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## Business

# Brookhaven woman creates 'memory books' for seniors

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Before her high school sweetheart, Eddie Doubet, captured her heart, Mae Burk had her sights set on a dancing career.

“She told us one time that she tried out for the Rockettes but married my dad instead,” said Dan Doubet of Chester Heights, the fourth of her seven children.

She and her husband, former jewelry store patriarch J. Edward Doubet, had 65 years together before his death in 2007. As for Mrs. Doubet, she still has the dancer in her at age 93.

She is reminded of it every time she opens a photograph album created for her last December as a Christmas gift by Melanie Arnold, a professional caregiver who also happens to be a professional photographer.

Included in the collection of photographs taken by Arnold is one in which the elderly Bethel resident is kicking her heels in the air while lying on her bed, cane by her side.

“My mother has no short-term memory so every time she looks at the book, it’s like the first time. Every time somebody gives her the book, it puts a smile on her face,” said Dan Doubet.

For 26 years, Arnold has been immortalizing lifetime milestones for people as a professional photographer.

For just as long, the 49-year-old Brookhaven resident has had a special place in her heart for the elderly. She particularly cherishes memories of her paternal grandmother who lived to be 100.

“I was never really taking care of people, I was just taking them out and getting them out of the house and having a good time with them. I’ve always loved the elderly,” said Arnold.

About a year ago, the photographer transformed her affection for older adults into a second career. She became a caregiver with Home Helpers of Delaware Valley, an in-home, non-medical care franchise based in Chester Heights.

Arnold was inspired to become a caregiver after helping her mother, Peggy, care for Arnold’s stepfather, David Lease, who died in the summer of 2009. Her neighbor, Holly Benner, a home health nurse, put her in touch with Home Helpers.

“My cousin said, ‘That’s your calling. You’ve always loved caring for the elderly,’” said Arnold who is studying to become a certified nursing assistant at Delaware County Community College in Marple.

Mae Doubet of Bethel was her first client and she immediately won Arnold’s heart. “I call her ‘dancer’ and we joke around. I dance around and she always says, ‘Point your toes,’” said Arnold.

She originally had the idea of creating the photograph album for Mrs. Doubet’s Nov. 12 birthday, but it became a three-month project. Among the photographs Arnold took of her client was one in which she is about to blow out a birthday candle on a cupcake Arnold brought her. She also took pictures of Mrs. Doubet in her daily routine including reading the newspaper and perusing greeting cards from family members.

Mrs. Doubet’s youngest daughter, Elaine Burke, with whom she lives, was so impressed with the photo album she showed it to Arnold’s boss, Home Helpers President John Squires.

“He said it reminded him of why he started the business,” recalled Arnold.

She said Squires has commissioned her to create photograph albums for three more clients. She is also now offering what she has dubbed “memory books” through her photography business, Images by Melanie.

“I’m trying to tell the person’s life story and love story — like, Mae married her high school sweetheart, Eddie Doubet. They had a very happy marriage. They had seven children,” explained Arnold.

Mrs. Doubet’s other children include Edward Doubet Jr. of Cincinnati, Diane Kratsa of Chester Heights, Mary Hickey of Bethel and Dennis and Michael Doubet, both of Wilmington, Del. She also has close to 40 grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

They all enjoy seeing the smile on Mrs. Doubet’s face when she looks at her gift from Arnold, noted Dan Doubet.

“This is mostly about having a good time and making these elderly people laugh,” said Arnold. “I can tell I’m adding something to their day.”