

Doris' DREAM SCENES

by Martha Davis

My 'in' to the wonderful world of senior citizens began when I started volunteering as a therapy dog handler with St. John Ambulance in the fall of 2015. With my background as a photo artist and filmmaker, it was a natural progression for me to begin a photography project with the residents of Christie Gardens in the fall of 2017. It was called "DREAM SCENES" and it gave seniors the opportunity to go anywhere, do anything through the magic of green screen photography.

Doris was excited when I first told her about it and signed up right away. When I asked her what she wanted to do, she answered promptly, "be in my daughter-in-law's Lindt chocolate shop in Switzerland! I'll be juggling chocolates!" Up went her hands, click went the camera and thus began a wonderful collaboration that lasted three years. She wanted to mark her life's adventures through the photographs, but didn't want repeated visits to the green screen. What could be done with just the one gesture? Lots, as it turned out. Weightlifting, beach volleyball, a trip in a hot air balloon, white water rafting, rescuing her cats from several dangers. We co-created 19 images in all. I showed my DREAM SCENES photos in a gallery and Doris came to the show. We were a team. And we were friends.

Then, in March 2020, Covid struck like a bomb. Suddenly my therapy dog work was cut off. I could no longer enter the building. I called Doris. She was distressed and anxious. "How long is this going to last?" None of us had the answer to that. I called some of my other clients on the phone to chat and try to keep their spirits up. I got my knuckles rapped by the t-dog top brass at St John Ambulance who said, "no phone calls" citing privacy issues. Even during the pandemic. Such bureaucracy!

At the beginning of May, just three months into the pandemic, Doris decided she'd had enough. Two months shy of her hundredth birthday, and in perfect health, she locked herself in her apartment and refused to eat. Ten days later she died, sending shockwaves throughout the residence. I was devastated. How could such a vital soul leave us without a word of warning? On reflection, I realize that this was Doris: never wanting to be a burden to anybody yet hating pain. I remember the fuss she made over a small cut on her finger. And her adamant statement, "I'd rather die than go downstairs to the long-term care," which she'd dropped on more than one occasion. Our loss of her was huge, but she exited the world on her own terms.

Doris, you were a beautiful soul, and I still miss you. I'm lucky to have these special photographs to keep your memory alive.