

*“You Have to Put  
Yourself Out There”*

**ESTHER MAY PARSONS**

Born 1922 – Retired 1979



*Esther and late husband George on their wedding day.*

**In 1944, twenty-two-year-old Esther May Lee—who, in the preceding year, graduated from nursing school, left the upstate New York farm where she was raised, joined the service, and completed basic training—arrived in Fort Dix as a second lieutenant in the US Army Nurse Corps. At Fort Dix, she met George Parsons, a private first class recovering from shrapnel wounds sustained in North Africa. Four months later, they were married. Shortly thereafter, she was transferred to England. There, she trained in preparation to support the D-Day invasion and treated burn**

**victims returning from the Battle of the Bulge. On one occasion, she was caught in a German V-Bomb attack in London and spent a sleepless night listening to the rockets screaming and exploding in the surrounding area.**

**Soon after arriving in Europe, Esther discovered that she was pregnant. Army regulations dictated that she could no longer serve and she returned to the United States to live with her husband's family. George was discharged in 1947, and the couple settled near Boston. George worked as a truck weigher at a chemical plant, while Esther worked as a surgical nurse and, later, as a school nurse. They had five children—one of whom, a daughter, passed away—eleven grandchildren, and seven great-grandchildren. George passed in 1999. Today, Esther lives in the same home that she and George settled in after the war.**

I've always enjoyed life. Wherever I was, whatever I was doing. I like to be with people. I have a lot of friends and a lot of interests.

I retired at fifty-seven because my mother had dementia and could not be left alone. My husband retired a year later at age fifty-nine. Even after I retired, I worked part-time for the local Visiting Nurses Association and for a local nursing home. I loved nursing. I miss it. I also volunteered with the Bloodmobile. I enjoyed that work, too. I got to meet all the people in my town and the people in the surrounding towns.

Before we retired, we bought a travel trailer and joined a camping club. Our camper was small, seventeen feet. We bought what we could afford. George pulled the trailer and backed it up. I directed him.

While my mom was with us, we'd take her camping, mostly around New England and down to Florida. After my mother passed away, we asked my youngest daughter to stay in our house for a year while we went on the road. We were on the road for fifteen months. We'd drive

two to four hours a day and stop whenever we wanted to. No marathon sessions. That's what retirement is about. Relax. Enjoy it.

First, we went down the East Coast to Florida and spent three months there. Then we headed west to Texas and hooked up with a Good Sam's Safari. There were forty trailers and travel homes in the caravan. We crossed the border into Mexico and put our car and the trailer on a flatbed railroad car. For ten days, we lived in the trailer on the flatbed. Sometimes, our railroad car would pull into a siding and we'd find ourselves stuck among cattle cars. That was different.

We went to the Copper Canyon in the southwestern part of the state of Chihuahua, Mexico. It's larger and deeper than the Grand Canyon. Every night we'd get off the train and visit villages with different Indian tribes. Some were living in mountain caves. We went down as far as Mazatlan, where we got off the train and started driving with the caravan. The roads were so narrow, two lanes, and often just dirt. As we went through some of the villages, we encountered kids begging. I remember one who tried to sell my husband a set of false teeth. Not sure if they were used or new.

We were in Mexico for three weeks, and then drove back up to Nogales, Arizona. We did Arizona for a month then headed west, up the California coast, visiting friends, and then up into Western Canada. Then, back into Wyoming, Montana, visited friends in Salt Lake City, and then across South Dakota and that way home. I have no idea of the number of miles. When I was headed home at the end of that trip, I wasn't thinking, *The fun's over*. Oh no, the fun is still going on!

I took a lot of photos during that trip, but never look at them and have never taken photos since. I just can't be bothered. Maybe I should look back through them, but I haven't.

In addition to camping, my husband and I always enjoyed gardening, dancing, and, of course, we did a lot of other traveling, too. For example, we took a cruise up the Mississippi from New Orleans, and

another along the Orinoco River in Venezuela. I still remember that trip, and how we tried all those strange native dishes.

In 1999, after my husband died, I gave the camper to my youngest son. My husband and I had a wonderful twenty-year retirement. We just enjoyed life. The time just flew. Oh, he was a real catch—he was. He was a lot of fun!

I still do the same things I did with him. I have wonderful friends and family who helped me through his passing. They allowed me to keep going the same way I had been, the travel, the camping, but now with friends.

These days, I usually spend ten days a year with younger friends at Scusset Beach on the Cape, and then go to campgrounds in New Hampshire. I still love to travel. Each year, I go to Florida right after Christmas and stay with friends until the end of March. I play bridge three times a week, sometimes for points and sometimes socially. I'm still driving, so it makes it possible for me to do all this.

I typically get up between 6:00 and 7:00 a.m., and do stretches and some strength training. I can't do much walking because I have spinal stenosis, a buildup of calcium in the spinal column that puts pressure on the spinal nerves. It's painful. Otherwise, I'm in good health, although I've had two complete knee replacements. I wore them out.

Retirement hasn't impacted my self-esteem or my sense of purpose. I've enjoyed my family and friends, and life is good. The only way I could improve retirement is to make the days longer. But I'm fortunate, and I appreciate that not everyone in retirement is as happy as I am. Whatever goals I've had, I've fulfilled. I have no big plans, but the fun goes on and on. My priorities have changed. I wanted to travel and see the world and I think I have. So now my priority is to enjoy each day.

I've kept a daily log of what I've done for over forty years. It takes about five to ten minutes, just recording the events of the day. I never

look back at the logs, other than to check whether an event occurred on a given date. In fact, I don't look back very often. I look to the future more than the present. I'm planning ahead. My husband used to say that I'd get to some places a week too early.

My advice is to keep making new friends because your contemporaries die. You make new friends through activities. You have to put yourself out there.