

# Compassionate Colonel

*From Flight Nurse to Child Advocate*

By Amy Morgan

Colonel Mary Giniewski, R.N., B.S.N., M.A., traveled the world for 30 adventurous years as a U.S. Air Force nurse. She joined the branch in its infancy and in time was among the few women to achieve the rank of Colonel. She settled in San Antonio in 1983, and upon retirement in 1986, she turned her formidable energy and organizational skills to supporting the children of Boysville.

Giniewski's father, a former coal miner, moved the family to Reading, Pa., during the depression. Living through World War II as a young teen inspired her to earn her nursing degree.

"Nurses did everything then," she said, "dressed in white uniforms - stockings, shoes and caps." She joined the Air Force as a first lieutenant in 1952.

She was eager to pursue her dream of travel. Upon learning her first posting was in Washington, Giniewski was initially disappointed because she thought Moses Lake was in Washington D.C., so close to home. She was happy to realize Larson Air Force Base was located in Washington State, not D.C.

The years travelling as a general duty nurse were happy times, she remembers. "You made your own fun," she said, and the bachelor officers shared many social events. She was transferred to Alaska when it had just become a state. She remembers feeling it was the edge of a frontier.

"The moose were very friendly, they ate the flowers and the grass outside our quarters. If you were working night shift and slept during the day, you might wake to see big brown eyes and antlers looking through the window at you," she recounted. "We built an ice skating rink for ourselves in the woods. We would make a pool with water and wait for it to freeze - invariably the moose would tromp through it in the night, and we'd have to skate around the moose prints."

Giniewski was promoted to captain, and her career took off, literally. She completed flight nursing school at Brooks Air Force Base and then flew all over Europe, England and the Middle East from her station at Rhein-Main Air Base in Germany. She nursed families as well as servicemen, and narrowly escaped delivering a baby on a plane en route to Libya.

When the Vietnam War broke out, she flew wounded patients returning from combat and was promoted to major. Later, she taught at the School of Health Care Sciences at Shepherd Air Force Base in Wichita Falls, where she assisted in the development of the Air Force L.V.N. program. She is proud of her work that opened the door for more nurses to build a career. With each accomplishment, her responsibilities increased. She was stationed in Hawaii as Pacific Air Force Command Nurse—responsible for nursing services for all the hospitals in the Pacific theater.

Her last post was Command Nurse at Randolph Air Force Base's Air Training Command. After 30 years she retired and decided to remain in the city that had become home. Giniewski wanted to pursue something different in the next chapter of her life. It all started when she dropped a donation at Boysville, and things escalated from there. Before she knew it, she found herself on the board of directors and president of the Boysville Auxiliary. Treasured times were those she spent one-on-one with the children.

"They are starved for love and attention," she said. "I've always loved children. And I hope was able to make a few of their lives a little happier. I learned that the world is very different when you see it through the eyes of a child."

She moved into a beautiful home in Independence Village in 2003. After 14 years, she counts that as one of her best decisions. She feels secure, she said, grateful for her church, Holy Trinity, across the street from the front gate and her doctor's office out the back gate. She values being able to have the help she needs, yet enjoys living independently in her lovely home with a beautiful garden.

"I've had a very good life," Giniewski said. "I have fulfilled most of my lifetime goals."



*Air Force nurse Colonel Mary Giniewski devoted herself to the children of Boysville after her retirement.*



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