

MEET YOUR NEIGHBOR: VIVIAN HAMES

Pert and pretty Vivian Pitner was an honor student in a Georgia high



school when she met the love of her life, Cecil “Red” Hames. They were married soon after high school graduation, and within

four months Red was going through basic training and on his way to join General George Patton’s Third Army in Europe. He survived the Battle of the Bulge and other fierce fighting before the war was over. Then he was on his way home, still not much more than a kid but married and full of ambition.

Meanwhile Vivian had gone to work for Liberty Mutual Insurance Co. and had begun a career of her own which would become dormant for many years but would blossom later.

Red went to school under the GI bill to receive business and law degrees, and took a job which would lead to a distinguished career with General Motors.

His work with GM took them to such places as Jacksonville, FL, Charlotte and Winston Salem, NC, San

Antonio, TX, and eventually to Houston in 1986.

Vivian had taken time out to be a full-time homemaker and mother to their one son Michael, but when he was older and they were living in San Antonio she went to work for Aetna as an insurance underwriter and eventually for DataPoint dealing with international contracts. She retired from that position five years later at age 62.



Red and Vivian’s 57th anniversary, 1999

When they moved to Houston they bought a comfortable townhouse and settled in. When Red passed away in 2005 Vivian remained there until a series of heart problems and the urging of her adult son convinced her that she needed to be where she could get immediate care, and after careful research she decided on Treemont as the best place for her. She moved to a

a pleasant apartment on the first floor of Building B, where she is now settled in and at home. Her gift for southern hospitality is so strong that if you are new here she was probably one of the first people to stop by your table, introduce herself, and welcome you.

One of the things almost everyone notices about Vivian is that she is always impeccably groomed and beautifully dressed. A careful observer will also notice the number of young women who are constantly in and out of the dining room and her apartment, often bringing flowers, videos and special culinary treats. Several call her Mom and all are obviously extremely fond of her.

Since she has only one son, Michael, his wife Judy, and one grandson, Mark, and his wife, it is unlikely that this bevy of younger women could be daughters or granddaughters, so I asked how she came to have so many young and attractive women friends. Her candid reply opened up a whole new story, which with her permission I will share with you now.

Vivian has always been a woman of faith and a lifelong member of the United Methodist Church. In 1968 she was confronted by a problem that was not dealt with in church services—a beloved member of her family had gone from social drinking to alcoholic drinking almost before she realized it.

*...those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles, they will run and not be weary; they will walk and not be faint.
Isaiah 40:31 NIV*

Looking for answers she sought help from Al Anon and AA, where she found a helpful, understanding support system and some principles that brought her through to victory for herself and even helped her beloved alcoholic reach triumphant and lasting sobriety. She began encouraging others “with the same comfort with which she herself had been comforted” and became a sponsor and counselor to dozens or more of younger women facing the same dilemmas.

She also has been involved for many years with the United Methodist Women, and holds the lifetime service award from that organization.

It should be noted that her local church, Chapelwood UMC, now has a service unheard of when her own need was greatest. On Saturday evenings they have something called “Mercy Street” to which everyone is invited, but it is especially aimed at those troubled with addictions of any kind, along with their loved ones.

The multiple young women who have such affection for her are either from her church or among those who have been greatly helped by her wise counsel in Al Anon. She is thus a shining example of a person whose own trials have led to a lifetime of lasting purpose and meaning as a mentor, encourager, and role model to others. Viva Vivian!

