



Merritt (Al) Althouse

Following graduation from Liberty, Al went to work for the former Hess's Department Store in Allentown where he stocked merchandise. He also worked for White Cross, a health and beauty aids supply store in Allentown as the assistant store manager.

After two years of working these jobs, Al decided it was time to do something better with his life. The military seemed to provide the best opportunity, so in 1963, he enlisted in the United States Air Force and was assigned to Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas for basic training. Since this was the era of the Vietnam War, Al expected to be assigned to a combat-related facility;

however, that was not the case. He received orders to go to Fort Lee, Virginia for Cook's School. He couldn't believe it; after deciding to do something better with his life the military said he was going to be a cook. But, orders are orders so off he went for eight weeks of military cooking school.

Al was next assigned to Whiteman Air Force Base located in central Missouri. Whiteman was home to the 351st missile wing that controlled the underground missile launch facilities for the minute man missiles. The Air Force personnel assigned to these facilities had to eat so Al quickly became one of Whiteman's "culinary aficionados".

After completing a two year tour of duty at the missile sites, Al transferred back to the base for the remaining 18 months where he ordered food and prepared menus for two dining halls. Although he loathed the idea of being a cook, it was probably the best assignment he could have had. Everyone needs food to perform their duties and keep their morale up. Al provided that and it was very rewarding, especially when he received letters of appreciation from his superior officers.

After his discharge from the Air Force in 1967, Al was hired by the B.F. Goodrich Company and assigned to their store in Kansas City, Missouri. Starting as a salesman, he was promoted to credit manager and eventually assistant store manager. Due to company downsizing, Al was laid off just before Christmas, 1971. By this time he decided he had enough of the retail business.

Al knew he had to find a job, but he didn't want just a "job". He wanted a job where he would be happy; a job that would become his career. He did some soul searching and since he did like to drive, decided that something akin to driving may be his niche. He went to Indiana where he completed a driving school, but was still unemployed. In 1972, a neighbor who worked for Jackson County Ready Mix Concrete in Blue Springs, Missouri told him that the company needed another over-the-road concrete truck driver. Al applied and was hired. His job search was over. Al delivered concrete

to a wide range of customers from people doing their own home projects to large commercial contractors. After 32 years, the man who went from cooking meals to retail sales and management to delivering concrete, decided to retire.

In 1974, Al met his future wife, Christine, and they married in 1976. Four years later, on January 12, 1980, Al and Chris became parents with the birth of their only child, Leslie Ann. Leslie Ann matured into adulthood and married her now husband Brandy. Together they live in Overland Park, Kansas with their three children, which make Al and Chris grandparents.

Chris was employed by the federal government's Small Business Administration (SBA) for 32 years. In 2004, her job was phased out due to downsizing and she was given the option of accepting another SBA position in Herndon, Virginia or retiring. Neither Chris or Al wanted to move so she opted to retire.

In July of 2007, life for Al and Chris changed dramatically when she was diagnosed with Stage 4 Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma, a form of cancer. In her case, she had an inoperable tumor located in her head (close to her pituitary gland and on top of her optic nerve) plus cancer in her bone marrow. Fortunately, Chris had a very experienced and capable physician as well as skilled nurses and devoted caregivers. Depending on her blood count, she was treated with high doses of chemotherapy followed by radiation. The results of her treatments were quite successful: Chris has been cancer-free for 10 years.

Al and Chris now live in Lee's Summit, Missouri. Although self-admitted "home bodies", they have traveled to some fascinating places. In 1979 Al and Chris visited Perth, Western Australia where Chris's mother was from and met for the first time, her mother's relatives. In addition to Perth, they went to see Las Vegas, Tahiti, New Zealand, and Sydney, Australia.

Over the years Al and Chris have visited some scenic and historical places including Colorado, Michigan (Mackinac Island), Missouri (Lake of the Ozarks and Branson), Georgia (Savannah), South Carolina (Charleston), and Maine. They also took Leslie Ann to Disney World twice. Al and Chris's most memorable trip was in October 2009. To celebrate Chris being cancer free, Leslie and Brandy gave them an expense paid trip to Maui, Hawaii. This was by far, the most important event in their life.

Life for Al has been quite gratifying. He and Chris have grown as a couple and have enjoyed their time together; but most important, Chris's cancer has helped them develop a spirituality which gives them optimism, inner peace and enjoyment of life. Al and Chris do not dwell on the past but live in the moment.