

Just ask Jody Riley about the Assistance League of Greater Collin County. As public relations chairwoman, she has some "bright ideas" for publicizing the group's programs.



GREAT GRANDMA on the

go!

BY BRITNEY PORTER

It was the big-band era and John K. Riley and his buddies from Randolph Air Force Base went out dancing.

"You see Joe out there dancing?" said John to Ribbie. "Yeah."

"You see that tall, lanky girl he's dancing with?" "Yeah. Do you know her?"

"No, but that's the gal I'm gonna marry," said John.

Ribbie gawked as John approached the tall, lanky girl. She was blonde and just shy of 20 years old. John's eyes met hers. "I have something important to tell you," he said.

"Six months later, we were married," said Jody Riley, laughing at how forward John was. "He was fresh!"

Today, Jody lives with her son John and daughter-in-law Cheryl in McKinney. At 78 years old, she's is up to speed with today's fast-paced world. Perhaps that's because Jody has seven grandchildren and 10 great-grandchildren. They certainly keep her dancing! If she's not cooking them dinner or communicating with them online, she's probably picking them up from school. Yes, Jody is one great-grandma on the go.

"She's extravagant, large, outrageous, and fun," said her granddaughter Kristie who lives five blocks down the street from Jody. Kelly, another granddaughter who lives two blocks away, agreed. They both have children, so it's always a full house at the Rileys', and Jody keeps it fun.

Her secret for her spunk is maintaining a balance between family and community. As public relations chairwoman for the

“My mother’s whole life was one of giving, and she led by doing.”

Assistance League of Greater Collin County, she is constantly promoting the league’s programs, including Operation School Bell, which provides clothes and hygiene kits to less fortunate elementary-school children in the Plano, Frisco, McKinney, Allen, and Prosper school districts. The program also assists children at CITY House, a children’s shelter in Plano.

Jody’s altruistic attitude comes naturally because her mother was a role model serving either in the PTA or at the church fair. “My mother’s whole life was one of giving,” said Jody, “and she led by doing. She was just the most incredible woman.”

She was Josefa Barloco, and she taught the art of gum paste all over the country, authoring books that are in the Library of Congress. Josefa was an ambitious woman and, no doubt, passed that gene on to her daughter.

After Jody graduated from Ursuline Academy in San Antonio, a college-preparatory school for Catholic girls, her parents’ graduation present to her was a trip to California. There, she auditioned for a guest radio spot through Republic Studios, but directors decided to test her acting skills. It wasn’t long before they offered her a contract.

However, the starlet’s dreams faded when a director asked her to go beyond the call of duty. “It was the old couch trick,” said Jody. “I told him, ‘No I don’t think so,’ and I tore up the contract.”

Back in San Antonio, a handsome pilot in the U.S. Air Force won her heart. John would become an airline captain, and he and Jody moved around the country together before finally settling down in Richardson. It was their nineteenth move and they lived there for 27 years before John passed away of cancer in 1995.

Being on the move so often made Jody a proficient realtor. She gained 37 years of experience before retiring last December. She enjoyed assisting others so much that she kept her broker’s license active and is an Ebby Halliday alumna; she can still refer clients anywhere in the world.

But Jody’s world is her family. “I retired only to find out that my retirement life is more pressing than my real estate life,” she said smiling as her family sat around the kitchen table to talk about their Mema. Dinner was cooking in the oven and the smell of roast lingered.

“Mema makes these crazy dinners and she doesn’t let you leave the table until it’s all gone and you have the ‘sparkly eyes,’” said Kathy as all the granddaughters batted their eyes.

The family will not miss a meal if Jody is cooking, especially the men. “Ernie loves my meatloaf, my rump roast, or my spaghetti,” said Jody. “Nonis will drop everything if he knows I’ve made my stuffing. And Ryan doesn’t care what I make; he wants it!” Jody laughed.

When 4-year-old David offered, “I love her to give me

kisses,” he received an “ahhh” from the family.

“David started calling me ‘Amo’ when he was 1 year old,” said Jody. “He doesn’t know it means love in Latin.”

“The great-grandkids just love her,” said Cheryl, who according to Jody, plans all of the family vacations. Last year, the Rileys went to Disney World. Jody said, “We looked like the Jed Clampett family—on a plane. There were 14 of us with booster seats, strollers, and backpacks.” And the year before, the family caravanned in four cars to Padre. The biggest surprise of all was when Jody walked out on the beach wearing pantyhose.

“You have to consider my background... nuns ...I didn’t cross my legs... pantyhose....” Jody rebutted and everyone laughed.

Christmas at the Rileys’ is usually spent at home decorating the

house and the front yard to the max. When John and Jody lived in Richardson, “Papa’s and Mema’s Winter Wonderland” was such a sight to see, the police made their street one-way to maintain the flow of traffic.

“It brought the community together,” said Candy, “except for the year when someone stole baby Jesus.”

“Mema chased him down the street in her pajamas!” said Cheryl, laughing.

“One of my favorite memories around Christmastime is Mema in the kitchen with the double ovens baking bite-sized sugar cookies,” said Kathy.

Jody recalled, “People drove by and they’d hand out the cookies. The grandkids learned how to give and not just receive on Christmas.”

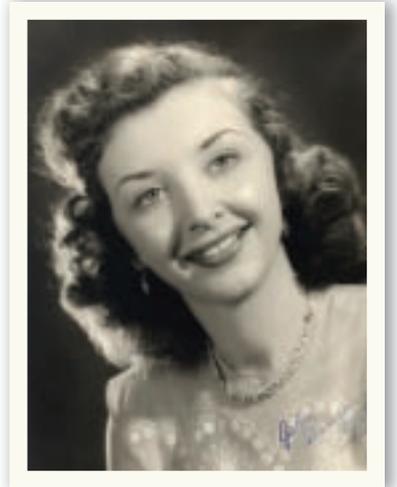
“It wasn’t enough to bake a dozen,” Kelly added. “There were a thousand.”

“She doesn’t know how to do anything small,” Kathy whispered on the side.

“Small certainly isn’t for us!” Jody replied. “Every second we spend with each other is meaningful, so we make the most of it. We have a great book of memories, and they’re priceless.”

“There were traditions every holiday,” said Kristie. “For Fourth of July, we’d put flags in every yard in the neighborhood.”

“We were up at 4 a.m.,” said Kathy.



At 18 years old, Jody was offered a contract through Republic Studios in Hollywood.



Jody Riley (center) with her family. Back row, from left, Kristie and Ryan Bonn, Kelly Herrera, Aimee Fisher, Kathy Boozer, Jody Riley, Ernie Herrera, Candy Favela (holding Camille), Cheryl and John Riley (holding Gaby). Front row, from left: David Boozer, John Marco Favela, Ellie Bonn, Kaley Bonn, Camille Favela, and Jaxon Herrera. The boxers are sisters, Allie and Maggie. Not pictured: Jody's daughter and son-in-law Debby and Mark Smitherman, their daughter Kari; Jody's grandson Johnathan Fisher; as well as Nonis Savela, Lynn Boozer, and the two newest members of the family, Natalie and Nathaniel.

"There were about 60 people that participated—neighbors and second and third generations—who delivered 1,600 flags. By the time they got home from delivering the flags, there would be 10 of us cooking eggs, bacon, and sausage," said Jody. "We were partying our heads off, and the rest of the world was just waking up."

"It is such a joy for Mema to see other

people having fun," said Kelley.

Jody's granddaughter Aimee, who recently moved to Texas from California, commented. "I never felt like Jonathan or I missed out on holidays because we always got to come."

Aimee's mom is Valerie, Jody's daughter who passed away in 1993 from non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma. When Valerie was ill, she and her husband Michael

bought a house in Richardson near "Big John" and Jody, John and Cheryl, and Jody's other daughter Debby and her husband Mark. They would all be within two blocks from each other. Valerie had told Jody, "I'll probably never live in this house, but I want the children to be near you."

The year following Valerie's death, Jody had four grandchildren in Richland Elementary, and her active involvement in the school garnered her the PTA award. "I was just a grandmother, so that was an honor. I still see some of the teachers today, and when they ask about the children, I say, 'Some of them are parents!'"

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Responsibilities have shifted as the grandchildren now take turns hosting holidays. "Everything that Big John and I did, my children have passed on to their kids," said Jody. "I think there's a lot that generations have to offer each other. What you leave in this world that's meaningful is the love and values you share."

And like her mother, Jody leads by doing. She joined the Assistance League of Collin County 10 years ago. "I love what the Assistance League does," she said. "Three years ago, they clothed 300 children who were brought over here from New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina."

The Assistance League's annual fundraiser is Holiday Happening, which will be Saturday, October 11 at the Embassy Suites in Frisco.



Profile photos

Steinmart's Carol Lehto and Assistance League members Marilyn Callahan, Jody Riley and Nancy Nagel, along with Steinmart's Joan Long, collect new clothes to be donated to elementary-school children as part of Operation School Bell. Steinmart's relationship with Assistance League chapters throughout the U.S. has been so successful that the Collin County chapter joined with the chain for the first time this year.



Jody in the stacks at the Assistance League of Collin County's new offices in Plano. The League held an open house in September to show off the new facility located at 2011 W. Spring Creek Parkway, Ste. 1500.

It will be at 6 p.m. and will feature dinner and silent and live auctions. Jody has been busy planning for the event, but knows not to take on too much at once. "I have a favorite saying: Don't drown in a glass of water," she laughed.

Of course, if she's given the choice to sit it out or dance, Jody's dancing.

For more information on the Assistance League, call 972.769.2299 or visit assistanceleague-gcc.org.

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