

04 May  
2015

## Facing Change With Courage

Posted by Admin in [Health and Wellness](#)

93-year-old Bette Weedmark makes the transition to senior living

By Joanna Bartlett



Bette Weedmark didn't expect to move into a senior housing apartment right before she turned 93. But it's how things worked out and she's dealing with it.

She's learned over the years that some of her biggest obstacles turned out to be blessings in the end. It's how she met her late husband, Donald.

Weedmark, the youngest of 12 children, was born in 1922. After graduating from high school, she took her keen interest in art to

the American Academy of Art in Chicago, to learn how to paint in watercolor and eventually teach. But six months into her four-year program, she learned she had tuberculosis and had to leave school.

"I was in a sanatorium for a little over a year," Weedmark says. "What they did in those days was they collapsed your lung to have the disease heal. They'd shoot air in between your chest wall and the lung."

Weedmark endured such weekly treatments for five and a half years.

She moved to Merced, California, where the air was said to be better for her recovering lungs. "I went to live with a sister whose husband was a pilot in the service [in WWII]. We joined forces and she helped me, and I helped her," Weedmark says.

It was there, toward the end of the war, that she met her husband at a dance. Their meeting was an unlikely twist of fate.

Donald Weedmark, who was in the Navy, was due to be shipped out to Europe with the rest of his company. But his records got lost, so he couldn't go. By the time everything was sorted out, he was sent to the Bahamas, where he remained stationed away from conflict.

In 1945, after the war had ended, they got married, and Donald Weedmark went to work for the Department of Agriculture in plant quarantine. They moved around a lot. Each of their three children were born in a different place: the Mojave Desert, Hawaii and New Mexico while on the way to California. Finally, they settled down in San Diego for four decades and raised their family.

The Vietnam War served as a backdrop to many of those years.

"During the Vietnam War, my mom and dad didn't see eye-to-eye on things," says her daughter, Pamela DuVall. "But my dad changed his views as time went by. If you're going to be a Christian, 'Thou shalt not kill' means you don't kill for any reason."

When it comes to war, Weedmark says she could go on and on. "Don't get me started," she says. "I'll just say this: war is not the answer. It doesn't help anything. It just makes matters worse. The nations and people just get to hate each other more."

Throughout those years, Weedmark continued creating art, teaching watercolor classes and displaying her work in galleries. She and a friend founded an art association in Calexico, Calif., which continues on.

Today, her artwork hangs in a small, one-bedroom apartment at the Eugene Arms, a senior living community that provides meals and light housekeeping.

The Weedmarks moved to Eugene in 2002, to be closer to family. In 2007, as Donald's started failing, the family realized he needed more care. But they didn't want to move him to an assisted living facility. Instead, DuVall quit her full-time job at a child development center and looked after him.

"Our society throws our elderly away into these places and we didn't want that," DuVall says. "So Dad stayed at home and he passed away at home with all his family around him. As my dad would fondly like to say at times, 'I'm sorry we moved up here to die on you.'"

After Donald died in 2009, Bette continued living independently in her home at Lakeridge of Eugene. She liked it there, with a life of friends and twice-weekly ping pong games.

But she knew there would come a time when she'd need more support, too. When a friend decided to take a look at the Eugene Arms Apartments, she learned there was a place available. Weedmark seized the opportunity, even though it meant saying goodbye and closing another chapter on her life.

The transition hasn't been easy. She had to downsize from a home to a small apartment. Then she fell, needed hospitalization, and contracted pneumonia.

"It was very difficult to leave all my things behind," she says. "I took a few things – the couch, a few chairs."

The hardest moment came as they drove away from her house. "She said, 'Goodbye, my love,'" DuVall says. "She was leaving Dad behind." Or at least her memories of him, together with her.

Weedmark is quick to find the blessing in the move. "I'm glad I did it," she says. "It was hard to do. But now that I'm here, I'm happy with it. Especially being really close to my daughter."

DuVall lives two blocks away and visits every day. And she doesn't come alone. DuVall cares for her granddaughter, Kennedy, while her parents work, and brings her along to fetch Weedmark's breakfast every morning. At nine-months-old, Kennedy charms all the residents at the Eugene Arms and brings smiles and greetings each day. She especially lifts Weedmark's spirits.

"It makes the transition easier. I'm just so blessed in my old age to have a grand daughter and a great granddaughter and to have Pamela really close," she says.

As Kennedy grows and becomes mobile, DuVall knows it may get more challenging to visit. "We'll meet the challenge when we get there. We'll adapt," she says.

The ability to change with life's demands was perhaps a lesson learned by example. After all, as DuVall says, "Mom's an adapter, she perseveres."