

CEMETERY WALK - CALVARY - SEPTEMBER 2020

ZELDA GEIS

Good Afternoon, my visitors. It is lovely to see you here this afternoon. I am Zelda Kastor Geis, born in Albia, Monroe County, Iowa, on December 10, 1910. I found out very quickly that December is a terrible month to have a birthday as everyone is always too tired and too broke to make it much fun.

My family then moved to Moravia, Iowa, where I went to high school and graduated with the class of 1927. I went right to work after graduation at the Moravia Telephone Company. I felt so lucky to have a job there. Working for a phone company was a good job in those days. However, I wanted to go to a bigger of business, so I eventually went to work for Iowa Success Barber Supply which is still located in Moravia today.

I then decided on a complete career change and enrolled in Iowa State Teachers College in Cedar Rapids. Teaching certification was quite different in those days. I could take college classes in the summer and teach in Monroe County during the school year. It was in the summer of 1932 that I took college classes in a satellite classroom in Creston, Iowa. Best move of my life, because that was the summer I met my husband-to-be, Elmer Geis. Talk about whirlwind romances! We met in early summer and were married in September, 1932, and lived in

Creston for many, many years. Our family grew to include two amazing children, John and Mary.

A little history on my husband Elmer and his family - he is of German heritage, with his great-great grandfather Sebastian coming to America in 1832. His great grandfather moved the Geis family from the east to Iowa - Spaulding Township in Union County to be exact - in 1876. Lots of Geis family history here in this area.

Elmer was a watchmaker and jeweler by trade. I bet none of you know that the correct term for watchmaker is horologist. There are only 2 ways to become a licensed horologist - apprenticeship to a master watchmaker or go to an accredited school. Elmer learned the trade by apprenticeship as the earliest schools were not developed until around 1950. Elmer later went on to become a master horologist in 1960, which took hours and hours of classwork and an extensive hands-on examination. We were so proud of his accomplishment. It was no easy task working on the watches, especially the tiny wrist watches of women.

SHOW PICTURES OF TYPICAL WATCHES OF THE ERA

Take a look at these pictures of the typical watches of the 1940's to 1960's. They all had tiny parts, NO batteries, and the watchmaker had to make sure to extra careful if there were diamonds around the face and watchband. Some watches were works of art, and Elmer's skills were much appreciated.

Elmer's watchmaking and jewelry skills prompted us to open our own jewelry store in 1944 - right at the end of World War II. We were first located at 111 ½ N. Montgomery Street, and we stayed at that location until 1963 when we moved the shop to 113 N. Maple. At the time we opened, it was difficult to get merchandise, we had little money of our own, and so we opened the shop on a shoestring and lots of prayers.

Many young men and women came to our store over the years. We sold engagement rings, fine jewelry, and, of course, beautiful china and sterling silverware for the brides-to-be.

PICTURES OF RING SETS

I know styles have changed in diamond rings, but let me show you some pictures of the types of engagement sets that we sold over the years. We had rings for every budget, and all our brides seemed thrilled at the ring that they or their finances chose. Maybe there is someone here today still wearing a ring from our store.

I also enjoyed helping young brides select their china and silver patterns for their trousseaus. Let me show you what was popular about 60 - 70 years ago.

FIRST PICTURE OF TRADITIONAL CHINA.

In the very early years, brides love to select the very ornate flowery patterns or china with stripes of silver or gold. Every bride 60-70 years ago would not have dreamed of starting her marriage without full place settings of china for either 8 or 12 people. Each young woman knew that she would be entertaining friends and family at her table and would need beautiful dishes. Many sets of china came with serving pieces, accessories such as vases, salt/pepper sets and everything in between. It was a major investment for a bride to be fully-equipped to be the perfect hostess.

SECOND PICTURE OF MID-CENTURY MODERN CHINA PATTERNS

Later in the 1950's, I saw a more modern trend in the patterns for china. The traditional patterns of Noritake, Wedgwood, Royal Adderley or Lenox had become more abstract with contemporary colors.

PICTURE OF THE FIGURINES

We also carried various decorative items in the store that every women loved to have on the shelf that showed off her innate good taste and style. Hummel and Llandro figurines were great favorites.

Our son John joined us in the business, and it was a great comfort to me to have his help when Elmer passed away in 1972. We were fortunate to have 40 wonderful years together.

As the years passed, I found that I loved to travel. My daughter Mary and her family settled in South Carolina, and I so enjoyed my visits there twice a year with her two children and husband.

In 1973, I was traveled to Rome and was privileged to attend an audience with Pope Paul VI. I sat just a few feet away from him at St. Peter's Basilica. It was a very special moment in my life.

My travels to Europe included stops in Switzerland, Italy, France, England, Scotland, and my all-time favorite country, Ireland.

Retirement was a busy time for me. The arts in Creston were of special interest, and I loved helping organize the first Crest Area Arts and serving as its first president. We even held an art fair one year.

Elmer and I were always closely tied to St. Malachy School and the Immaculate Conception - now Holy Spirit - Church. I was privileged to help start the St. Malachy PTA and the Rectory Re-Run Shop for the parish. I hope both these organizations have continued to flourish.

Yes, from our early lives growing up in the Depression, to starting the jewelry business during war time with rationing, to a lifetime of joys and good times - Elmer and I lived with the greatest generation of Iowans.

I loved helping people and the town of Creston. May you all feel the same and invest in this community - through good times and bad.

It was a delight to see all of you this afternoon.



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Lladro



Hummel