

McGregor Resident Mary McGowan Shares Her Wisdom at 88

“Swimming upstream may be hard, but ‘can’t’ isn’t in my vocabulary,” says Mary McGowan, who grew up penniless in Ireland, moved to the United States to make a name for herself, and continues to give back to her community with the remaining years of her life.

Mary was born May 27, 1934, in Ireland, where her father owned a very modest farm. On the farm, Mary spent her childhood learning the importance of discipline while caring for cows, chickens, ducks, and geese.

By the time she was an adult, Mary was ready to leave Ireland and she decided to immigrate to the United States. In 1955, Mary boarded a boat and began a long journey to her new life in America, eventually ending up in Cleveland.

As a young woman in America, Mary switched careers often, working several years at a time in law, banking, healthcare, and secretarial. During this time, Mary also attended both John Carroll University and Ursuline College.

Beginning with her semester abroad in Japan through John Carroll, Mary became a world traveler. By the time she retired, Mary had visited at least 15 countries, including Japan, Italy, Germany, and more. Reflecting on these adventures, Mary specified that “the best part was that I was exposed to all races and all people to learn from.”

When she wasn’t traveling around the world, Mary purchased a house for herself in Cleveland Heights. This was a huge accomplishment for Mary. “In those times, few, if any, women were able to buy their own house on their own as I did,” she proudly explained.

At some points during her life, Mary struggled with alcoholism. Today she is proudly 41 years sober, a success she attributes to her involvement with Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). Her words are clear: “To me, AA is divinely inspired. I thank God for the freedom that it has given me.”

To this day, Mary has made a great difference in Northeast Ohio by helping others to become sober by sponsoring them in the AA program.

Mary attributes her AA sponsorships to the words of her mother when she was a young girl in Ireland: “whenever and wherever you see a need, it is your duty to fill it.”

Today, Mary resides at McGregor Independent Living in Cleveland. Mary chose McGregor because she loves the campus and because it is close to the Cleveland Heights community, the place she considers to be “home.”

Mary stays close with her family by remaining in contact with her over 40 nieces and nephews who live around the world. For the past few years, she has even dedicated much of her free time to writing her life story in a book to share with them.

“I am very lucky and very grateful that my mind and memory are still intact...It is very clear to me that there is someone out there, like a guardian angel, watching out for me,” Mary concluded.