

## Your Commitment Restores Hope in This Caregiver Son Who Never Gives Up

**“I’m a fighter. We’re going to turn this thing around or die trying. That’s just how I’m built.”**

An only child, Sergio Rozzelle does everything to support his mother, Margaret. Three years ago, friends and neighbors started noticing a change in Margaret’s behavior. “She started having symptoms of dementia and some friends reached out to me and said, ‘I think you need to come back home,’” says Sergio, who had previously lived in Atlanta, GA for 24 years.



*Sergio Rozzelle and his mom, Margaret, are thankful for your support.*

At first, Sergio commuted back-and-forth from Atlanta to DC every few weeks. Then, as his mother’s symptoms progressed, it became clear that a move was necessary. “I had this decision: do I move her to Atlanta or do I move here,” Sergio recalls.

A trial-run in Atlanta, however, revealed just how difficult a move would be. “I flew her down to Atlanta for Thanksgiving, and it was an ordeal,” says Sergio. “And even when she was with me, she was not happy. I could see the symptoms were much more prominent because she wasn’t in familiar surroundings. She was confused. There was no way.”

So, in December 2014, Sergio left Atlanta. “I just dropped everything and moved up here,” he says.

Once in DC, Sergio’s fight for his mother’s care only deepened. “I have no reverse,” he says. “I’m going to do anything I can if it helps.”

**For Sergio, that meant getting his mom to Iona’s Active Wellness Program at St. Alban’s.**

Sergio first learned about our program from Vivian Harris, a family friend who worked for Iona. It seemed like a great fit for his

mom. The only problem — Margaret refused to go.

“Mom was not interested in coming at all,” Sergio says. “It was like pulling teeth.”

But, Vivian had the perfect solution: why not frame the program as going to work? “The whole idea was that mom would be going to work with Vivian to help others,” says Sergio. Margaret agreed to go with Vivian, and immediately fell in love with our program, and manager Courtney Tolbert. “Mom really, really loves Courtney. Courtney is absolutely amazing. She treats everybody, every single person, with the care and personal touch and interaction that they need.”

**That first visit was nearly two years ago.**

Today, Margaret attends the Active Wellness Program at St. Alban’s every day. “I drive her myself and we live all the way out in Southwest DC, but she’s attached to this

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# Why Do You Give to Iona?

*Each of you has your own personal reason for giving to Iona.  
Here's Greg's...*

**A** former Washington Home hospice volunteer, Greg Mize first met Paul Brown after Paul's wife passed away. "Paul really went to a reclusive state," says Greg. "The Washington Home was worried about how he was coping. They called me to see if I could be a support to him in his loneliness."

For six months, Greg called Paul to no avail. But then, Greg had a stroke of luck. "When I visited him, I brought my labradoodle, Stella. Stella was in the backseat of the car. Paul just fell in love with her. He didn't want to sit in the front seat with me. I said, 'Let's have lunch that way you can spend more time with Stella!' And he agreed that it was a great idea."

That marked the beginning of many lunches at Greg's home. And, as their friendship developed, Greg began learning more and more about what Paul was doing all that time he was alone in his apartment.

**The answer was surprising. Paul was making art.**



*"Iona made Paul feel like he had some special worth," says Iona donor Greg Mize, pictured here smiling with his dog, Stella, in front of one of Paul's incredible artworks.*

"He would go into his building's back alley to the dumpster, and he would pull out discarded cardboard," says Greg. "He'd bring the cardboard into his apartment, and he would make cowboy pistols and musical instruments." The results were captivating.

"I was totally amazed," says Greg. "All that time

since his wife died, he was making these beautiful things."

Unbeknownst to Greg, others had taken notice of Paul's artwork, too — including Iona social worker Deb Blum. Deb had been working with Paul for a few years. She helped him tap into different benefits, and ensured he regularly received Iona's home delivered meals. She also introduced Paul to Iona Gallery Director Patricia Dubroof. Within a year, he was exhibiting his pieces in the Lois & Richard England Gallery at Iona.

The exhibit ignited something new in Paul, says Greg. **"It was the blossoming of Paul Brown. He just came out! That's where Iona made a big difference."**

To this day, Greg now intertwines his memories of Paul with Iona. "Iona made Paul feel like he had some special worth. And he did. They shared his story, and that meant so much to him."

It meant a lot to Greg, too. After Paul passed away in 2011 — two years after his artworks were featured at Iona — Greg and his wife, Marisa, decided to show their gratitude to Iona with a gift.

Today Greg and Marisa are inspired by not only what Iona did for Paul, but what Iona does for so many other older adults, especially those facing hunger. "We learned about how many seniors don't have food. They scrounge and they go hungry day after day. It was a total surprise and shock to us," says Greg.

That's why Greg and Marisa continue to make a monthly donation to Iona. "It's easy to give and it's lasting," Greg continues. "And you know because Iona has been around for a long, long while that they've learned how to support seniors in the most effective ways." **V**

*Learn more about Paul Brown's Instruments with Personality exhibit at Iona. Visit [www.iona.org/newsletter-paul-brown](http://www.iona.org/newsletter-paul-brown).*

# Thank You

*for sharing your music with Iona's Wellness & Arts  
Center participants*



**L**ast year, Iona launched a new **Music & Memory Program**. The program includes playlists based on participants' favorite songs. Through the power of music, participants feel joy and reconnect with old memories.

Since our launch, many of you have sent in iTunes gift cards, CDs, headphones and earbuds, and used iPods and iTouches. Our music library now spans multiple decades and genres, thanks to you! Pictured here is participant Carlton Washington, who enjoys Motown and other classics.

You can listen to Carlton's favorite tunes, too! Visit [iona.org/newsletter-carlton-playlist](http://iona.org/newsletter-carlton-playlist) to hear what he's listening to. 

*Thanks to your support of our Music & Memory Program, Carlton Washington is all smiles.*

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## You restore hope ... *(continued from page 1)*

program. She just loves it," says Sergio. "It's made her feel good about herself again. She's not just sitting around, watching TV. She's doing things and having new experiences on a daily basis. She's excited to go every morning."

Despite the distance, Sergio has no hesitation about making the drive. "The conversations, the activities,

the field trips. It's all worth it. That's why I come up here every single day. I could get her into a program closer to the house, but it wouldn't be Iona."

The positive effects on his mom, Sergio says, have been plenty. "She's not as anxious anymore. She has a sense of accomplishment because she's contributing to a community again. And we have something to talk about in the evening."

Sergio has also noticed positive changes in himself, too. "I feel comfortable," he says. "Mom is here. I don't worry about her at all during the day." 

*Because of your generous donation, Margaret and other older adults have a wonderful daytime program full of activities and friends. You make it possible for otherwise isolated folks to have a warm and welcoming community.*

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***"The conversations, the activities, the field trips. It's all worth it. That's why I come up here every single day. I could get her into a program closer to the house, but it wouldn't be Iona."***

*—Sergio Rozzelle*

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# Remember Ms. Louise Pearson?

*Your support is still building a community for Louise*

**W**e first introduced you to Ms. Louise Pearson's story in the summer of 2015. Facing isolation and financial concerns, Louise was having a difficult time managing at home. She had anxiety about aging and her world seemed to be shrinking.

She says, "I lived by myself. I would sit down in my apartment's lobby and read. People would come by, but they had their own lives and they didn't really pay too much attention to me. It was lonely."



*Ms. Louise Pearson and her "roommate" of 29 years, a Sun Conure named Tiger, love their new home at Friendship Terrace.*

Fortunately, thanks to the fantastic support network of Iona social workers and counselors — that your donations help make possible — Louise was connected to a trusted partner to help manage her finances and medical arrangements. She also began meeting with Iona psychotherapist Bill Amt to share what's happening in her life and learn new coping strategies.

Best yet, Iona helped to facilitate her move to Friendship Terrace, a senior living community in Tenleytown. Now, she always has a friend and neighbor nearby. "Here, it's different," she says with a smile. "Everyone is concerned about each other, which is great."

## **Your generosity has been a part of Louise's story...**

So, we thought you'd like to hear how she's doing now — two years since her move to Friendship Terrace.

In a word, according to Louise, it's been "wonderful."

"I enjoy Friendship Terrace. They have so many different things to do and you can always meet other people," says Louise. Most nights, you can find Louise enjoying conversation with her neighbors or activities like movie nights and music performances.

## **But, it hasn't all been easy.**

In the last two years, Louise has had some health concerns. She's met with eye doctors and dermatologists, and had cataract surgery.

Through it all, Louise was able to lean upon Iona for support. "Iona is great. I have Bill, and I can talk with him whenever I have problems."

With countless neighbors, Iona around the corner, and your continued generosity, Ms. Pearson's shrinking world is no longer a fear. 

## **Make Your Donation Monthly!**

You've seen the important work Iona does in our community. Now, you can show your ongoing support. Your monthly gift of any amount means you'll be there for Iona, and for your community, to lean on for supportive and often life-saving services.

Your monthly contribution makes a huge difference because we know we can count on your generosity as we continue to serve older adults. You are there for Iona each month, and together, we are there for older adults and caregivers.

To make your monthly donation, please visit [www.iona.org/donate-now](http://www.iona.org/donate-now) and check the "Make this a monthly gift" option under recurring gift.

# Giving the Gift of Time

*Find out how this volunteer gives back — and read her advice for how you can make connections too*

**E**veryone has a story — a family, a life's work, interests and avocations, a personal history. These stories, and the smiles that often come with them, are one of the things that keep me coming back to Iona Senior Services, where I've volunteered weekly since the fall of 2016.

Part of my role as a volunteer in Iona's Wellness & Arts Center's adult day health program is to greet the participants and talk with them as they settle into their day at Iona. As we visit, they sometimes talk about who they are and the interesting paths their lives have taken.

One man shared that he'll turn 90 years old this month. He's told me about his past work managing large construction projects nationwide, his love of Irish music, and a visit to Belfast with his son. He has also reminisced about growing up on Long Island and surprised me by listing — in quick succession — all of the rail stops on his long-ago commute to Manhattan!

One woman told me happily about meeting her husband when she was a young person working in San Francisco, and an often-silent elderly gentleman told me quietly one morning a little bit about his childhood and his career with the NAACP Legal Defense Fund.

Not all participants in Iona's Wellness & Arts Center are able or choose to talk about themselves and their lives, but I'm sure they all have rich and diverse life stories they could tell.

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***“Making that kind of connection with others, even if briefly and in small ways, is one of the gifts you can both give and receive while volunteering at Iona.”***

*—Susan Farrer, Iona volunteer*

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*Special contribution to the VOICE by Susan Farrer, Iona volunteer (pictured)*



## **Susan's 10 Tips for Connecting with an Older Adult with a Cognitive or Physical Challenge**

1. Greet the older person and introduce yourself as a volunteer.
2. Sit or kneel so you're at eye level if someone is seated.
3. Look at the person and make eye contact unless doing so seems uncomfortable for the older person.
4. Listen carefully.
5. Speak clearly and loudly enough for the person to hear you.
6. Be patient.
7. Show compassion and respect.
8. Avoid making assumptions about the person and what he or she wants.
9. Make requests using "I," "we," "let's," or "it" instead of "you." For example, say "Let's sit at the table" instead of "You need to sit at the table."
10. Smile!



Part of the DC Office on Aging's  
Senior Service Network

4125 Albemarle Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20016-2105

TEL 202.895.9448

TTY 202.895.9444

[www.iona.org](http://www.iona.org)

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