

LIVING LIKE A KING

*Even if I knew that tomorrow
the world would go to pieces,
I would still plant my apple tree.*
— Martin Luther

I first heard about Frank King as a regular fixture at the Lincoln City Community Center aquatics center. But what made me really want to meet him is when I was told I might not see him in the pool as regularly for a while because Frank, at 97, is taking piano lessons.



THINK PAWSITIVE

COASTAL STORIES WITH MORE WAG
BY GRETCHEN AMMERMAN

"I live each day at a time and it keeps adding up," he said. "I've always liked learning new things; that didn't change just because I get older."

Swimming began as therapy for Frank when he was acting as a caretaker for his wife, Carma, who suffered from Alzheimer's and passed away in 2008.

"I knew that to be able to take the best possible care of my wife I needed to take care of myself," Frank said. "I needed to be both mentally and physically hearty, so I started to come to the pool as a respite and a workout. I started out with water aerobics in 2006, then I evolved to swimming laps and never looked back."

As a young man in the 1940s, Frank learned quickly to take every day as a gift.

"I was in the Marine Corps as a radio gunner for 15 months," he said. "I was in the Guadalcanal campaign in the Solomon

Islands, that was the first big offensive in World War II in the Pacific."

His next steps, which took him to Utah, were taken more from circumstance than desire.

"I went to airborne radio operator school in the military," he said "When I was back stateside I started out in communications before transferring into air traffic control. After the war, jobs weren't that plentiful and I had the background for it so that's what I did."

His true love though, was in written communications.

"I was approaching 20 years in ATC which is too long," he said. "I had been taking all the journalism classes I could get, so I started freelancing in 1960. I started writing for the Deseret News, FAA Publications, Aviation News out of Washington D.C. and a bunch of other publications."

That experience opened a new door for Frank and brought him to Oregon in 1977 to work in the Army Corps of Engineers Public Affairs Office in Portland representing the Pacific Northwest and

Alaska.

Frank retired from that position in 1984, moved to the coast and started fishing.

"That's all I did for a year," he said.

"Then I was offered a job at the Statesman Journal in Salem. I did all my stories on a little TRS-80 typewriter, which had a word processor but no spell check or thesaurus; I had to phone all my stories in for a while. I enjoyed that job more than anything else I ever did. I'm a firm believer that everyone rises to their own level of incompetence, and that's what I had been doing before."

Now fully retired, Frank's time in the pool and on the keyboards breaks up his time with the other thing that gives him joy; the family that includes children from his first wife, June, who died in 1960 and a step-son from his wife, Carma.

"I've lost two daughters," Frank said. "But I have two still living: Melanie who lives in Imbler just outside of La Grande and Lisa who lives in Eugene. I'm very close with both of them. Mike was Carma's son from before we married, but in my heart he's definitely my son and he lives next door to me now, we're also really close. He's a

Vietnam vet, typical hippie with a ponytail."

The family also includes Frank's nine grandchildren, 16 great-grandchildren and three great-great-grandchildren.

"Every Thanksgiving, Melanie comes down and rents a house and puts on a dinner," Frank said. "There are usually about 20 to 25 of us."

Frank credits his family for a large part of his longevity:

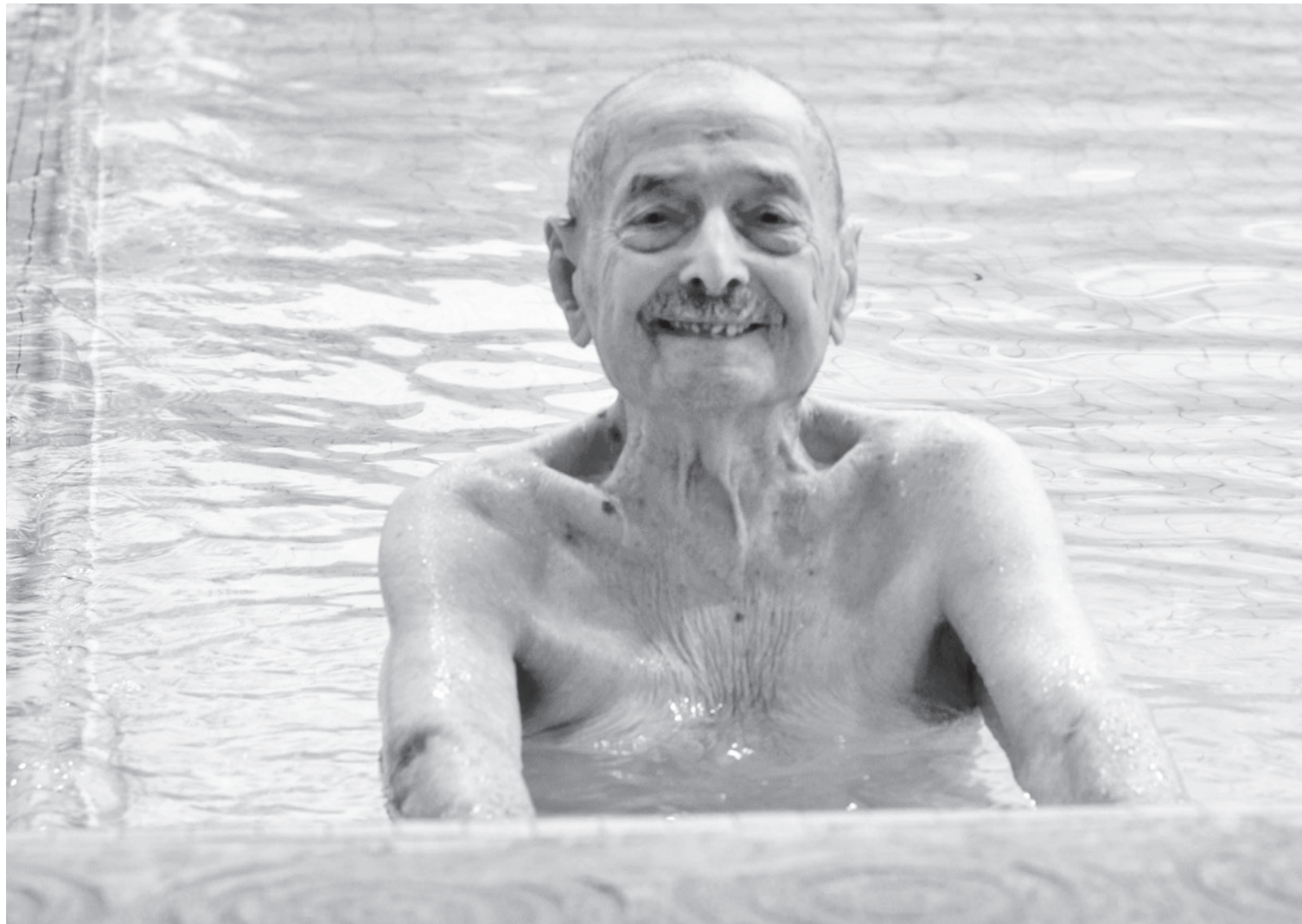
"The more love you have in your life the longer you are going to live," he said.

Frank also stays busy as a member of the senior citizen singing group the Lincolnaires, who entertain at retirement communities, such as Hillside Place and Lakeview Senior Living.

"We perform golden oldies and folk," he said. "My solo is 'Paper Doll.'"

Frank is truly good company; his mind is still extremely sharp as is his wit, but he doesn't take anything for granted. After enduring all my compliments about his approach to life and what an inspiration he is, he left me with this parting piece of wisdom:

"Growing old ain't for sissies."



GRETCHEN AMMERMAN