



Jessica Lange
explores Hwy. 61
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Pine Knot

News

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only independent,
locally owned newspaper.

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With similar afflictions, they found affection

Mike Creger
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Tragedy happens in an instant. To triumph over it, well, that can take much longer.

One day you are simply a newly minted teenager leaving school. One day you are an infantryman fixed in a foxhole, already accustomed to a daily deluge of enemy fire.

In an instant, you are literally blinded.

...

Joyce Campbell of Cloquet fell flat on her back. The icy snowball had hit her square in the face. Her school books went flying, she probably hit the back of her head — hard.

FIRST OF A TWO-PART SERIES

It was boys horsing around. She didn't want to get them in trouble. She

was fine. At age 13, she was headstrong that way.

But she wasn't fine. Already inhibited by cataracts from birth, Joyce's vision was flagging. After holding out for a few days, she could no longer hide it.

Her retinas had been severely damaged. There would be several surgeries and hope beyond hope. But it was the mid-1940s and medical treatment didn't exist. The facts were plain. Joyce was gradually losing her sight, and would eventually be blind for life.



Carlton County residents Jack Thornton and Joyce Campbell had blindness in common. When they chose to marry in 1954, their story became a sensation across the country and the community rallied behind them. *Photos courtesy Thornton family, Carlton County Historical Society*

...

Carlton High School graduate John Thornton was known as "Jack," and followed his older brother Ed's path from the past decade — serving in a war far away from home. Jack was a big guy,

athletic and headstrong.

He found himself in the 45th Infantry unit, one of four National Guard units active in Korea. They faced constant combat for 429 days. In Korea, you won a hill one day, lost it, and had to retake it.

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We're still here

Your Pine Knot has
reached a milestone

Ann Markusen
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The Pine Knot celebrates one year of publication this week. It's been a heady journey for the founders and those who work to assemble your newspaper every week. We re-opened the downtown Cloquet office that the Pine Journal's corporate owner closed in early 2018. The Journal used to be called the Pine Knot before the name was changed. We obtained the rights to the historic name in a nod to the past and future.

It took us two months to launch the new Pine Knot. Five of us formed a board with Jana Peterson, an award-winning investigative journalist and former editor of the Pine Journal. Jana brought deep understanding about what a newspaper serving a community needs to achieve to cover the staff roles of editor, reporters, office manager, compositors and an advertising manager.

She needed intelligence on the business side. What are reasonable expectations for subscriptions, for advertising revenue? Where should we go for printing and how much would that cost? How do we distribute the papers? What kinds of businesses in our region would sell our papers and how do we approach and work with them?

We also had aesthetic challenges. Should we go with a standard layout or go to a smaller, more compact format? What colors should we use? How could we make our West End storefront attractive and inviting to people?

We went to work.

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Peterson



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Affection ...

Continued from Page 1

Jack was a machine gunner and found himself in the Haean Basin, in a hellish place called the Punchbowl, in late 1952. Grenades were being launched into his foxhole. He had successfully tossed some out. Then his luck ran out.

The grenade exploded in front of him. He was instantly blinded. One side of his body was paralyzed from the shock. He lost eight teeth, had a cracked vertebrae, and lost some hearing.

Years later, he would describe the next stage in his war story to a reporter visiting a reunion of blinded soldiers who had met in a Veterans Administration hospital in Chicago after they were injured.

“There we were, all four of us guys, at the young age of 22, 23 ... They gave me my last rites, several times. We were there with guys with limbs missing, heads blown apart. I tell you, we were mutilated.”

...

While Jack recovered in Chicago, a woman 400 miles away in Faribault, Minnesota was thriving. She was a star attendee at the school for the blind there, 50 miles south of Minneapolis.

The first thought was that Joyce would stay at home. But she was having none of that. She insisted on continuing her education and soon she was spending school years in Faribault and summers in Cloquet.

She was more determined than social, but starred in school plays and speech events. She played piano and other musical instruments. She became president of the Junior Red Cross in Faribault and wrote articles that were published in national magazines advocating for the blind.

She had entered a national beauty contest and was deemed the second-most beautiful “blind girl” in the country.

In May of 1953, Joyce was featured in a series of 16 photographs in the Sunday Minneapolis Tribune magazine. It was a feature on the school in

Faribault and “how blind girls become homemakers.” “Talented, attractive” Joyce is shown going through the steps in baking a cake.

She graduated soon after that publicity, winning a scholarship to the University of Minnesota.

...

And something else had happened. She met someone, on an arranged date, while on a spring break in Cloquet in 1953.

A friend had set her up with a blind man who was also visiting home. Joyce recalled later that she was reluctant. “He had been blind only four months,” she said. “I was afraid he would be the kind who would want to cry on my shoulder about his troubles. He wasn’t like that at all. I was amazed at the progress he had made.”

Joyce said he had been able to adjust to his blindness and perform tasks in those four months that took her four years to conquer.

Jack Thornton was just as headstrong as she was.

As he recalled later: “I’m sure

every one of us could have gone home to our mother’s, father’s house and sat down in an easy chair and just existed. But these guys, all of us, wanted something more.”

While Joyce was admittedly shy, with a limited circle of confidantes, Jack was an “extrovert,” with friends all over the county. They found that the dichotomy worked for them as a couple. By May of 1954, he presented her with an engagement ring.

...

A few months before his life changed in Korea, Jack had been in Carlton County on leave. He walked in downtown Cloquet that spring day and paused at a photography studio’s window display. There was a picture of Joyce Campbell, the one that would be used, along with her biographical information, in the beauty contest.

“She sure is pretty,” Jack recalled thinking. “Too bad she’s blind.”

While Joyce was being feted in November of 1952 for finishing second among 76 contestants in

the contest — earnestly designed to normalize blindness — Jack was in a hospital in Japan, dealing with his own new reality.

He would later date that pretty girl for several months before realizing she was the pretty girl from the display window. The coincidence wasn’t lost on reporters near and far who caught wind in the summer of 1954 that a veteran blinded in Korea was going to marry a blind woman from his home county.

Neither Joyce or Jack could have predicted what would happen next — that their impending Sept. 25, 1954, marriage would be celebrated in newspapers and news reels across the country, catch the attention of Pope Pius XII, be entered into the Congressional Record and stir county residents to unprecedented, compassionate action.

Next week, read about Carlton County’s seemingly wedding of the century, and how Joyce and Jack’s road to triumph didn’t end with the fairytale wrappings placed around them at the time of their marriage.

Pine Knot ...

Continued from Page 1

The shuttered Pine Journal space had been shuttered for nine months. We ordered a new banner for the awning. We furnished it with items we could all do without at home and two rocking chairs from a rummage sale. We converted our beautiful office-length multi-colored brick wall into an art gallery and issued a call for artists.

Closures of local news weeklies serving smaller communities have become epidemic in the country. They leave residents in a local news desert, hamper the ability of advertisers to reach customers, and undermine town and county governments’ abilities to communicate with their residents.

National Public Radio ran a story last year on what happens when small towns and locally owned newspapers disappear. Reporter Shankar Vedantam interviews Laura Frank, an investigative reporter for the Rocky Mountain News, which folded in 2009. Frank explains how important stories for locals, especially long and costly ones to research, disappear when a paper evaporates.

Vedantam then recounts the findings of three finance professors who studied 300 local newspaper closures around the U.S. from 1996 to 2015. Local government borrowing costs went up substantially following the shutdowns. Finance companies raised the interest rates they were willing to pay for school, county and city projects. Taxpayers ended up paying millions more in interest



The Pine Knot News is located in Cloquet’s West End and is the only paper covering northern Carlton County with a local office. *Mike Creger / Pine Knot News*

for bonds. Why? Lenders charge more if there is no local watchdog keeping county, city and town governments and school boards in check.

The Warroad weekly newspaper in far northern Minnesota — published for 121 years — closed May 7 of this year. New York Times reporter Richard Fausset wrote a long and beautiful eulogy for the Warroad Pioneer this past summer. He interviewed its editor and staff. Their view of the future: “No hometown paper to print obituaries from the Helgeson Funeral Home. No place to chronicle the exploits of the beloved high school hockey teams. No historical record for the little town museum, which had carefully kept the newspaper in boxes going back to 1897.”

In ending its run, the Warroad Pioneer joined roughly 2,000 newspapers closed in the United States the last 15 years. A recent study by Penelope Abernathy titled “The Expanding News Desert,” concludes gloomily that “there is simply not enough digital or print revenue to pay for the public service journalism that local newspapers have historically provided.”

Our revived Pine Knot

is successfully swimming against this tide.

We welcome your subscriptions, advertising, and visits to our downtown home.

Join us at 4:45 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 7 for our Chamber of Commerce ribbon cutting, to be followed immediately by a reception for our latest artist exhibit featuring photographers Mark Cline and Vern Northrup from 5-8 p.m.

Take home some sample copies if you are not yet a subscriber. You’ll be delighted with our coverage mix: local and county politics and governance, community events, remarkable citizen profiles, church news, school, sports, environment and outdoors coverage, along with some unique columns from a locavore foodie as well as a retired but still incredibly curious science teacher.

We welcome your subscriptions, advertising, and purchases at our newsstands around town. And your ideas for stories, opinion columns and letters to the editor.

The Pine Knot News is one-year old. We celebrate, but the real joy is in surviving and providing the local coverage the community deserves.

8th Annual Mom’s Group

Vendor & Craft Fair

November 9th • 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Journey Christian Church • 1400 Washington Ave., Cloquet

Free event with over 50 vendors & crafters

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Community rallied behind blind couple

Mike Creger
news@PineKnotNews.com

When Jack Thornton carried his wife Joyce over the threshold of their new home on Jan. 23, 1955, the newlyweds weren't alone. A thousand people stood outside and cheered as they entered the two-bedroom, pre-fab house at 109 7th St. in Cloquet.

It had been this way for a while, ever since the previous August when a story about the blind couple flashed on newswires and landed in every newspaper across the country.

"We were well-known," Joyce coyly said of all the attention.

The new home was a gift. The lot, the house, the construction,

the furnishings, all of it donated as the weekly newspaper in Cloquet and Carlton led a campaign to help the couple.

Business and personal donations meant the Thorntons would have a centrally located, specialized home easily navigated by two blind people. Taxi companies even promised a lifetime of transportation for the couple. They were also offered food, fuel and even dry cleaning for a year after they moved in.

"The place is just darling," Joyce told reporters on that cold day. "We both just love it."

...

Joyce Thornton is alive and relatively well today at age 86. She lives in Florida, where she has made an indelible mark as a staunch advocate for the blind and the services and accommodations made for them.

"It was crazy," she says in looking back at her wedding in September of 1954 and all the fuss made. She said it was because Jack was an injured Korean War hero and was well-known in the county. "They honored him," she said. Along with a Purple Heart medal, Jack received a Silver Star and the Distinguished Service Cross after his efforts to protect three other men in his foxhole by throwing out an enemy grenade. Some reports said that even after his grievous injuries, a blinded Jack held his ground under more enemy fire.

At the time, there was a lot of pressure on the U.S. government to make sure even badly injured veterans were reintegrated into work and life when they returned home from war, especially since Korea came on the heels of World War II. Officials stepped in to help Jack return to work at the Wood Conversion Company plant in Cloquet. They had to find a job that he could do as a blind person. He ended up operating a shredding machine operated by sound.

U.S. Rep. John Blatnik praised the efforts of the Carlton County community, and government agencies, from the floor of the House in May of 1955. The story of Joyce and Jack is part of the Congressional Record.

Jack had been worried about finding work for much of the summer of 1954. He and Joyce

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Blind Leads Blind--to Altar
The radiance common to all brides lit the face of Joyce Campbell, 21, blind since she was 13, as she was led down the aisle by her groom, Jack Thornton, 25, who lost his sight in Korea. The couple was married at Carlton, Minn., Saturday. Joyce, who was married at Carlton, once won a prize in a beauty contest blinding by a snowball, once won a prize in a beauty contest for the blind. Thornton fell in love with her picture before he met her and before he himself was blinded. The couple met in nearby Cloquet, where townspeople donated to build a home for them. Wood Conversion Co., where Jack works, with a specially-built home.

And So They Were Wed



John L. Thornton, 25, blinded Korean war veteran, receives training for his new job at the Wood Conversion Co. plant, Cloquet, Minn. Supervisor L. E. Mallory watches as Thornton feeds sheets of pulp into a shredder machine. (AP photo)

It's a Boy for Blind Veteran, Sightless Wife

Duluth, Minn. (AP) — A blind Korea war veteran and his pretty blind wife who captured the hearts of thousands throughout the nation upon their marriage, today became the parents of a son — 7 pounds, 11¼ ounces.

The baby was born to Mrs. John L. Thornton at St. Lukes hospital, Duluth, at 4 a.m. today. Mrs. Thornton and her son were reported doing fine.

Thornton, 26, and his 22-year-old wife, formerly Joyce Campbell, were married in their home town, Cloquet, last Sept. 26, in a ceremony topping off a community drive that resulted in a home for the couple and a job for Thornton. Neither Thornton nor his wife have ever seen each other, though Thornton had seen a picture of the girl he was to marry before he was blinded in Korean fighting. Mrs. Thornton lost her sight at 13 when she was hit by an icy snowball.

Cloquet to Give House to Young Blind Couple

Cloquet, Minn. — This northern Minnesota community has opened its heart to a blind couple to be married in September. The community is giving a 24 by 32-foot pre-cut home, with 12 bedrooms, to the couple. Cloquet residents contributing \$1,800 toward the cost. Martin Capp, owner of the Cloquet Lumber Co., Minneapolis, is giving a 24 by 32-foot pre-cut home, with 12 bedrooms, to the couple. Cloquet residents contributing \$1,800 toward the cost.

Drive Opened To Build Home For Blind Vet, Bride

Will You Aid Their Future?



JACK THORNTON AND JOYCE CAMPBELL
Thornton is a Korean War veteran who was blinded. Campbell is blind. They are the couple who were married in Cloquet, Minn., last September.

\$4,000 Is Cash Goal

BY NORMAN NELSON JR.
A community-wide drive to build and furnish a new home for Jack Thornton, 25-year-old blinded Korean war veteran, who will marry Joyce Campbell, 21, Cloquet, who has been blind since she was 13 years old, began as a spontaneous movement here last week after the news was announced of the forthcoming wedding of young couple on Sept. 26.

Both Jack and Joyce were shaken by the news. "Who don't know what to say," Jack told this reporter, his voice a bit last night after we told about it.

Jack is the son of Mr. Mrs. Edward Thornton of town and is a former Carlton resident. Joyce is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. William Campbell, Sunnyside Drive, Cloquet.

The young veteran lost sight while fighting with 45th Infantry division in "Punchbowl" sector of Korea in late 1952. While manning a machine gun, he seized a grenade thrown by Red and attempted to hurl it to save himself and the three men in his foxhole. The grenade exploded and hurled it.

Fragments of bomb blinded him, partially paralyzed his right arm and knocked out eight teeth, loss of hearing in his right ear, crushed a vertebrae and other body wounds. Two other men in the foxhole



BLINDING EYES: Joyce Thornton, coordinator for the Visually Impaired Service Team at the VA hospital in Fort Myers, with her Seeing Eye dog, Audie.

A champion's vision

Joyce Thornton hasn't let blindness keep her from helping others

position of blind of dances like president at Visually Impaired Persons (VIP) and is an event chair and volunteer who recently helped up a school for the blind. They're small details — but sometimes the most important.

happens, or whether or not you can do it — it's how you do it. "Even though the veteran population is decreasing, the population of the visually impaired is increasing because they are living longer and using their vision," she says, noting she now has 400 clients. "In her role at the VA clinic,

Family scrapbooks kept of the clippings about Joyce and Jack Thornton are overflowing. Their love story, and subsequent actions to build them a home, was in papers across the country in 1954 and 1955. Joyce has also been featured in papers in Florida since the early 1980s for her advocacy work with the blind.

were engaged in May and the September wedding was looming. The crush of press coverage was overwhelming but welcome, Joyce said, as it helped get their marriage off to a comfortable start.

More than 300 people packed the tiny St. Francis of Assisi church in Carlton that fall. Hundreds more stood outside. News reporters and cameras were there. Sheriff's deputies had to direct traffic before and after the 15-minute ceremony followed by a reception at Cloquet's union hall.

"My wedding day was so crowded," Joyce said. "It was a mess. But I walked down the aisle very proud."

Their wedding pictures were

shared across the country, often accompanied by excruciating headline puns considering the couple's sightlessness. "Blind love" and "blind leads blind" were some examples.

Things calmed down, slightly, until the house dedication in January, which included the revealing of a framed blessing of the marriage from the Pope in Rome. Coverage ebbed again until July 1, 1955. The couple's first son, Randy, was born, and the couple's news was once again in papers from coast to coast.

...

For all the kindness extended to the couple, Joyce said there were moments when small-town life squeezed in on them. Before their house was built, neighbors

were asked to grant permission for a blind couple to move in. When Randy was born, she heard and felt the swirl of doubt about a blind couple raising a child. "There was prejudice," Joyce said. "I had trouble in Cloquet. They wanted to take my kids away ... I proved them wrong. I had to fight all the time."

Randy and now younger brother Kurt were under a spotlight, Joyce said. Kurt, who lives with Joyce in Florida and takes care of her, said he had a fairly normal upbringing despite everyone knowing his parents' special circumstances. "If you grow up with it, they aren't handicapped," Kurt Thornton said. "They were our parents. What they said went."

"It was a normal life," Kurt said. It was also an active life. Jack loved fishing, and trips to area lakes and resorts are a favorite memory for Kurt. He especially liked it when his parents would take the helm of a boat and the sons would guide them along the lake. They learned to ski on water and snow.

Joyce was part of their Boy Scouts experience as well, teaching some unique hands-on skills only a blind person could convey. "Everyone knew us in town," Kurt said, which made it hard to get away with anything. Whatever the boys were up to would quickly get back to Jack and Joyce.

Continued on next page

Thorntons ...

Continued
from previous page

Joyce had a sister, Christine, who was 19 years younger. The then 2-year-old was a crowd pleaser at the wedding, cheering her big sister and marveling at her dress. Christine became a sister of sorts to Joyce's children. She visited her sister's home "all the time," Christine said.

"There wasn't anything she couldn't do," Christine Williams said from her home in Texas. "She cooked, she cleaned, she took care of the kids. They walked all over town."

She never saw her sister as a blind person, she said, because she was so capable. "She's just a remarkable person," she said. "And you never use the word 'handicapped' around her."

Now 60, Kurt also reflects on his parents' accomplishments. "I admire them," he said. "The courage that they had. I wish I had half the courage they have had."

...

It was a typical mother-son argument in the kitchen one morning in 1972. The family had moved from the now-crowded home on Seventh into a larger brick home on Ninth. Randy wanted a motorcycle and Joyce fretted. The 17-year-old was adamant. "I want this motorcycle," he pleaded. She asked him: What if you get in an accident and are hurt or killed. Joyce recalls him shrugging his shoulders and saying "if it happens, it happens."

On an October Saturday months later, Randy took a girl on his motorcycle for a ride on the road through Jay Cooke State Park. At the hairpin curve, the pair ran head-on into a car. Randy was killed, the girl was badly injured.

"It's the worst tragedy you can imagine," Joyce said, her voice still quivering whenever she thinks of her first son. "I remember Kurt saying, 'He can't be dead. I love him.'"

"It was such a horrible time," Christine said. "I remember that call."

The grief sent Jack and Joyce in different directions. Joyce decided she would continue her education in social work at the University of Minnesota Duluth.

"It drove Jack to the bottle," Joyce said.

"It's tough for parents to stay together after a child dies," Christine said. "She took her grief and went back to school."

One of Joyce's proudest moments is the standing ovation she received at her UMD graduation in social work in 1976. "Then I needed a job," she said.

She knew her rights, as the Minnesota Legislature

had just passed a law banning discrimination against people with disabilities. She made an offer to Cloquet Memorial Hospital. She would work there for free, for six months. After that, they could decide if they would keep her on or not. The hospital kept her on.

She was also obtaining a master's degree in social work at UMD. After the hospital, she worked in Duluth as an addiction counselor and at a halfway house for women.

In 1982, she got a call from Florida. Joyce was known for keeping up with the latest technology that helped blind people navigate in the world. She could read using a scanning device and had other skills to teach those adjusting to sightlessness. Her skills were sought after.

"I couldn't stand the weather," she said of winters in Minnesota. She asked Jack to come to Florida with her. He didn't want to go. And that was that. Kurt had graduated from high school and was gone.

She has no regrets about leaving her life in Cloquet. "We had a good marriage," she said. "It was a good 30 years."

...

Ed Thornton is one of the few World War II veterans from Carlton County still alive. At 93, he says he doesn't remember much of the details around his younger brother's wedding and the hoopla it created. But he remembers Jack's spirit after he was injured in Korea.

"To be truthful," he said, pausing a beat, "he was a smart aleck. He always had his own mind. And he wouldn't give up for nothing."

And that's what helped him survive after being blinded. "I'm extremely proud of him," Ed said from his home in Carlton. He fished, he hunted, he golfed — he was a top golfer on the national blind golf circuit.

"He was very active," said younger brother Bob, who lives in Barnum. "He got screwed up in Korea," he said, "but he didn't give up."

In 1992, Jack was crossing Cloquet Avenue in downtown Cloquet and was struck by a car. It was crushing for Joyce, as she had spent the past decade in Florida advocating for safer streetscapes for the blind and educating drivers. She herself has been hit by cars while walking.

Bob said he and the family had to make the ultimate decision after Jack's accident. They had to take him off life support. It was Sept. 19, and Jack died 40 autumns after his life was changed forever in Korea.

Ed said his brother never complained, and often said he would take blindness over losing a limb. "I'll

Crowd Throngs 'Dream House' at Dedication

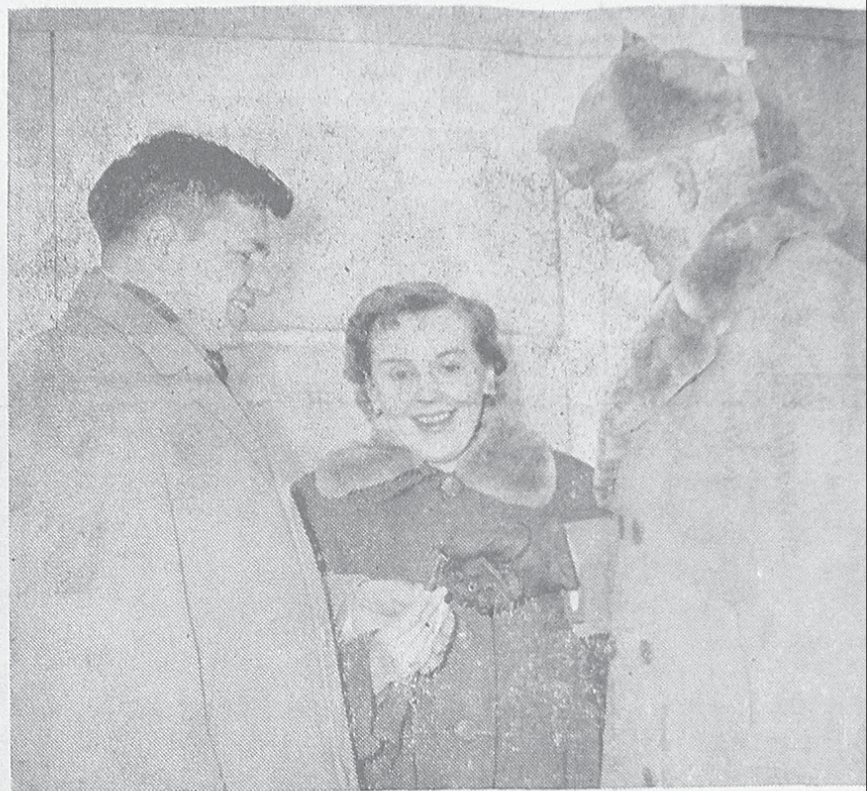
MORE PHOTOS ON PAGE SIX

An estimated 1,000 people, many of them from out of town, visited the newly completed home of Mr. and Mrs. Jack Thornton, Cloquet blind couple. The house, built mainly by volunteer labor with funds donated by area people, was formally presented to the young couple by Mayor Norman Halverson. The ceremony climaxed a campaign begun last September by Harry Lawrence, Pine Knot advertising manager.

Thornton lost his sight and suffered other serious wounds when fighting in Korea with the Infantry in an action that won him the Silver Star. His bride, the former Joyce Campbell, has been blind since she was a youngster. They were married last September.

The crowd of well-wishers thronged through the two bedroom bungalow at 109-7th street to admire the house and its complete furnishings given to the Thorntons.

Several visitors were blind people from Duluth and Superior, including Verne Edwards,



MAYOR NORMAN HALVERSON presents the keys of their new home to Mr. and Mrs. Jack L. Thornton at a brief ceremony Monday afternoon. The mayor expressed the heartfelt best wishes of the community to the young blind couple in the formal dedication of their new community-built home. (ALL PHOTOS BY JIM)

take my legs over my eyes," he recalled Jack saying.

...

Joyce worked at a Veterans Administration hospital in Florida for 15 years, helping those who had lost their sight and were trying to adjust. She remained a determined woman whose mantra was simply that no one can wallow, you make do.

Doreen King is a friend, one of many who flatly say that "Joyce saved my life." When she lost her sight, she moved to Florida and found Joyce. "She's just been everything," she said. "She really has had an amazing life."

When sister Christine visits, she hears from those touched by Joyce's advocacy.

"I was so blown away," she said. "There were so many people who said, 'Your sister saved my life.' It was story after story."

Joyce has been featured in a host of newspaper articles in the Fort Myers area as word of her expertise and determination spread. It seems she never left the news spotlight.

But she remains modest. She's on dialysis and has suffered from some recent falls. She even admits she might have a "touch of dementia."

She surely didn't sound like it on the phone, where she took over the conversation from the start. "There's not much to tell," she said, trying to stave off a prying reporter.

"But you've had a remarkable life," the reporter said.

"I guess I have," she then admitted.

Then she went into the

impressive list of accomplishments — the groups she helped start, the initiatives she drove home. All of it while touching the lives of so many people, sighted and blind.

Her life's scope came into focus as she talked about the first weeks of her blindness, when at age 13 she faced the prospect of sitting at home and trying to figure out the rest of her

life. She demanded that she be sent to a school for the blind. Immediately. She wasn't going to wallow. She was moving forcibly ahead. "I wasn't going to let anyone stop me," she said.



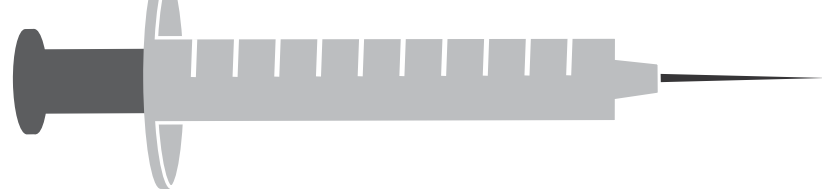
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