



*Ratliff Care Center*



*Mike, Emmagene, and Carlos Ratliff (left to right)*

In April, I visited Ratliff Care Center in Cape Girardeau. The 46-resident skilled nursing home is owned and operated by husband-and-wife team Emmagene and Carlos Ratliff, and their son Mike. They also operate Sprigg Street Manor, a 15-resident residential care home, on the same premises.

The Ratliffs, from Baton Rouge, Louisiana, built Ratliff Care Center and moved in, in 1992. Previously, Emmagene and Carlos operated a family-owned boarding home and a 17-resident intermediate care home. In the latter facility, Emmagene was the administrator, the activities and transportation director, and just about everything else.

These days, son Mike is the Ratliff administrator. He grew up around residents and many thought he was “their” grandson. Mike was the residents’ entertainment, and he encouraged them to eat. “Grandma, you need to eat,” he would say, as he dined next to a resident. And she would, as did others who were reluctant to eat, because they wanted to please Mike.

Ratliff became Medicaid-certified at Emmagene’s prompting. Residents who ran out of money were moving to other homes that accepted Medicaid because Medicaid would pay for their care. This saddened Emmagene because she wanted to care for residents until the end of their lives. Now she can do so.

Emmagene, 77, also cares for former residents’ children. Her sister, who previously managed Sprigg Street Manor, also lives at Ratliff.





*Carlos, Emmagene, and Mike are all licensed nursing home administrators.*

Emmagene shared many stories of caring for residents over the years. For instance, she, Carlos, Mike and the Ratliff staff held a memorial service for one long-time resident whose only family was a niece and nephew. They sang songs with other residents. A nurse read a beautiful story that the deceased resident wrote. Mike's wife made a scrapbook in the resident's memory and gave it to the resident's nephew.

On another occasion, a resident wouldn't eat. Emmagene told the resident that she loved her and was worried about her. Emmagene asked if the woman would let staff feed her until the woman regained her strength. The woman agreed but said she did not like staff telling her, "You need to eat." After Emmagene explained the resident's feelings to staff members, they changed their approach. The resident regained her ability to feed herself.

At one time, a 112-year-old - the oldest person in Missouri - lived at Ratliff.

After a resident dies at Ratliff, the Ratliff staff dresses the resident, and if it's a female, they put on her jewelry and makeup. The resident's door is left open until his or her family members and friends have a chance to say goodbye.

Emmagene, Carlos and Mike are proud of their small family-like environment. Staff and residents develop relationships and care about one another. Recently, a staff member deposited money in two residents' accounts to pay their beautician fees. "We haven't lost our homey atmosphere, Emmagene said. "I don't want to be so big that I can't do that extra touch or know the residents."



*Deck and Sprigg Street Manor roof*

Mike also shared the story of a hearing-challenged resident who used sign language. Staff members learned basic signs so that they could communicate with him and learned they had not been using his preferred name.

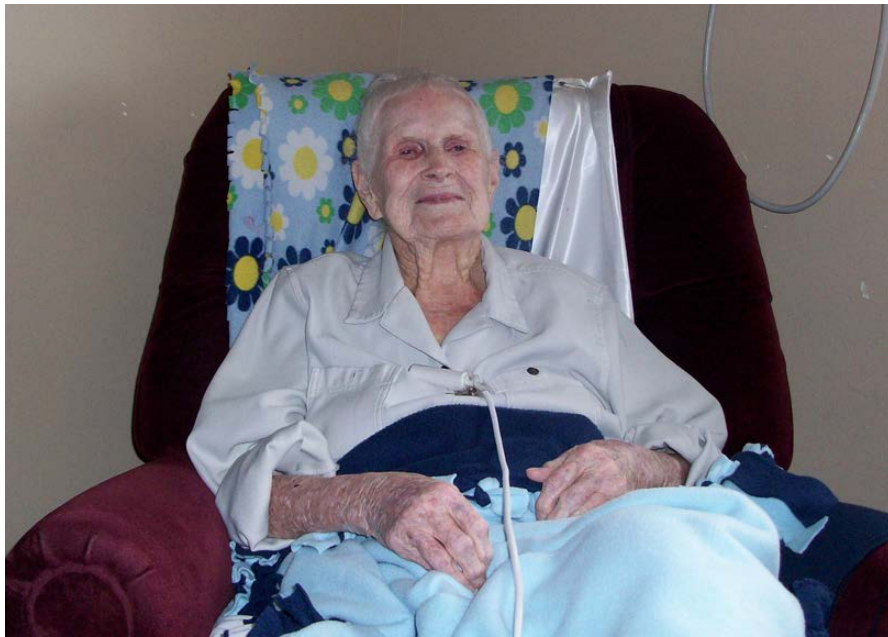
Other staff members have also gone beyond the call of duty. The food service manager, for example, volunteers to work every holiday to ensure residents have special holiday meals. At the time of my visit, she was planning the Easter meal, which included chicken cordon bleu and strawberry pie.

Residents choose one of two dining rooms in which to eat. Institutional clothing protectors have been replaced with linen napkins. During my visit, residents enjoyed home-cooked fried chicken for lunch. In addition to the daily meal choices, residents can make special requests. One resident has ice cream twice a day. Another eats biscuits and gravy almost daily. A dessert cart is available. Residents who don't wish to rise for the traditional breakfast are provided with a continental breakfast. Snacks are available at all times at no additional cost. A community refrigerator is available to residents to store personal food items.

Care plans are written from a resident's perspective, in the first-person viewpoint, using the iCare planning format. Staff members are not required to wear uniforms. Residents can furnish and decorate their rooms as they choose. WIFI is available throughout the building.

Ratliff actively participates with the state culture change coalition, [MC5](#) (Missouri Coalition Celebrating Care Continuum Change), and the [Cape Girardeau](#) (Southeast) and [Poplar Bluff](#) regional chapters. Mike said, "As I learn more about culture change, I think that is what my parents have done forever."

During my visit, Ratliff's emergency generator was being tested. Mike explained that after a big ice storm, they decided to install a large generator that fully operates the home. The home was also built to withstand a significant earthquake because of its location near the New Madrid fault line.



*Resident Dorothy Polsgrove*

I met resident Dorothy Polsgrove, 93, who grew up with six sisters and one brother near the Civil War battle site of Chalk Bluff on Crowley Ridge, near Campbell, Missouri. Dorothy said, "It is very beautiful there when the peach trees are in bloom, all pink, and in the fall, the trees are hanging with fruit. Those peaches are as good as those you'll find anywhere. People come from all over the country to buy them."

Ms. Polsgrove's father was a cotton ginner until he was injured on the job. His arm caught in the cotton gin and had to be amputated below the elbow, in the local doctor's office. Chloroform was the only medicine at the time.

"In those days, a married woman couldn't get a job if her husband was able to work," Ms. Polsgrove said. Because of her father's injury, her mother went to work cleaning and doing laundry for a big hotel near the Campbell train station.

Ms. Polsgrove told me about Prohibition and how women fought to keep liquor out of the market. They wore long-sleeved dresses that covered everything from their necks to their high-top shoes.



Ms. Polsgrove left high school to marry a farmer when she was in ninth or tenth grade. “We were Old McDonald’s farm,” she said. “We raised beef cattle, hogs, guineas, ducks, turkeys, you name it we had some of them. It was a joyful life. You worked hard but it wasn’t as stressful as you people have it now.”

Ms. Polsgrove was also a seamstress. She made lingerie, dresses, police jackets, airplane pilot jackets. “You name it, we made it,” she said.

She and her husband had two sons and a daughter. Their youngest son was bit by a rabid dog and died when he was just a little boy. “It almost killed us,” she said.

More recently, Ms. Polsgrove went to her basement to put a load of laundry in her washing machine. She missed the bottom step and fell. She heard her hip break. She pulled herself up the stairs and into the kitchen by her elbows. She was able to pull the phone down and call her daughter for help.

When Ms. Polsgrove went into surgery to repair the broken hip, her sight was good. When she came out, she was blind. Doctors think her sudden blindness might have been the result of her pacemaker malfunctioning. She said, “You have to take what is dealt you; I could have sat here, carried on, and made everyone miserable, but why?”

Ms. Polsgrove has now lived at the care center for two-and-a-half years. Her daughter lives nearby and visits often.

Ms. Polsgrove receives good care and couldn’t be more pleased. “You don’t hear any swearing or offensive language,” she said. “All you hear is laughing, talking, and teasing with each other.” She also complimented the food. “We are fed well and I can’t begin to tell you how many different kinds of snacks we have.”



*Resident Cuba Higgerson participates in an Easter egg coloring activity.*

I also met Ms. Polsgrove's 88-year-old roommate, Cuba Higgeson. Ms. Higgeson grew up on a farm near Portageville, Missouri, with two sisters and a brother. She feels very fortunate to have the parents she had. "We weren't wealthy but we had a good farm life."

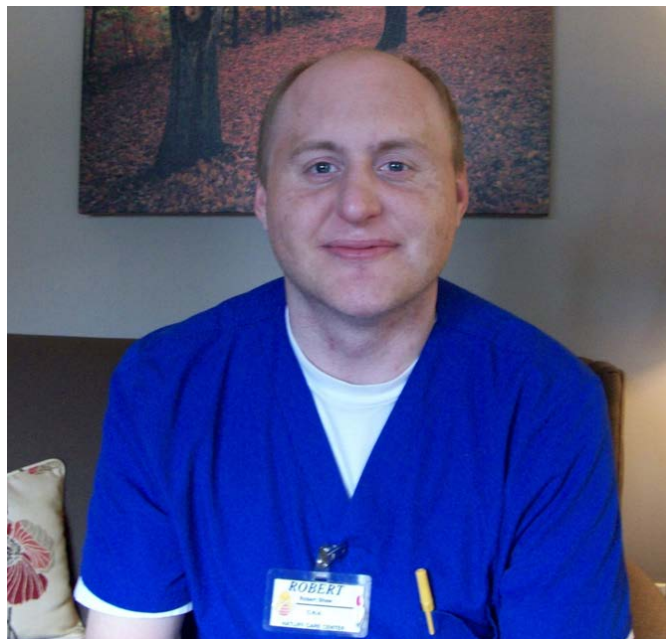
Ms. Higgeson's English teacher played an important role in her life, too. She told Ms. Higgeson she would recommend her to the school board if she went to college. She did, attending Cape Girardeau College during the summers after she graduated from Portageville High School in 1946. In 1948, she married and moved to New Madrid, where her husband had a barber shop. She drove back and forth to Portageville for eleven years to teach sixth graders, in the same grade school she attended. Then she taught at New Madrid School for another 21 years.

After Ms. Higgeson's parents passed away, she and her husband bought the family farm. She still owns and rents it to a farmer who raises cotton and soybeans.

Ms. Higgeson has two sons and two grandsons, who "are a pleasure." She used to believe that only girls could take care of their parents, but her boys have shown that they can do the job, too.

Her husband, whom she described as "wonderful," died in March 2011. A year later, Ms. Higgeson could no longer live alone. One son recommended that she move to the care center. She sold her furniture and rented out her house. She has lived there three years now.

"I used to say that I never wanted to live in a nursing home, but I don't feel that way about this one," she said. "This is a wonderful place. They are interested in the people who live here. I decided this was going to be home. There are so many good people here, employees and workers. I thank God for them daily."



*CNA Robert Shaw*

I spoke with CNA Robert Shaw, a New Madrid native who has lived in Cape Girardeau the past 14 or 15 years. He has a Commercial Driver License but transitioned into healthcare after taking care of his mother, grandmother, and grandfather. He has worked at the care center for a year.

He said, “It is a nice homey place. Everybody gets along well. We are a team. Somebody always jumps in to help and they try hard to accommodate residents’ wishes. The administrator asks, ‘What can we do to make this person happy?’” He takes pride in giving top-notch care. “I love what I do, and I’m blessed that I’m able to help somebody else,” he said.

He tells new residents to call him if they need help. He receives compliments from residents and their families. His favorite part of the job is making residents smile and doing something positive for somebody else. The hardest part, he says, is when something like a fall happens.



*LPN Josh Lange with Resident Cuba Higgerson*

LPN Josh Lange has lived in the Jackson/Cape Girardeau area all of his life. He worked at Walmart for seven years, but his compassion for people prompted him to quit and start working at the care center. He started as a nurse aide and then became a CNA while attending nursing school. Now in his eighth year at Ratliff, he says the aide-to-nurse transition was a big step. He said he is probably different from many other nurses because in addition to enjoying the residents, he also likes the paperwork.