



# A treasured elder...

## Peter Gottfried Muller

*You name it and he's probably done it*

Treasure  
Our  
Elders

“If you get me started talking, you’ll be here until Christmas,” warns 90-year-old Peter Muller, relaxing in the spacious library of The Floridean Nursing Home in Miami. An hour-and-a-half later, Muller has only just begun to describe a remarkable life with as many and varied experiences as one could possibly imagine. This oldest of six children born in the year Woodrow Wilson was running for re-election has a lifetime résumé that includes stints as a U.S. postal inspector, plumber, electrician, carpenter, professional dancer, elevator company clerk/dispatcher, gas range installer, professional pigeon racer (more on that, below), truck driver, fisherman and decorated Army veteran. “I just get up and go,” he shrugs when asked how he’s been able to maintain an active life into his ninth decade.

### Jersey boy

Growing up on the streets of Trenton, New Jersey, and later, in the Bronx, New York was tough, even without the Depression as a backdrop. Muller had to drop out of DeWitt Clinton High School when his father went missing and the family was left without means of support. His father, an interior decorator, had gone out to play poker with the boys and had been struck by a cab on the way home. “My mother found him in a hospital a month later, but he was never the same again.” Muller took on a series of odd jobs and learned as much as he could before moving on to another.

### War service

The day after the U.S. was attacked at Pearl Harbor in 1941, Muller went to his local Navy recruiting station to enlist, but was told he was too short. “A year later the Army drafted me and a year after that I shipped out of Fort Dix, New Jersey on the *Queen Mary*, headed for Europe.” Muller left behind his new wife, Claire, a girl he had known all his life.

Muller was assigned to a combat engineer battalion which landed in France three days after D-Day. The battalion cleared and then leveled fields in areas of France recently secured by the infantry. Pierced steel planking — a series of interlocking metal plates —



### Dancing Pro:

*Muller was a member and trustee of the German-American Social Club of Greater Miami and part of its professional Schuhplattler dance troupe, shown front row, third from left, until 2004. At right, Muller on a recent visit with sons Richard, left, and Peter.*



were laid down to form aircraft runways, and Muller’s unit moved forward as the Allied battle lines advanced. Muller was at the wheel of a ten-ton tractor trailer truck when an enemy sniper caught him in the hip. Pointing to it, Muller joked that his only other war wound came when a Nazi V-1 “buzz bomb” fell and exploded a half block away while he was working on the engine of his truck. “The blast shook the hood down on my head and about knocked me out cold.” Muller’s battalion made its way across France and into Germany, and by the Spring of 1945, was just outside Berlin. “I knew the war was over when I saw the Russian troops launching fireworks in celebration.”

### Back home

Muller was mustered out of the service, but soon found that jobs were scarce in post-World War II America. His son, Peter, was born while he was in Europe, but Claire had died shortly thereafter at age 23, succumbing

to a kidney ailment. Within a year he married Alice, a striking redhead who was herself a widow. Their son, Richard, was born soon afterward. The family lived in New York, Wilmington, North Carolina, Washington, D.C., and finally, Miami, where Muller worked for the Otis Elevator Company and Alice worked for the Internal Revenue Service as a stenographer. The couple traveled all over the world and remained happily married until her death in 2005.

### Living life

Today, only Muller’s baby sister survives, who still lives in New Jersey. Son Peter is an assistant manager for a construction supply company in New Jersey and calls weekly to check in. Muller’s other son, Richard, lives nearby and is an attorney for the Miami-Dade County Public Schools. It was Richard who researched area facilities

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before choosing The Floridean, a place Muller gives high marks for comfort and care. The skilled nursing staff helps him manage his diabetes and the twice-daily insulin injections he must have. He boasts of having put on 15 pounds since his arrival last June and had just finished off a plate of the facility's signature Ropa Vieja, a delicious spicy Cuban shredded beef dish served over rice, when the Treasure Our Elders interviewer arrived.