The following pieces were written by Michele Driskill of North Versailles, who participated in VetsWrite Allegheny this spring (2017). Michele is mother of two sons, grandmother of four, and wife of a Vietnam veteran. With great creativity, she brought to life on the page many interesting aspects of her life. Thanks for taking the time to read her stories!

Edna

My character Edna was legally blind. She lived alone after retiring as the nurse at a local university. She was also a teacher. She told me her father did not think that either position was a noble one for a woman in that era. She married, but soon found out that her husband had a heart condition. They chose not to have children because they were not sure of her their future with her husband’s health. She worried she would have to be the bread winner in the house. Being a nurse, she took very good care of her husband. He had to give up golf, and she did all the yard work and “heavy lifting.” She used to joke that he lived 35 years, and outlived three of his doctors, because of those precautions.

When I met Edna, she was in her 80’s. The Blind Association had set her up with several radios that would read her all the prominent newspapers. She also would receive tapes of books she loved to read. One of her favorite authors was Sidney Sheldon. She loved his books, but said when she read the words it was so different than hearing some of the graphic language being read to her.

She also could still cook for herself with the help from an agency that adjusted the gauges on her stove and oven with markings that she could feel to use. She would also mark the middle of her bedding with safety pins so she would know where the center was. This made her able to make the bed properly, especially for a nurse where that was an important task.

Another favorite thing for her to do was to “watch” a soap opera she loved called *The Young and the Restless*. She would have her face about two inches from the screen, but would listen intensely.

Her stories, experiences, and enthusiasm for life were so encouraging to me. Especially because she had so much to be discouraged about. Her love for life shown through her disability.

Not So Boring After All

Cleaning house is usually a chore that we all do not think is interesting. It is more a job that most of us put off until we have to do it. It was my job for many years. A form of exercise, because of all the lifting of heavy sweepers, buckets and moving furniture around, as well as climbing stairs. Some houses, because most clients were not home during the week that much, still had sweeper marks on the carpet from my last visit. I would just run the sweeper in the opposite direction to show both the home owner and myself that I had done my job.

The quietness of the house was sometimes welcome. But often, I enjoyed listening to the stereo while I was cleaning. I would also describe the homes or home owners to my husband when I talked about my job. I would categorize them as “happy homes”, because I could “feel” that as I was cleaning. Pictures and decorations explained to me who they were, what they liked and believed in. How they lived their lives.

Most of my clients were elderly and were home when I cleaned. I preferred the houses be empty, but the company, and exchange of life experiences with them, were so interesting.

When I was alone cleaning, it gave me time to think. When I was finished, I felt a sense of accomplishment, and pleased at what I had completed, and what I had been trusted to do. It took many years for me to feel that my job was important. I had met so many different people of a wide variety of ages. Some I think just loved the company. Others were happy to have my services to make their time at home less stressful and to use their time off for fun things and relaxation. Over the years, I realized I had run my own business, scheduling, interviewing and organizing all aspects of that business.

It was just a job in the beginning, but when I look back now I can see it as a wonderful experience.

Untitled

On 9/11 she was starting a new job. Unaware when she arrived what was going on in New York City. After being greeted by her cousin, her new client, she entered the kitchen where the television was on. Her cousin informed her that a plane had hit the World Trade Center tower. As they were both standing there watching, she was unaware that the footage she was watching was a second plane hitting the World Trade Center and not a play back. They both looked in horror. Her cousin had a personal issue to take care of and had to leave. She was left alone on the new job. Thoughts crossed her mind. What should I do? Should I go home or stay and continue my work? Family members started calling to check on her and to give an account of where they were and what was going on. She decided to stay and continue her work until it was time to go home, all the time checking on the television, keeping her eye on what was transpiring. A local television anchor came on the air breathless reporting about the plane that had crashed in Shanksville. She became more anxious, especially because she was alone, and unfamiliar with her new place of employment. Her thoughts were scattered between continuing her work or heading for the safety of home. What else could happen, and was it safe to travel home? She felt the need to be at home and to make sure that she and her family were safe.