



OTOW ID card filer has seen the best of two worlds

By John Koning

Mary Lou Miller is one of our most recognizable On Top of the World faces, but you might not recognize her, unless, like this reporter, you've had the chance to get to know her.

It is not because she is a forgettable person, but it's because of what she does. She is the last stop on the slightly annoying, yet ultimately rewarding annual journey that every On Top of the World resident endures for the sake of the magic card.

Mary Lou is our resident ID card filer, and has been for the last 21 years.

Virtually every Monday, she can be found at the West Activity Center, along with her buddy, Phil Meissner and a group of selfless volunteers.

One of the hardest things for a press reporter to do is to interview a humble soul like Mary Lou. It is like eating an oyster. While you know there's some really good stuff in there, it can be quite a job to get at it.

It wasn't until my second interview with Mary Lou that I discovered the thing that is most near and dear to her heart.

You see, Mary Lou's giving nature extends far beyond the gates of On Top of the World. One of the most important roles that she plays is serving communion to residents of St. Mark's Village retirement home and Mease Manor. Without this service, these shut-ins would not have the opportunity for this very important faith practice. On numerous occasions she has even accompanied the pastor to individual homes for the same purpose.



Mary Lou Miller looks over a book full of memories.

Before you conclude that Mary Lou is a passive, stay at home couch potato, let me set the record straight. This woman is a world traveling dynamo and an ardent basketball fan. She was prudent to suggest that we

conduct the interview as far from the television set as possible because Duke University was playing basketball. Oh, it doesn't really matter who wins. She just loves the game!

Mary Lou was bitten by the trav-

el bug many years ago when she and her late husband, Lewis, struck out on their first excursion to the exotic destination of ... Michigan. Neither one of them ever recovered, and subsequently scoured the entire North American continent in their Holiday Rambler trailer. From there the travel bug took Mary Lou across the equator to Australia, New Zealand and Fiji.

This reporter couldn't help but notice the cornucopia of bird sculptures that adorn Mary Lou's living room. She is an avid bird enthusiast and Lewis never missed the chance to show his affection with a wren, with a kookaburra, or with Mary Lou's favorite, a scissor-tailed flycatcher. Many of her birds are representative of their travel destinations.

Once she finished scouring this side of the Atlantic Ocean, Mary Lou hopped across the pond and explored Europe, the Mediterranean and the Holy Land. She clambered up the Parthenon, craned her neck in the Sistine Chapel, prayed at the Wailing Wall, and witnessed the Passion Play at Oberammergau, Germany.

Her travel diaries read like a who's who of world travel.

When Mary Lou Miller peruses her travel diaries, there is a distant look in her eyes. It's not a sad look. It's a look of appreciation for what has passed and anticipation for what's to come. After all, at a mere 95 years, Mary Lou has a bright future. She is a prime example of age as a state of mind.

"Some day," she says with a twinkle, "I'll have to sit down and read all of these again and refresh my memory."