Houston was booming and Alice, a talented artist and designer who had studied at Chicago's famous Art Institute, quickly found her niche in the fashion and advertising scene. With a highly respected judge for a grandfather, a distinguished architect for an uncle (the original Hobby Airport, old Jeff Davis Hospital, Roberts Elementary School and several of Houston's finest homes were just a few of his triumphs), and a young and talented *fashionista* for a mother, Connie had it made. Moreover, she began playing tennis at about age 10 and quickly discovered a passion for it as well as an aptitude that led her into the Houston girls' tennis championship all four years at San

Jacinto High School, and being seeded at the state level. She won a full academic scholarship to prestigious Smith College in Northampton, Mass. but did not give up tennis until 2013, and then only because of emphysema. "I could still HIT, but I couldn't RUN anymore," she explains. Meanwhile in high school she found time to serve as a Golden Gaucho (drill team) and then as Head Cheerleader. It never seemed to rain on her parade.

After college she was hired by Prudential Insurance and sent to Newark, NJ, for training as an insurance underwriter. She returned to Houston to work with Prudential, but when Lloyd Bentsen started to build his insurance empire he hired her away from Prudential. She recalls with a smile how from the beginning she bought small amounts of stock out of each paycheck, for which she later was very grateful.

Meanwhile "Mr. Wonderful" as she ironically refers to him, came striding into her life. Handsome and impulsive, he swept her off her feet and much against her family's wishes she married him.

The next 23 years saw Mr. Wonderful turn into Mr. Washout and he finally left her with three children ages 13, 14, and 16.¹ Devastated by

desertion and divorce, she found her way with difficulty as death claimed first her grandfather, then her mother and Uncle Roy. A few years after Roy's death Auntie Jama married Cliff, but after only a few years both of them needed full care and moved to Treemont. Connie, the little girl so long protected and doted on by four adults, was now at 50 the only responsible adult in the family, with three teenagers plus Auntie Jama and Cliff to look after. To complicate matters further, her father called from Chicago to say he was alone, old and sick, and needed her help. After a few trips back and forth, and torn between his needs and her responsibilities in Houston she brought him to Houston, where a year later he was killed by a drunk driver.

Hard as these years were, they brought awareness of how blessed her life had been. And as her gratitude grew, so did her understanding of scripture's command to "Consider it pure joy... whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith brings perseverance, and perseverance must complete its work in you so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives graciously to all without finding fault..."^{1 P 1:2-6} The faith of her

fathers found reality in Connie's life, and that made all the pain worthwhile. "I turned to God," she says simply, "because there was no one else left."

Connie moved into Treemont directly from a hospital bed in 2014.

Severe breathing difficulties limit her activities now to church and frequent games of bridge, but here are a few of her former volunteer activities:

- .Ranking Senior Docent, Museum of Fine Arts (42 years at 500-700 hrs/yr.)²
- .Assistance League of Houston
- .Founding member St. Martin's, now the largest Episcopal Church in North America both in registered members and regular attendees... Taught children's Sunday School classes, and championed and helped lead Vacation Bible School for many years...
- Completed Education for Ministry (EFM) training, a four-year course out of Sewanee. ..Is Lay Eucharist Minister, also a long-time participant in Prayer Shawl and Altar Guild service ministries.

Note 1: Connie's children are Reid Colley, Dean Colley, and Caryn Colley Kelley (try pronouncing that in a hurry!) who with their respective spouses have produced nine "magnificent" grandchildren—7 boys and 2 girls.

Note 2: Treemont has other ties with Houston's Museum of Fine Arts: John Matlage, another long term docent, is a new resident in A104-105.

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Dr. Caroline Goeser is married to attorney Allen Douglas, son of LILLIAN DOUGLAS and the late John Douglas.