

Growing Older & Wiser in Brookline: Gift Cart Salesperson Hermia Hall

- Miriam Rosalyn Diamond, Brookline Council on Aging Engagement Editor

If you walk by the Senior Center gift cart most mornings, you likely will be greeted by Hermia Hall. Originally from Trinidad, Hermia was the youngest of five children. She began her career as a teacher and store clerk. Life changed when she visited Massachusetts in her mid-30's. "I went around Boston and I liked what I saw." She found an ad in the Brookline newspaper for a pre-school cook. Despite being unfamiliar with American food, she was hired and stayed in the country. "That's kind of adventurous – I was here alone. I made very good friends."

When the institution closed four years later, Hermia became a Brookline school bus monitor. A former educator, "I knew about kids." She held that position over 29 years, along with housekeeping and childcare. The households that hired her "were like family," and still remain in contact.

Hermia moved from Allston-Brighton to Pelham Hall in Coolidge Corner, eventually purchasing a residence in Brookline. In 2010 she heard about the Tax Work-Off program, whereby income-qualifying seniors volunteer in return for partial real estate tax refunds. She visited the Senior Center, was accepted into the program, and began assisting Food Commodity distribution. "Then I got elevated – I started working at the gift cart ... I started selling... You meet people. People come and they talk... it's pleasant." She works at least 3 days a week, assisting customers purchasing jewelry and home décor such as vases. "I know how to sell – I sell the things I know they would like."

Her life highlights encompass 3 grandchildren and 5 great-grandchildren. "I love to hear from them... I give them words of comfort and how to live." In her free time "I love to read – Wordworth, Browning, Kipling." She also enjoys Bible reading and "I like music – old songs" as well as opera. When dealing with setbacks and worry "I put it in God's hand – He will give me the strength to bear. He promised me He will take care of me."

Hermia's strength is "I love talking to people. (If they're experiencing difficulties) I say 'Have courage, it's only for a little while – it's not going to last'." She is inspired by faith, friends, and "my granddaughter who lives with me."

If she went back in time, she would tell her younger self "You should have listened to mom more... She taught us how to live, how to be kind, because we didn't have much." Her mother welcomed guests for meals and gave clothing to people in need. (Hermia recalls a time she saw her blouse going down the street on someone else's back, as her mother provided it to someone undergoing hardship.)

Hermia advises young people "Listen to older people who know what we are saying... talk, ask the old people questions." She believes everyone experiences similar problems, regardless of generation or age.

As her legacy, Hermia would like people to say "She loved everyone."



Hermia Hall Photo by
Julie Washburn