



DAVID JAMES HEISS/Redlands Daily Facts

Christa Hatfield, a psychology major at the University of Redlands, interviews Fritz Bromberger, who was an English professor at the university and is now a resident of Plymouth Village.

The times of their lives

University of Redlands students hear fascinating stories from the residents of Plymouth Village

By **DAVID JAMES HEISS**
Staff Writer

About a dozen students still send retired University of Redlands English professor Fritz Bromberger Christmas cards every year.

"Of course, they've got to be very, very old," joked Bromberger. He himself, he pointed out, is 88 — which "is no secret."

Bromberger is among several individuals at Plymouth Village continuing care retirement community who are being tapped by the UR SPURS (Service, Patriotism, Understanding, Responsibility, Sacrifice) club as part of a community service project.

It's a sunny morning and Bromberger — Redlands' Man of the Year in 2002 — cheerfully agreed to meet for another "session" with Crista Hatfield, a psychology major at the university who is recording his story in a dining room on the retirement facility's campus.

Bromberger spoke proudly of his five children and their accomplishments, and the things he and his wife used to do. He also

reflects on his time at the university.

"I miss teaching," Bromberger said, a twinkle gleaming from his eyes. "When I

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— **Chrissy Firato**, a University of Redlands sociology major from Dublin, Ohio, who interviewed residents of Plymouth Village

came to the U of R as a professor, Armacost was still president."

Mischievously he added, "He and I had

different views on how an English department should be run."

"When we came, this was a Baptist school," he said. "More students back then were Methodists." Over the years, he says, "Redlands is becoming more of an intellectual institution, which a college should be."

Plymouth Village is sponsoring "This Is Your Life," a program designed to record the gold mine of fascinating stories waiting to be discovered among its residents, which includes a man who worked on the atomic bomb; another who helped work on the first jet engine. Residents are artists, ex-military personnel, Pearl Harbor and Wake Island survivors; many are former UR faculty.

Their stories will be written up and presented back to their respective clients, and a copy will also remain with Plymouth Village's archives.

"The SPURS were looking for a community service project, and this was suggested," said Cheryl Hines, an activities coordinator at Plymouth Village. "It's great, because there's such an age gap between the students and our 80- to 100-year-olds. Everybody here

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has a fascinating story."

The students get to fulfill a community service requirement for college, and the residents get a keepsake memoir typed up to pass down to their families, she said.

"It's amazing how different things were," according to Hillary Chambers, a sophomore psychology major from Anaheim. "I met one 87-year-old woman who lived in a box car for a couple of years while her husband worked on the first jet engine. It's neat to see how similar these people were at our age, with similar temptations."

Chambers said, "When it comes down to it, the struggles I have as a college student trying to figure out what I want to do — even though it was a different time — they still had the same struggles."

SPURS President Allison Happ, a global business major from Salt Lake City, expressed similar observations.

"Going to college, we all focus on the little details of getting a job, studying and focusing our attention to the future," said Happ. "Talking to someone who can look back at the big picture puts things into perspective. Someone might say, 'Worrying about what grade I got here didn't matter so much as the friendships I made, or the places I traveled, or the experiences I had.' It makes me want to focus on the big things I want to accomplish and how I want people to feel about me when I'm at their age. I want to be able to look back and feel blessed like they do about what I've accomplished."

Happ hopes to work for an international nonprofit organization upon graduation.

She is inspired by her interviewees for the project.

"One woman is an artist. She's painted oils and watercolors and portraits, and won a gold medal in the Redlands Olympics for her art," Happ said, referring to 84-year-old retired elementary school art teacher Lucille Von Wolfersdorff. "She had a son and a daughter, and she adopted a Chinese son while he attended the U of R for three years. She spoke highly of him."

Happ described Von Wolfersdorff as "a nice woman."

"She asked if she could draw me," Happ said. "She told me that her artwork is a healthy habit, and that it helped her deal with the world, which stuck out at me. We all have ways we return to or an outlet we use for anxiety. To hear that something that beautiful was her expression was fascinating."



THERESA LONG/For the Daily Facts

Lucille Von Wolfersdorff stands next to her painting "Fruit and Bottles" at Plymouth Village.

Happ also talked with Lt. Col. Charles Ullrey, 85.

"I'm a pilot," Happ said, "and it was fascinating to hear him talk about all these details of flying in B-24s and C-47s — huge planes. I've seen these planes at air shows, but it was fun to hear him talk about them."

One fascinating fact that stood out for Happ: "He flew more than 3,000 hours while in the Air Force," she said. "During the 27 years he flew — in North Burma, New Delhi, Cairo, Africa, Nova Scotia — he was never shot at once."

Another SPURS member, Chrissy Firato, is a sociology major from Dublin, Calif.

"They're the sweetest people ever," Firato said. "One gentleman I interviewed was head of the Manhattan Project. Others were U of R professors and people from all walks of life — World War II and Vietnam War vets."

Firato admired the fact that "They all have very romantic stories about how they met their spouses. I think the shortest marriage I've encountered was 52 years. We don't see that often today. They were very respectable. Some of their circumstances included getting married quickly and heading off to war, some dated for a long time. They were always

cute stories. It was fun to hear facts about the U of R, which is so different now."

"It's become a different world," Bromberger said. "Five years ago my wife (Corrine) and I declared that we'd never go to a place like Plymouth Village. But we're much slower now, and this place keeps our spirits up. We like our privacy, and we feel safe here. I used to always worry about the house burning down."

At Plymouth Village, their lives and stories get intermingled with many others. Bromberger said that "I still chum around with Martin Munz," former principal of Redlands High School. "We miss many of the friends with whom we were acquainted with, who are long gone now. I miss flying, and we both miss teaching. Corrine was a substitute French and physics teacher."

Hatfield, whose parents attended U of R and whose father Bill is owner of Hatfield Buick in Redlands, explained that SPURS was looking for a way to continue

the organization's tradition of community service, despite the fact that the national SPURS program, an honors sophomore women's service organization, was disbanded earlier this year.

"It's been a really rewarding experience, and I've enjoyed hearing their stories," Hatfield said. "As I'm still trying to decide what I want to do in life, it's fascinating to see what they've done. I like to hear about the challenges they faced and overcame, and where their lives have taken them."

"There's a lot of history here," said Firato. "It's really important to talk to these people and hear their different stories of living on farms without plumbing and arriving on horse-drawn carriages. They're wonderful stories and amazing achievements and accomplishments; and they're contributing them in some way before they move on."

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