



# RESIDENT OF THE MONTH

## *Christie Russell*

Christie Russell was born on December 18, 1941, in Excelsior Springs, Missouri, where her father worked as an X-ray technician at the VA Hospital. She grew up during WWII, experiencing food shortages mitigated by a large family garden and a dairy cow. As the youngest of four, she witnessed her siblings heading off to school and work while she was still a toddler.

After the war, her father was transferred to O'Reilly VA Hospital in Springfield, Missouri. The family rented a twenty-acre property and embraced farm life with Jersey cows, Yorkshire hogs, chickens, ducks, and a horse. Christie attended a two-room country school without indoor plumbing and quickly learned the value of hard work, participating in 4-H projects that earned her awards in sewing, baking, and hog raising.

In 1947, another transfer took the family to Kansas City, Missouri, introducing Christie to new cultural experiences. She played violin in the school orchestra, attended Kansas City Philharmonic performances, and had her fiber collage exhibited at the Nelson Atkins Art Museum. She graduated from Southwest High School in 1960, engaging in chorus, literary society, and spring musicals while working summer jobs at Macy's, Manpower Temp Agency, and Rothschild's business office.

Following in her father and sister's footsteps, Christie attended the University of Missouri, earning a Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education. She studied under Dr. Artley, co-author of the Dick and Jane early reader series, and met Alan Russell, whom she married in 1965.

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She began her teaching career in Overland Park, Kansas, serving on the Curriculum Advisory Board and helping design John Diemer School. She witnessed the devastating White Tornado of 1966 while teaching first grade.

Christie and Alan's sons, Brian and Scott, were born in 1969 and 1970 while Alan worked at Arthur Andersen & Co. In 1971, the family relocated to Seymour, Indiana, where their daughter Sheryl was born in 1975. Christie was active in the Presbyterian Church, taught Sunday School, served on the Boys and Girls Club Board, helped establish the first October Fest, and was involved with Tri Kappa.

In 1978, the family moved to Paris, Illinois, where Alan became COO of Illinois Cereal Mills/Cargill. Christie continued her community involvement as a church elder, choir member, Cub Scout leader, and board member of the Paris YMCA, Link Art Gallery, and P.E.O. Sisterhood. Her interest in history led her to serve on the Looking for Lincoln Heritage Coalition of Illinois. She took classes at ISU in genealogical research, watercolor painting, and word processing, ultimately publishing "The Civil War Period Journals of Paulena Stevens Janney," housed in the Westminster Library.

Alan's work took the couple on extensive travels across Europe, South America, Iceland, and Asia. They also made numerous trips to Guatemala,

volunteering at the Hogar Raphael Ayau orphanage, where Alan taught woodworking and Christie instructed watercolor painting. Their eldest son, Brian, was a gifted scholar and musician in the Mayo Middle School Marching and Jazz Bands. Diagnosed with Rhabdomyosarcoma at twelve, he participated in experimental treatments at St. Jude in Memphis, TN, contributing to cancer research and a University of Illinois PhD study on visualization techniques. He passed away at fourteen. Christie later assisted St. Jude oncologist nurse Ralph Vogel in developing a handbook for parents of patients. To honor Brian's legacy, she and Alan established the Brian K. Russell Academic Excellence Award, funding college credit classes for high school students.

Scott, an Eagle Scout from the Wabash Valley Scouting program, graduated from DePauw and Oregon State and now resides in Whitefish, Montana. Sheryl, a 1996 ISU Criminology graduate, lives in LeRoy, Illinois. Their three grandsons live in Illinois, Missouri, and Texas, staying connected with frequent visits.

Seeking a creative outlet after Brian's passing, Christie pursued watercolor painting at ISU under Louise Hansen, who invited her to paint with fellow artists. She also dedicated herself to genealogical research, transcribing and annotating her great-grandmother's Civil War journals, culminating in her published book.

Christie first visited Westminster Village with a Presbyterian group when it opened, knowing residents Wendall and Julia Blair, parents of Susan Blair Farris. When the time came to consider retirement living, she and Alan moved to Westminster in December 2020, just as COVID-19 struck. Once activities resumed post-quarantine, Christie quickly became involved as a Lobby Leader and joined various programs, including Stretch, Meditation, Cardio Drumming, Tai Chi, Book Club, Bible Study, Sunday Vespers, Westminster Singers, and entertainment events. Her genealogical research led to the discovery of four cousins among Westminster residents, all of whom are also part of Westminster Singers. Throughout her life, Christie has faced challenges with resilience. She has survived the Hong Kong Flu, a postpartum hemorrhage, a near-fatal car accident, and most recently, COVID-19. She credits her faith and gratitude for seeing her through life's trials, counting her blessings daily.

Christie's journey is one of perseverance, service, and dedication to family, community, and learning. From rural farm life to global travels, from teaching young minds to preserving history, she has embraced each chapter with passion and purpose, leaving an indelible mark on those around her. At Westminster, she has found a community that allows her to continue growing, connecting, and contributing, ensuring that the next chapter of her life remains as fulfilling as the ones before.