



New Hampshire Veterans Home

139 Winter St.
Tilton, NH 03276



Joseph "Joe" Bennett *Resident Spotlight - February 2020*

Joseph "Joe" Bennett was the second of nine children and is now the lone survivor. Born and raised in Manchester, NH, he spent his entire life there except for his time in the military. In September 1924, Joe started 1st Grade at St. Joseph's Grammar School for Boys. The following year, the new St. Joseph's Grammar School opened its doors with combined classes for girls and boys. He was a student in their very first 2nd Grade class.

Joe began his career in the grocery business working for the Moore Grocery Stores and Ferretti's Market. During the Great Depression, Joe worked on projects in the local

area; one of these projects was building the walls that line Smyth Road in Manchester - all the way up to the Veterans Medical Center. These walls still stand today.

Joe served in the US Army from May of 1942 to November of 1945, beginning with training in Fort Knox, KY. He was sent to Africa as part of the 2nd Armored Division, 67th Armored Regiment, Hell on Wheels, Patton's Army. Joe served in the European Campaign from Africa to Berlin. He landed at Omaha Beach on June 11, 1944 where his tank landing ship struck a floating mine at the beach. His ship sunk within one hour, with loss of lives, many injured, and the complete loss of all vehicles and equipment on board. Welcome to France! He participated in the Battle of the Bulge and walked into Berlin behind the Russians...a bit of a sore subject with Americans. As a reward for its battle record, the 2nd Armored Division was selected to be the first American force to occupy Berlin.

Joe shares a few vivid memories from his days in WWII. Once, while he was sitting in a rest area after a long march in France, enemy planes dropped bombs overhead and killed three tech sergeants right in front of his eyes, something you will never forget. Another memory was guarding the Eiffel Tower from German troops who were ordered to destroy this and other Paris landmarks. He remembers sleeping on the floor of a Belgium home at Christmas time and lastly, interviewing Canadian citizens in Africa and helping them gain US Citizenship so they could fight in American uniforms.

In 1946 after returning home, Joe was dared by friends to ask Rita Boisvert for a date. He asked her and she said YES! They dated for ten years before he finally married his sweetheart at St. George's Church in Manchester on November 28, 1956. Being Thanksgiving Day, they treated their guests to a traditional Thanksgiving Dinner. Over their years together, Rita and Joe had two daughters, Claudette and Susan, three grandchildren and two great grandchildren.

After WWII, Joe returned to work as a Grocer, and later worked in the garment industry making women's sportswear and eventually men's cashmere coats. He was often the Shop Steward, representing the workers in their dealings with the owners and unions. Joe always worked two jobs to support his family. In the winter months, his night and weekend jobs were



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managing the Shea Theaters who owned the State, Palace, Strand, Crown and Lyric Theaters in Downtown Manchester. In the summer he worked at Pine Island Park until it closed.

Joe retired at 62 to help take care of his wife. After a heart operation that left Rita with dementia, he took care of her as long as he could at home, but the time care when she needed the 24-hour care provided in a nursing home. Once she moved there, Joe visited Rita every day, twice a day. In the afternoon, they would sit by the window and talk. At night, Joe would bring a VHS movie from the public library to show to all the residents in the dementia unit. They were the old movies that the residents could relate and sing along to. Joe was known as, and fondly referred to as, "The Movie Man". After Rita passed away in 2005, Joe continued to bring movies for the residents to enjoy. One day a resident said to him when he was visiting, "I don't remember who you are, but I know you always make me smile when you are here."

After retirement, Joe always had a huge vegetable garden. He loved visiting the Litchfield Farms on a daily basis and looked forward to strawberry picking every season. He especially enjoyed bringing new friends and family into these activities. He also loved watching his Red Sox win, although he had never seen a game in person. On his 90th birthday, he finally got to Fenway Park. In spite of tremendous seats, he decided he really did enjoy watching the games at home on his 50" TV better because he could keep track of the game more easily. Joe became part of the New Hampshire Veterans Home (NHVH) family in early 2016 when only 97 years young. In April of 2018, the Veterans Home celebrated Joe's 100th birthday by throwing him a huge party. The picture on this memoire is a commemoration of that special day.

Joe has never missed a tree trimming party at his daughter's house and is proud of the thousands of lights he helps put on the tree every year. One of his favorite things to do is to decorate at Christmas.

His church family is also 'family' to him, especially after losing Rita. He started volunteering at Blessed Sacrament Church once moving to the parish in 1966. He helped with Bingo, was an adult altar boy who served at funerals with a team of retirees, became an usher, and volunteered at a children's ministry at the church that distributed clothes, toys, and all things 'kids'. When he moved to the Veterans Home, there was a tremendous send off from his church. They honored him with a beautiful wooden cross that hangs in his room to this day. In the pastor's tribute, he said Joe Bennett was a wonderful example of 'Human Love and Devotion to his family and church'. Still after four years, his church family continues to visit him at the NHVH, call and send well wishes.

The most important things to Joe are his family and friends. He loves his grandchildren, great grandchildren, and will start a conversation with any child that crosses his path. At family gatherings he was always the one doing dishes, preparing food, cleaning up, or you could find him outside playing with the kids.

Often times, you will find Joe at a NHVH coffee social, attending musical programs, going out to eat at restaurants, watching the Red Sox, visiting with his daughter on 'Main Street' by the store, and playing Bingo or table tennis in the Town Hall. Joe's advice to newcomers to the Veterans Home: "Listen to what people tell you to do, and do it."

*We are so happy that you are such a special part of our
NH Veterans Home family, Joe!*

