

# A Note From Father Emmett

As in many parts of the country, this is the winter to remember! Arctic weather swirled down from Canada into Montana and it hasn't let up since our first major snowfall in early November. Temperatures in parts of the state fell to 40 degrees below zero. Four years ago we were buried under a foot of snow on the 4th of October. Early snowstorms in Montana are a way of life and are usually followed by weeks of "Indian summer." Not so this year. Brrr!

I was sitting in my office a few days ago watching big snowflakes fall to the ground when I remembered images of winter, impressions of my youth in Wisconsin that fill me to this day with the same excitement I felt running home from school to meet Daddy on the banks of the Rib River. It was sub-zero weather in January, ideal for cutting the river ice into thick, two foot blocks and then hauling them home on the bob sled. Running as fast as I could in the snow, I'd just make it as he was loading the last haul of the day.

It made me feel important to help Daddy as we dragged the clear, heavy blocks into

the ice house and then he tightly stacked and wedged each block next to each other. My job was to pack two feet of sawdust from the ice house walls up to the large blocks to keep them from melting. It was hard work, but we could look forward to the fruits of our labor all summer long, especially when we used the ice to make homemade ice cream.

This November brought bitter cold weather, but it also brought a special comfort as well. Mike Skaggs, a gentleman I met more than 10 years ago, will assist me as our Soaring Eagle CEO. He is already, "my right hand man." Mike married his lovely wife Gayle 34 years ago and they have adult twins, son Michael and daughter Cody.

Mike Skaggs is a blessing for Soaring Eagle because he comes to us after many years at the Northern Rockies Cancer Center and the Deaconess Hospital Foundation, both in Billings. His background has given him broad experience in fundraising and management, helping people get the care they often could not afford. He will be using these skills now, as well as in the future, when someday he will carry on my life's calling, to provide the best possible care for Northern Cheyenne elders at the Heritage Living Center.

For years, I tried to find time to visit with you, our compassionate donors. There just aren't enough hours in the day. One of the

*continued, page 2 >*



*From left, DeWanda Little Coyote, Father Emmett, Fergie and Mike Skaggs visit with Heritage Living Center resident Mark Small. Mike was getting to know the residents during a January stay at the Center.*





Father Emmett and Mike Skaggs discuss the technology that will allow Father Emmett to visit face-to-face with donors in their homes.

*<continued from cover...>* things I want Mike to do is to spend more time with as many donors as possible. I've met many wonderful people, some when I traveled and many who have visited us in Montana.

Now, I'm not able to travel as I once did, so Mike and I are working on an innovative program using computers to visually communicate with our donor friends while he's on the road. Using your television or Mike's laptop computer, I'll be able to see you and you can see me in a face-to-face visit. I look forward to using this program after writing to my wonderful friends for so many years.

Please join me in welcoming Mike to Soaring Eagle and the Heritage Living Center.

God has allowed me to live this long in order to do His bidding. Not a day goes by without our prayers to "Maheo," Creator God, to bless you for your sacrifices that provide for the Cheyenne elders' needs.

Your grateful beggar friend,

*Father Emmett Hoffmann*  
Father Emmett Hoffmann



## Retaining Wall Holds Back Erosion

During this past Fall, local contractor CJ Little Coyote (right) and his uncle Robert Redfox utilized their landscaping skills to construct a tiered retaining wall at the entrance to the Center. The stone wall will serve to keep the earth from sliding downhill and give resident green thumb gardeners a showcase for a wildflower garden.





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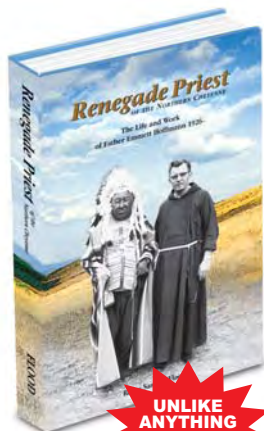
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# Frozen World Outside... ❄️ Warm Smiles ☀️ Inside



*The frigid chill of a Montana winter shows in the two top photos of frozen fences and a lone coyote in Northern Cheyenne high country. It is much warmer and safer inside the Heritage Living Center. Lower photos from left to right – At Christmas, Richard Tallbull hoists a little elf; residents mix good food and conversation during a traditional Thanksgiving meal; Cleone High-walking wraps her arms around her grandfather, Frank Rowland.*





# My Cheyenne Brother

BY RENEE SANSOM FLOOD

Vincent White Crane, a 20 year-old Northern Cheyenne, lifted his buddy, Sergeant Gordon Long, into the Medivac Helicopter. Gordon was gravely wounded and covered with blood, but he knew Vincent was there because he squeezed Vincent's hand. The cowboy from Wyoming was in bad shape. After seeing how much blood Gordon had lost, Vincent thought he would bleed to death before he made it to a field hospital.



*Vincent White Crane stands with Gilbert White Dirt, the Sacred Hat Keeper and Gordon Long.*

Vincent and Gordon were U.S. Army 9th Infantry soldiers and that was all they had in common. Gordon was a tall, blue-eyed rancher who loved horses. He was boisterous, charismatic and curious. His nose was always sun burned bright red and he wore a small patch on the back of his uniform in the shape of Wyoming.

In contrast, Vincent was a full blood Northern Cheyenne descendant of the warriors who had fought against Custer at the Battle of the Little Bighorn. Later on, Vincent's father fought under General George S. Patton in World War II. The young Cheyenne was all muscle, athletic, quiet and always alert to danger. He had inherited the traits of a warrior, instincts that for thousands

of years had protected and fed the women and children of his tribe.

Perhaps it was Vincent's careful observations that led Sergeant Long to pick the quiet Indian as his right hand man. They were called "Forward Observers," men who tracked and spotted Viet Cong camps. Trained as Radio Telephone Operators, they called in air and ground artillery to attack.

At night in camp, the two soldiers talked about Cheyenne customs. Gordon was fascinated with Cheyenne history and loved to hear Vincent's stories. Out in the bush, Vincent had to remind Gordon to duck down because the tall man always looked up and made too much noise, slogging and swearing through water and grime. One day, they watched a helicopter lift a soldier out of chest high mud.

The men depended on each other when daily mortar fire exploded around them. They were the eyes of the artillery and soon found enemies they didn't expect. They killed poisonous snakes, were attacked by fire ants and slept in water only to wake up with blood-sucking leeches all over their bodies. Once they saw the death and destruction around them, they realized they would not make it out alive. They never talked about what they would do when they got home. Vincent carried the radio, while constantly watching for deadly booby traps that had to be blown up.

One afternoon, they sat down to eat lunch. As usual, Gordon was talking, but the Cheyenne was silent and focused on the sounds around him. Suddenly, Vincent heard it – a sound that was not a scurrying animal or wind in the grass. He grabbed Gordon's sleeve, "Run for it!" he yelled." Both men, "ran like hell," 25 feet to the tree line. An incoming mortar round exploded where they had been sitting.

"How did you know the mortar was coming?" Gordon asked. Vincent told him he used all his senses; smell, sight, hearing and intuition. "You're too curious Gordon," he'd say. "Don't keep looking up." Gordon laughed. "That's how I was raised. The squeaky wheel gets the grease." Unfortunately, he was right.



One day Gordon asked Vincent to join him on a mission. Vincent declined. He wanted to write some letters home. Later that day, they brought Gordon in with other wounded and dead soldiers. Vincent held Gordon's hand until the last second, as the helicopter door closed. Vincent's best friend was gone.

After Gordon was airlifted, Vincent felt terrible guilt. He knew Gordon might not have died if he had been with him. Vincent turned cold and angry. He crawled into dangerous Viet Cong tunnels and later destroyed a, "sniper's nest." Vincent didn't give his life, but his life was offered.

From then on, the Cheyenne steeled himself against getting close to other soldiers. He saw and heard about things that would haunt him for the rest of his life. The Viet Cong strapped explosives on little children and sent them running toward the Americans. A soldier's first reaction was to run and grab the toddler to get him out of harm's way, but instead, the soldier blew up with the child in his arms.

Not long afterward, Vincent was hit on his leg and hand by white, burning phosphorous, a mistake made by a soldier marking targets with an artillery gun from a plane. Vincent rolled in the mud but the burn was so deep, it continued to bleed. Finally, he was transferred to the 25th Infantry and made sergeant before his tour of duty ended. He went home to the small reservation town of Lame Deer, Montana.

On the way, he landed at Travis Air Force Base. In the airline terminal, Vincent saw a crowd of protestors holding signs and screaming, "America hates you!" Shocked, Vincent was not prepared for what came next. They spit in his face. Humiliated, he threw away his uniforms when he got home. In a short span of 15 months he had changed from a fun-loving, reservation boy to a silent man with a heart of stone. His 8 service medals, 2 Air Medals and the Bronze Star with a V for valor, awarded for his individual acts of combat heroism, meant nothing to him anymore.

Eventually, Vincent married and had children but the white phosphorous wounds never completely healed. They bled as a reminder of what he wanted to forget – a war he never understood and the death of his best friend.

Despite his wounds, Vincent worked many years for Western Energy Company and Montana Power Company. In 1987, tribal staff member, Adeline White Wolf, notified him that a letter had come to him from Wyoming. He opened the letter and read: "Vincent, I've been looking for you. If this letter finds you, call this number." It was signed, "Gordon Long." Vincent couldn't believe it! He dialed the number. The next day Gordon drove up from Wyoming and met Vincent with a bear hug and a lot of tears. "Vincent White Crane! If you aren't a sight for sore eyes!" he laughed.

The two men renewed their bond. They cried together and the healing began. Gordon came to Montana for Cheyenne ceremonies, especially the Sundance where Vincent prayed and danced four days for his mother's recovery from a serious illness. She survived. Gordon loved Vincent's children, who called him, "Uncle," and he called Vincent's mother, Edna Seminole, "Mom." Edna once joked, "Gordon, you really are a Cheyenne. You were just captured by the white people!"

As the years passed Gordon earned a college degree, married and had a son, Cody, whom he adored. But the boy died of SIDS and the tragedy devastated his marriage. Vincent was there for his friend every step of the way. Finally the day came when Vincent told him, "You'd give your life for me and I would have given my life for you. There's a ceremony where we can become true Cheyenne brothers."

The Sacred Hat Keeper of the Northern Cheyenne, Gilbert White Dirt, performed the solemn and private ceremony. They smoked the pipe as brothers and exchanged gifts, Vincent giving his brother a war bonnet, while he and Gilbert received buckskin shirts.

The bond of brotherhood sustained them through many years. But one night Vincent got an unforgettable call from Gordon. "I just want you to know I have cancer," he said softly. "The doctor gave me two weeks to three months to live. Can you come down?" Vincent left immediately for Wyoming. They spent the day praying and talking over their lives. "I've pushed people away," Gordon admitted, "but we did what we had to do. I have no regrets, but... I died when my son died."

Vincent comforted him with the gift of peace: "You are going to be with your son, Cody, but your spirit will always be here with us." They went to sleep and the next morning they prayed with the pipe before sunrise. Gordon smiled. "That's the best sleep I've had in a long time. I knew you were watching over me." They cried and hugged for the last time.

Vincent's old wound opened and bled but it was nothing compared to the bleeding of his heart at Gordon's funeral on September 3, 2010. Elsie Long, Gordon's mother, gave Vincent her son's Army flag and then Vincent read a poem that she had written. Tears dropped on the page:

*When I went to Vietnam,  
I found a friend for life.  
We stood by one another,  
through all that Hellish strife.  
But our friendship has survived it all.  
He's my Indian brother,  
in grief and good times through it all.  
Vincent White Crane is his name.  
Gordon Long is mine.  
We had it rough in Vietnam  
but now we're doing fine.*

Infamous stories of massacres and bitter fighting between the U.S. Cavalry and the Cheyennes will live forever in frontier history, but this story will be told in the oral tradition of the tribe. Two Cheyenne brothers, one born white and the other born Indian, defended the United States, just as their forefathers fought on foreign soil, in major military engagements since the Spanish American War. They were courageous Americans who weren't that much different after all.

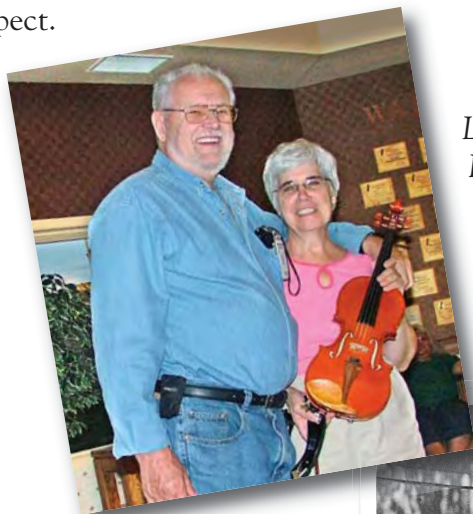


*Heritage Living Center resident, Edna Seminole, with her Cheyenne sons, Vincent and Gordon.*



# A Surprise Meeting After 53 Years

Exuberance for life and sincere compassion for others describes Thomas DeLuca's uplifting personality. Tom was born to Italian parents in Wisconsin and he didn't speak English until he went to school. He aspired to become a Capuchin priest, but first he decided to volunteer at St. Labre Mission in September 1957. The 19 year-old boy left home for the remote village of Ashland, Montana, bordering the Northern Cheyenne Reservation. He had no idea what to expect.



*Last October Tom and Kay DeLuca visited the Heritage Living Center in Ashland, where in 1957, Tom snapped this photo of Father Emmett with three Cheyenne school children.*

Tom drove around for some time before he found the Mission, which then consisted of four dilapidated buildings ready to be condemned.

Father Emmett, who had only been at the Mission for 3 years, put Tom to work doing manual labor, or "anything they needed." His most memorable task

was digging the grave for a Cheyenne who had been hit by a car. Tom describes the event as, "an experience I never forgot."

Father Emmett officiated at the funeral and after they lowered the pine box into the grave, Cheyenne women, "began to chant." Tom then witnessed something he had never seen before at a funeral. The dead man's female family members dropped cans of Spam and bottles of Coca Cola into the grave. The teenager stood speechless, not understanding why they had done this, until someone explained the Cheyenne custom of burying their deceased relatives with items the person enjoyed in life, including food.

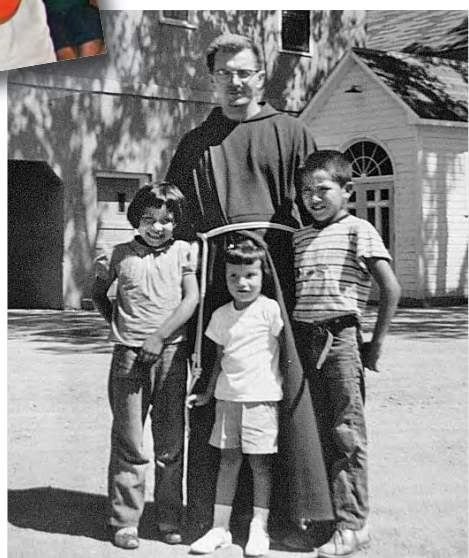
Tom remembers helping Capuchin brothers bring food, blankets and clothing to Cheyenne homes. "It was just overwhelming to see the abject poverty," he says. At night sleeping in the school dorm, he fell asleep listening to the beat of drums. When the summer ended Tom went home.

When he finished his college education, Tom decided against entering the priesthood. After a long career with the Michigan Department of Education, providing services to disabled children, Tom retired in 1997, to spend the rest of his life traveling and using

his artistic skills as a Luthier, a talented violin maker. Tom often talked about his summer in Montana with his wife Kay, an accomplished violinist. One day he said to Kay, "You know what? I'd better do it! I have to go back and see the school and Father Emmett in Montana."

When they arrived at the Mission on October 5, 2010, Tom said, "I simply couldn't believe it! The school was breathtaking!" Caring donors had helped Father Emmett build what today looks like a college campus.

Tom and Kay, "walked in cold turkey," and asked about Father. Sure enough, Father was still in Ashland and still faithfully working to help the Cheyenne 53 years later. They drove up to the Heritage Living Center and Tom says that finding Father was, "Absolutely unbelievable. I was astounded. Seeing Father took my breath away! I am in awe at what he has done. He is so special." They ended up staying the night at the Center and before they left, Kay DeLuca entertained the elders with a violin concert in the main lobby. Everyone enjoyed the event and Father didn't want them to leave. God willing, they'll come again next summer.



## Your Will Keeps on Giving

**Please use one of the following sample forms of bequest when preparing your Will:**

A. (Whatever is left after other bequests have been granted) "All the rest, residue, and remainder of my estate, I bequeath to Soaring Eagle Public Charity, a corporation created under the Laws of the State of Montana, located at Billings, Montana."

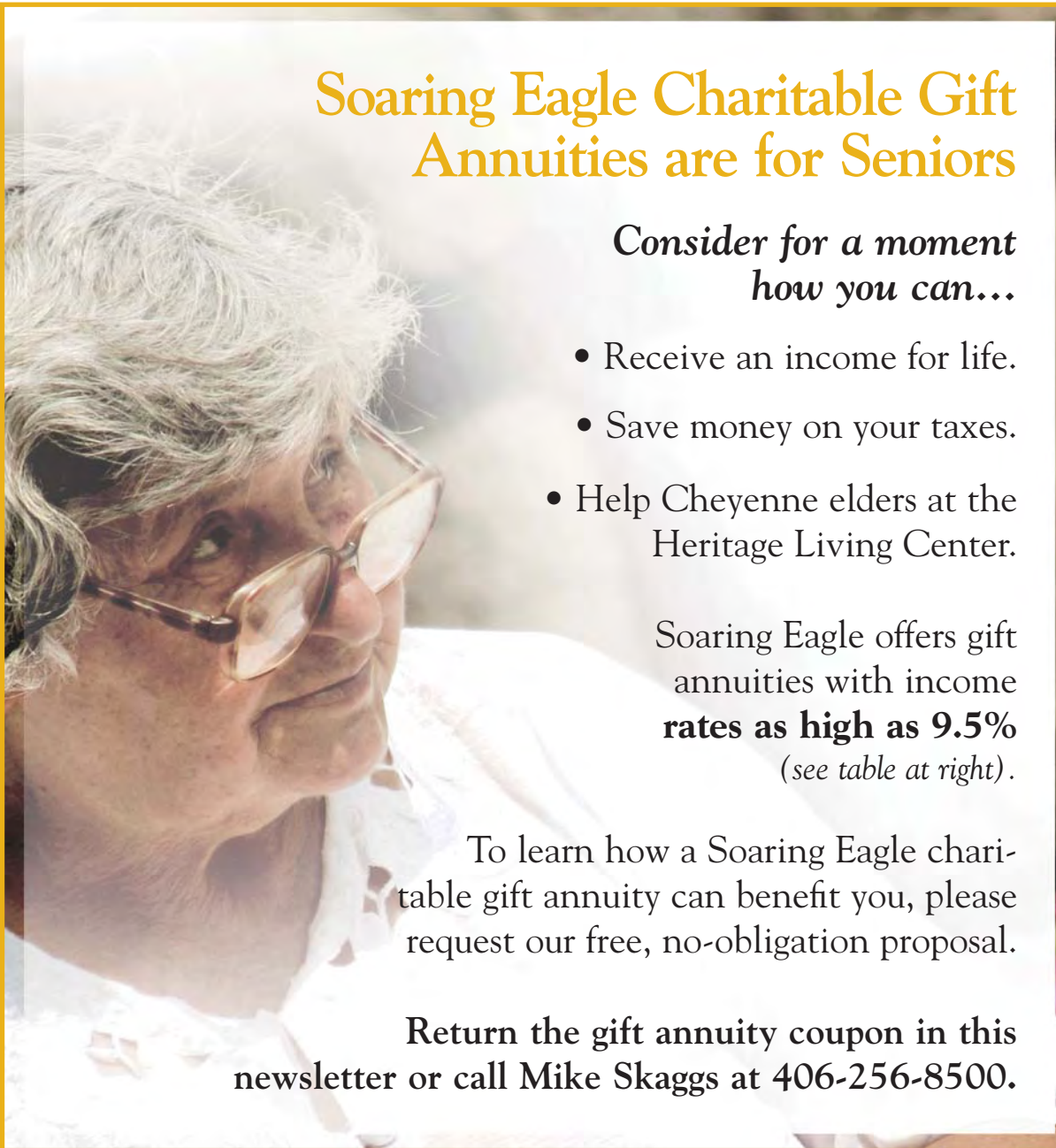
B. "I give, devise, and bequeath to Soaring Eagle Public Charity, a corporation created under the Laws of the State of Montana, located at Billings, Montana, \_\_\_\_\_% of my estate."

C. "I give, devise, and bequeath to Soaring Eagle Public Charity, a corporation created under the Laws of the State of Montana, located at Billings, Montana, the sum of \$\_\_\_\_\_."

D. "I give, devise, and bequeath to Soaring Eagle Public Charity, a corporation created under the Laws of the State of Montana, located at 745 Indian Trail, P.O. Drawer 879 in Billings, Montana, 59103, the sum of \$\_\_\_\_\_ for the Wall of Living Memories Fund, to care for Cheyenne elders, the principal of which shall remain in perpetuity."

These are sample forms only. Consult your attorney when preparing any legal document.





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73	6.1	85	8.1
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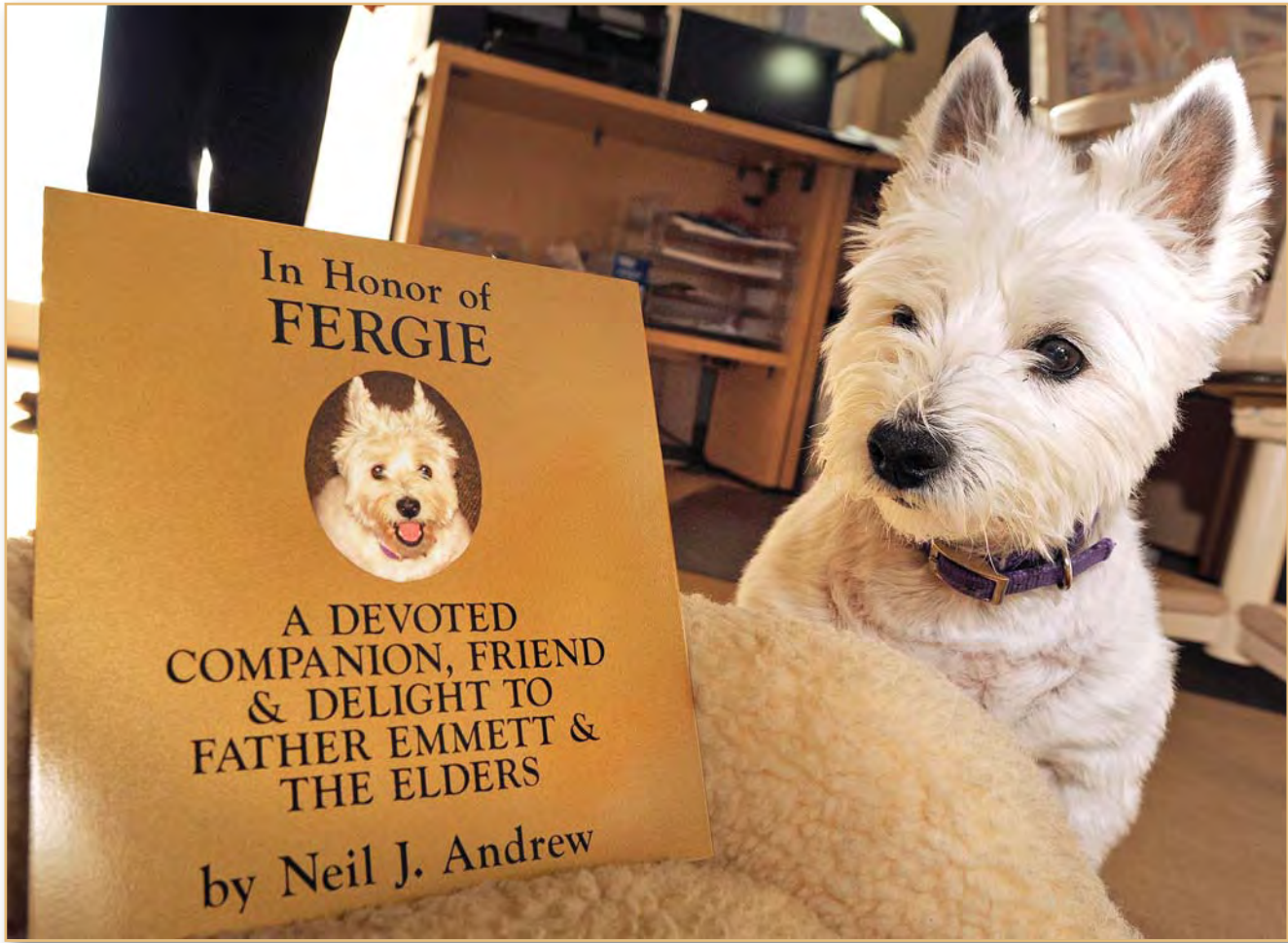


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*Heritage Living Center Jesuit volunteer, Sarah, shares a quiet moment with Father Emmett.*



*A thoughtful donor knows how important Fergie is to the elders' enjoyment at the Heritage Living Center. Fergie's plaque will be placed on the Eagle Ridge Park Donor Wall. Fergie still runs about at the Center finding affection and bringing smiles.*