



life with the TOP DOWN

The legacy we leave behind in our passing is a true testament to how we lived our life. Alma Francina Stonesifer, Alpha Epsilon, was remembered in her passing as someone who lived life with the top down.

“Francina lived a fully engaged life, maximizing the opportunities available to her. She was highly successful in a variety of endeavors. She was a credit to any group with which she affiliated,” says Miriam Houseworth, long-time friend and co-worker at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. “She was the epitome of a lady.”

The following is excerpts from a tribute written and delivered by her nephew, Lou Garvin, at her funeral in 2007. It exemplifies what it means to be a real strong woman.

BY **LOU GARVIN**

“My Aunt Francina went through life with the top down. My earliest memories of Francina are of her with a 1954 sky blue Pontiac convertible with a white top. When the family got together with her at the beach or drives through the country roads of West Virginia, the first thing she would do is put the top down.”

“Convertibles seemed to suit Francina’s personality. She was always ready to put the top down and embrace what life and the elements had to offer. She was a truly independent and free spirited woman. A feminist long before the term was coined.

“She put the top down and left Charles Town after high school and headed to the big city of Philadelphia to attend college at Penn.

“She put the top down and joined the very first class of women officers in the United States Navy as a member of the WAVES-Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service. Her initial assignment was in Washington, D.C. working in communications. From there she put the top down on the first of many convertibles and drove to California for duty at Oakland Naval Air Station enjoying the sites throughout the west.

“She had the top down metaphorically when she went to Oslo, Norway assigned to the Naval Attaché Office, and in true form while there, she learned to ski.

“She was always on the go with the top down and after retiring from the Navy, she got the perfect job with the Naval Relief Society traveling around the country to various Navy and Marine bases as the Director of Field Representatives instructing volunteers.

“During this period she had a succession of beautiful convertibles that I remember well as I was old enough and about to start driving. There was a gorgeous 1960 metallic red Pontiac

Bonneville. It was followed by a huge 1967 yellow Pontiac Bonneville. Then came a 1970 blue Oldsmobile with a white top. At the time I had a small sports car, so Francina let me borrow the Oldsmobile so I could tow a U-Haul trailer behind it when I went off to pilot school.

“The late seventies played a cruel joke on Francina when the major car manufacturers stopped making large convertibles. Undeterred she retired for the second time and returned to Charles Town with the top down to immerse herself in renovating the family house at ‘312,’ volunteering to help restore the ‘Old Opera House,’ becoming an Elder in the church and helping with various civic events.

“The last fifteen years she put the top down and drove to D.C. every Thursday to lead tours at the Kennedy Center. One day on her way there she was using the new toll way. For some reason the Smart Tag didn’t work and she went through the gate at full speed. Recalling the day she said, ‘I smashed it into a bunch of tooth picks.’

“Francina was always ready to put the top down and travel and loved having someone to go with. Her adventures took her to Europe, China, Africa and Egypt. And she traveled to Florida and Myrtle Beach every year with friends and to see family.

“Francina was always the biggest fan of her niece and nephew and later her great nieces and nephews. We all loved talking to her because she was always so excited to hear what we were doing. Indeed she was a fan of

any child. She followed the lives of children of many friends and friends of family with great delight.

“Over the last several days I have had the opportunity to hear many descriptions of Francina.”

‘She was always dressed to the nines.’

‘The life of the party.’

‘Francina is a treasure.’

‘One in a million.’

‘A true light.’

‘Exuberant.’

‘A real lady.’

“And now Francina has gone to the next party with the top down to see her God.”

In the upcoming issues of the Lyre magazine, we will profile Real. Strong. Women. Do you know a sister who is an inspiration to others through her actions and accomplishments? Someone whose purpose has made the world a better place for one person, ten people, or the world? We want to hear your stories and will pick the most inspiring for future profiles.

Submit your suggestions to:

Real. Strong. Women.

Attn: Lyre Editor

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