



“My greatest work is yet to be”

Eleanor Isaacson’s Passion for Life

by Holly Fritz



At the age of 74, Eleanor Isaacson isn’t “retiring.” She’s “re-firing.”

That’s how this vibrant woman describes her life since moving to Willow Valley Retirement Communities five years ago. She says in many ways, her move to her spacious Versailles-style townhouse in Willow Valley’s Willow Gables Community was the start of a new life.

“The emphasis here is on community and not retirement,” says Eleanor, referring to Willow Valley. “I’m more involved in the community than I ever was when I lived in New Jersey. In fact, everything I did there was just a preparation for all the activities I’m involved in now.”

That list of activities could exhaust a person half her age. She’s a vegetarian and gourmet cook. She walks the paths that wind through Willow Valley every day and works out regularly in the Fitness Center. She’s a champion ballroom dancer who designs her own sequin-laden costumes, and takes weekly dance lessons with a local instructor. The dozens of medals she’s won in competitions adorn the railing on the second-floor balcony of her home.

A woman whose faith is of central importance to her, Eleanor puts that faith into action by teaching seminars for Touching the King Ministries and mentoring college students.

She’s active in American Home Life International, a foreign exchange program where families host students from Japan, Taiwan, Korea and Spain. She just returned from a trip to Japan, where she visited some of the families whose children were hosted by the program in the U.S.

A former fashion model, Eleanor was the director of admissions at a modeling school in New Jersey. In that capacity, she counseled many young women and out of that experience came a consulting business called Image Dynamics, which covers topics related to inner beauty as well as outer beauty.

“I love to be with young people, and they love to be with me,” she says. “I love to absorb their energy. Everything I’ve experienced has taught me something, and has brought me to where I am today.”

Eleanor’s life hasn’t always been an easy one. Not long before World War II, when she was just a toddler, her parents traveled to East Germany on a three-week tourist visa to spend time with relatives in Dresden. While there, Eleanor contracted whopping cough and was too ill to travel back to the U.S., so an aunt and uncle offered to care for her until she recovered.

But before the parents could return to Germany to claim their daughter, World War II broke out, and travel to the country was prohibited. Eleanor ended up spending her entire childhood – and the entire war—in the care of her aunt and uncle. She suffered through the bombings, the starvation, and the Russian occupation.



Eleanor at age 4 in Germany



Eleanor takes a break in front of her Willow Valley home.

After the war ended, as an American-born citizen, Eleanor was finally permitted to leave, and traveled alone, by ship, to the United States. She arrived as a 13-year old, speaking only German. But by the time she graduated from high school four years later, she was a National Honor Society student and a living example of the power of faith over adversity.

Having grown up with very little, giving to others is a big part of Eleanor's life. As she was in New Jersey, Eleanor is active on fund-raising committees for civic and cultural groups, and has turned her attention to helping with worthy projects for the Lancaster General Hospital, Lancaster Symphony Orchestra and Lancaster's famed, historic Fulton Opera House.

And if that's not enough, Eleanor indulges her passion for people, gourmet cooking, decorating and entertaining by hosting holiday Open Houses, concerts, dinner parties, and other events at her beautifully-appointed, spacious townhouse. Last year, her holiday Open House lasted four days, with more than 160 people stopping by to enjoy holiday decorations, gourmet goodies and Eleanor's infectious good cheer.

"I'm open to new things," she says. "I'm studying Japanese at an area community college. I'm learning Spanish on tape while I'm driving. I paint Chinese brush watercolor.

"Willow Valley has given me the freedom to do whatever I please," she says. "I don't have to worry about the responsibilities of maintaining a house. It's wonderful! The grounds are kept picture-perfect, and the cultural activities are of the caliber of New York City, but without the smog. The staff here is courteous, thorough and capable. I'm just sorry I didn't move here sooner."

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Eleanor outside her Willow Valley townhouse



Interior of Eleanor's Willow Valley home

Is a retirement community for me?

When her husband passed away, Eleanor Isaacson was faced with making the difficult decisions nearly every widow or widower wrestles with. Should she hang on to the home and gardens she had grown to love? What would it be like to start over again in a new area? Was she ready to move to a retirement community?

When friends asked her why she was living alone in that big house, and brought up the possibility of a retirement community, Eleanor at first scoffed at the idea, arguing that she wasn't ready for "retirement." But, she began to change her mind after accepting an invitation from longtime friends who had moved to Willow Valley Retirement Communities and enthusiastically endorsed it.

"I put together a list of pros and cons," she says. "Although I loved my big house for entertaining, it was a lot of work, there were the expenses of the upkeep, the gardener, the snow removal, and the taxes kept going up."

Eleanor liked what she saw at Willow Valley, but did her homework and checked out a number of options. "I looked into several places in New Jersey, but nothing compared with Willow Valley. When I saw the exact same house plan as the



Versailles at another retirement community, and it was twice the cost, that settled it for me," she says.

Easy access to health care was another concern. Although Eleanor is fortunate to enjoy good health, she has the security of knowing that should she have a health issue in the future, health services, including Lifecare, are always available to her.

"Not long after I moved in, I had a sore throat," says Eleanor, "I made a call and within five minutes, a nurse was at my door. She checked my throat, and made an appointment for me with a doctor. I went to the appointment, and got a prescription for antibiotics. The doctor's office called it into a local pharmacy, and I picked up

the prescription and was home within an hour. Now that's service. The health care system here really works."

Eleanor's advice to someone considering Willow Valley Retirement Community is simple: don't put it off. "Living here at Willow Valley has actually restored my youth. Do your children a favor. Move while you are well and young enough to adjust to a new lifestyle. Your children will love you for it."

