



Know Your Board: Elizabeth Neeld

By Joe Huber



Teacher, Scholar, Author, Photographer and now, Communicator:

In 1966, a Brainerd High School senior named Joe Huber came under the tutelage of a dynamic, young English teacher named Elizabeth Wooten. With almost scary passion, she introduced him to the great works of literature and writing. In so doing, she propelled him down a path to becoming a soldier and chemical engineer who loved to write. This was an amazing feat by any measure, since he was better at balancing chemical equations than diagramming sentences. But more importantly, who could know that their friendship would endure for a lifetime?

After my senior year, we diverged on our career paths. Elizabeth moved on to Cleveland State Community College to direct the Humanities Division. Notably, she carried her close association with Penny Overend from Brainerd to Cleveland. It was through Penny that she came to know and love Possum Creek and the Chickamauga Fly and Bait Casting Club.

For a young south Georgia country girl, raised in the shadow of Lookout Mountain, there appeared to be no limit to her potential. She completed her doctorate from the University of Tennessee. Much of her dissertation came from quiet time with her pen and typewriter in the Possum Creek cabin of George and Penny Overend, now the home of Bill and Anna.

She continued her teaching career while becoming the first woman to receive tenure and full professor of English at Texas A&M University, later becoming Assistant to the President of the university. In her professional career she has worked as a consultant for many Fortune 500 and 100 corporations as well as many well-known foundations and government organizations.

As a writer, you cannot pigeon hole her works. Her titles and subjects are so diverse. A prolific author, she has nearly two dozen books to her credit. She has tackled difficult subjects. Her book *Seven Choices: Finding Daylight after Loss Shatters Your World* grew out of the tragic loss of her husband here at Possum Creek. Thanks to the American Red Cross, her words of healing from grief found their way to the families of the people lost in the 9/11 Twin Towers tragedy in New York.

As an avid photographer, I was intrigued with her goal to capture something beautiful every day on her iPhone camera. I somewhat foolishly opined that a digital SLR camera was a much better camera than a mere iPhone. When we next met, she handed me her book, *With Eyes Wide Open: iPhone Photography*. It is a remarkable work with many photos from Possum Creek. The teacher taught her student an important lesson: The best camera is the one in your hand.

As her parents reached the end of their ministry career and sought a place to retire, Elizabeth led them to Chickamauga Fly and Bait-casting Club. They purchased the cabin facing the original club house and happily resided there for 20 years. Elizabeth and her husband, Jerele, later remodeled the home into a beautiful retreat. Unfortunately, a tree felled in a spring storm destroyed the home two years ago. They now own an adjacent home and have remodeled the original clubhouse into a beautiful study and retreat while maintaining its timeless look. It is here that she hides away to write her next work.

I asked her what it is that keeps the club and Possum Creek in her heart. She said that deep within the cells of her body rests the beauty of our special place. It is the stars shining so brightly when she arrives after a long journey from Texas; it is the trees; it is the rustic nature of the experience that goes to the core of her heart. For all that has changed in the last three quarters of a century, the club still appears much as its founders established. There is a sameness that brings rest and reassurance to all of us.

The club is about the people too. I asked her to tell me who are her “unforgettable characters”. She called out George Overend, Bill’s father. He was a quiet, hard-working person, an outstanding lawyer, and a highly skilled wood craftsman. She will always be in debt to his wife Penny who introduced her to our world. Elizabeth called out the Chambers. Lloyd was always there to assist Reverend Harper in remodeling the cabin. Elizabeth and her mother enjoyed their times with Cleo. Her neighbors, the Farris, were wonderful people, and she recalls fond memories of them. Beverly Ligon was a great friend to Rachel, Elizabeth’s mother; and Billy Wiggins a great friend to Tommie, her dad.

With such a long resume of accomplishments, places lived, and destinations traveled, I asked her to describe what could be still on her to-do list. She did not disappoint. Since 2013, she has been hard at work on a public history narrative. From her family genealogy she has taken a person from the 1700s, when we were colonies and not a nation, and is developing a historical narrative of colonial Virginia. Much of her writing work is taking place in the old clubhouse that she and Jerele have remodeled and restored so beautifully.

We are honored to have Elizabeth serve as vice president and secretary on our board of directors. She has strategically taken our club communications to an entirely different level and, in so doing, we are connected and united as never before. Elizabeth, we sincerely thank you and Jerele for your friendship and for all you do for us.