



# A treasured elder...

## Ray R. Robinson

*A natural salesman and one tough Hoosier*

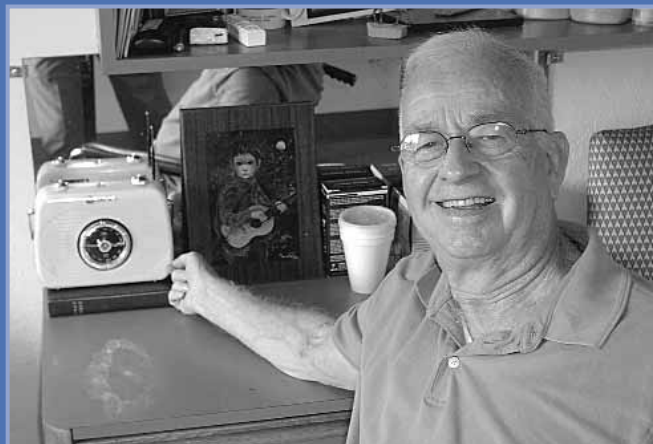
Treasure  
Our  
Elders

**R**ay R. Robinson remembers waking up and wondering what happened. It seemed only moments earlier he was enjoying dinner out with friends, but, in fact, he had suffered a massive stroke after getting up from the table. Robinson received immediate medical attention, but the stroke was so severe it left his left side paralyzed from his ear to the tip of his toe. "I couldn't sit, stand, shave, feed myself or brush my teeth," Robinson recalled. "I was completely, totally dependent." Robinson remembers later being wheeled into the elegantly spacious lobby of Miami's Villa Maria Nursing Center. "I look up and I see the room is full of old ladies. I said to myself, 'What in the heck is going on here?' It took awhile for me to concede that something was wrong with me and this is where I needed to be."

Robinson credits the dedicated Villa Maria rehab team with helping to restore a measure of his independence after his doctors said he would never walk again. Almost four years later, Robinson walks daily with the assistance of a cane and leg brace. When the Treasure Our Elders interviewer arrived, Robinson was busily tuning his vintage bedside radio to WIOD, the powerhouse Miami station that broadcasts the Miami Heat pro basketball games he enjoys.

### Hoosier farm boy

Ray R. Robinson was born December 19, 1932, the oldest of three children in a farm family in Crawfordsville, Indiana, about 45 miles west of Indianapolis. Following his graduation from high school in 1951, Robinson headed for Purdue University to study agricultural science but dropped out 18 months later after marrying a girl he met at a drug store soda fountain. Two years later the couple's first child was born, the same day Robinson's draft notice arrived in the mail. "I'll never forget it — the letter said, 'Your friends and neighbors have selected you to serve our community.'" The "community" ended up being an Army air base in Frankfurt, Germany, where Robinson managed the base's extensive inventory of spare parts. Toward the end of his tour he was stationed in England as massive airstrips were being constructed to accommodate the new B-52 bombers needed to fight the Cold War.



### Tuned In:

*Robinson's vintage bedside radio rests atop his bible and buzzes with play-by-play broadcasts of Miami pro teams. A natural salesman, Robinson admits having the gift of gab. "They used to say in our business that if a guy don't talk, he don't eat."*

Robinson's intention was to return to farming when his hitch was up, but he changed his mind after seeing vast family farms being sold to make way for new housing and interstate highway construction. "I figured the farm business would never again be like it was and I was right," Robinson said. He took a job loading and unloading trucks in Crawfordsville and started a fence-building company that kept him extremely busy during the Spring and Fall. After three years of non-stop back-breaking physical labor, Robinson decided there *had* to be a better way to get ahead. Within a year he had become a licensed insurance broker and within another three years was at it full time, busier than ever. "I was a workaholic — I worked day and night and it cost me my marriage and family," Robinson candidly admitted.

### Florida-bound

The couple divorced in 1974, and Robinson — not yet age 42 — felt it was time for other changes in his life. He sold his lucrative insurance business and spent the next two years traveling the U.S. and Canada by air, car and train. While visiting his children at his former mother-in-law's house, Annie, had fallen ill and desperately needed help managing her affairs in Miami. "I went down there and she was in terrible shape, Robinson said. "I didn't have the heart to say 'no,' so I went back up to Indiana and flew back down with all my clothes." Robinson took a job as a furniture salesman at the Burdine's department store at the Mall on

163<sup>rd</sup> Street and lived with Annie as her caregiver until her death.

Robinson quickly became one of Burdine's top salesmen, but five years after he started, the store closed its mall location and Robinson was without work. Again he changed careers, taking a job with Kent Security as a night road supervisor. "I'd bring coffee and doughnuts to all our sites, but my real job was to make sure our people were in place and doing the job." Within ten years, Robinson was named Chief of Security for the huge Bal Harbour Condominiums complex where he supervised a staff of 20. It was while having dinner and discussing retirement plans with colleagues that Robinson was felled by the stroke.

### Living life

Today Robinson is trim, tan and remarkably youthful in appearance for a man approaching age 74. Still a confirmed bachelor, he is active in several of Villa Maria's social activities and mixes easily with fellow patients and staff. In quiet moments, Robinson is more reflective. "I never smoke or drank and I've watched my weight all my life. I've done everything a man is supposed to do. So why am I here?" he asks rhetorically, gesturing toward the walls of his spotless room. Robinson pauses only a moment before answering his own question. "Because it's not time for me to go. I still have more to do."

FHCA honors Ray R. Robinson and treasures his many contributions to our state and nation.