

At ease with older people, she found a career in senior center management; now sheâ??s a senior and walking the talk

Description

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Sue Horst believes everyone has a North Star â?? hers was her mother, who showed her that age is no barrier to creating a new life.

Her mother had been a homemaker, raising Horst and her older brother. She volunteered but never had a paid job. Yet at age 61, she studied to become a certified travel agent and went on to develop a clientele that made her the firebrand for AARP members, booking cruises and ushering seniors to destinations around the globe.

â??I thought it was amazingly cool,â?• said Horst, who at the time was a senior center manager. â??My mother made me feel proud and helped me form a deeper vision that we can do fabulous things no matter our age or disability.â?•

That sensibility is what guided Horst through a long career in senior center management, including the directorship at three Bay Area facilities. She spent 31 years at the Doelger Senior Center in Daly City, eventually becoming director. For the following eight years, she directed the San Francisco Senior Center, which encompasses the senior center at Aquatic Park and the Downtown Senior Center in the Tenderloin district.

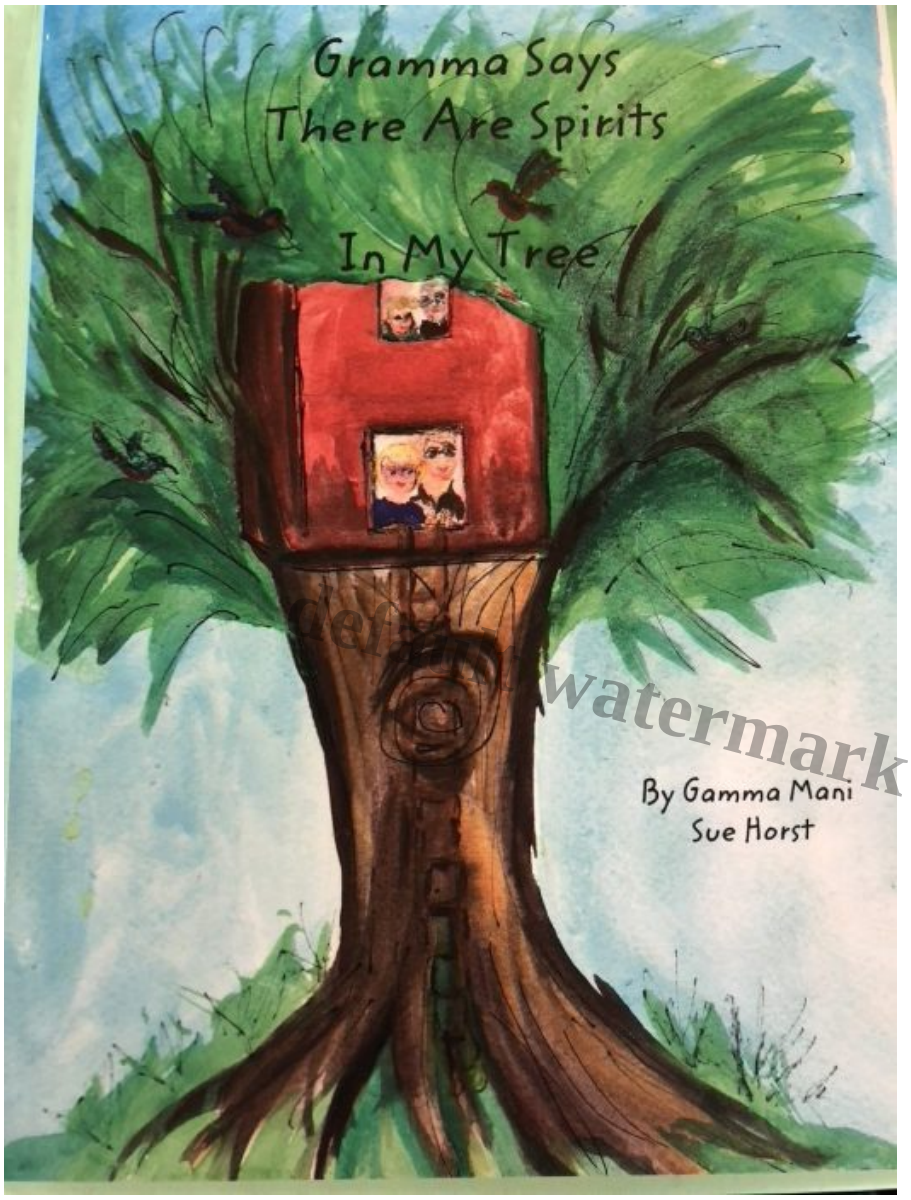
Family time

In 2020 at the age of 67, she retired to spend more time with her family. She and her husband, who this year will celebrate their 50th anniversary of being together, have two adult sons. They each have three children; one of whom just delivered her seventh grandchild.



Horst, her son and almost all of her grandchildren. (Photo courtesy of Sue Horst.)

Horst is putting her accumulated grandma wisdom down in words and illustration. Sheâ??s working on â??Gramma Says I am the Universe,â?• a book to be help children learn a few facts about the universe. And sheâ??s in the process of publishing â??Gramma Says There Are Spirits in my Tree,â?• is a tribute to the idea that those we love but lose are always around.



Horst and her family moved from Pennsylvania to California when she was 15. Her dad was raised on the Vancouver coast and missed the spindrift of living close to the ocean. Millbrae, Calif., was more to his liking.

Initially, like many twentysomethings, Horst was unsure of a career path. She got her undergraduate degree in physical anthropology at the University of California-Berkeley, romanticizing the notion of travel to exotic places and excavating old bones and artifacts. However, after hunkering down in museum basements with other interns, she said she felt like an interloper among a bunch of introverted science geeks.

â??Social interaction is my food, water and air,â?• she said, and a career aptitude test confirmed that. Lots of interactive human contact was requisite for her growth and happiness.

So, she signed on for a masterâ??s degree program in recreation administration at San Francisco State University. She got familiar with working with seniors as a student intern at the Pacifica Senior Center.

One of her first jobs out of college was as an adult education teacher for the Daly City Recreation Department. Her duties included instructing staff and senior volunteers on food service at the Doelger Senior Center.

Living well, aging well

â??I have always had an ease of conversation with older people,â?• she said. â??And being someone who easily loves and respects people, I was a natural at the first senior center I worked when I was 21 years old.â?•

When the director retired, she filled the position and eventually became a manager of Daly City Neighborhood Services, providing multicultural and multilingual services for the older adult community, including at the Doelger Center. She held that position for 15 years.

Over nearly four decades of senior center management, Horst and her teams have formulated programs, events and ongoing classes to improve the lives of active older adults. Those programs include the Healthy Aging Response Team (HART), a phone linkage for isolated, underserved older adults; Living Well, Aging Well, a goal-setting service for aging well; and the San Mateo LGBT Aging Film Series. The list goes on. The work garnered a number of awards, including from the Center for Innovation of Medicare and Social Security for bringing services to multicultural, monolingual underserved seniors in Daly City.

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Horst on the cityâ??s southern waterfront, near the Maritime Museum and the Aquatic Center, where she worked. (Photo by Myra Krieger.)

â??While managing a busy senior center, I was encouraged to keep my door closed,â?• Horst said. â??Supposedly, that was the way work got done. I did the opposite; I kept my door wide open, and like my dad, I let the distractions fall away and fully listen with my head and my heart.â?• Her father was a Freudian psychoanalyst.

Horst is still keeping her door open, letting in new experiences. Soon after retiring, she worked on the 2020 election, texting, writing letters, calling folks and working the Democratic Party Hotline to help people who needed voting assistance.

She walks about five miles a day in her Ingleside neighborhood, does elliptical and strength training and Qi Gong. And she still volunteers in senior-focused work for Daly City.

â??Working with older adults for my entire career, and here at 68, I became one myself. It has been a perfect path for me,â?• she said.

â??What I quickly learned is that you are not, in the end, defined by your work. You are defined by those you have loved and who love you. So, my philosophy became balance between family, friends and work.â?•

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1. All Posts

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