

# *Love of Our Common Home*

THE STORY OF JANET & JOE CONOVER





This project, and story series, was made possible by Bella Ease and their vision to capture the life stories and legacies of key community leaders. This is just one of many stories of lasting community impact, overcoming adversity, and creating positive change in the Quincy surrounding area, with stories and memories spanning the last 80 years.

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*\*\*Cover photo: Joe and Janet Conover, taken in the winter of 1967, the year they were married, with their West Highland Terrier.*



*Back row, left to right: John Nord (Robert's partner), Joseph (son), Robert (son), Janet and Joe in front*

## **THE STORY OF JANET AND JOE**

This book is told through the perspectives of Janet and Joe. It tells the story of how their lives came together to build a family and legacy in the Quincy area through their extensive community involvement.

Their impact on the community has been great, and the story is still being told. This compilation of stories is just a glimpse into their lives and the work they have done.

# Janet's Story



Janet at two years old,  
getting into trouble with  
toilet paper, sister Barb in  
the background reflection.

# Janet Gates Conover

AS TOLD BY JANET

## GROWING UP

I was born on August 18, 1939, in Quincy, Illinois. I have two sisters: Mary and Barbara. I attended Webster Grade School and graduated from Quincy High School in 1957. In high school, I was on the student council, played in the orchestra and band, and was the piano soloist for “Rhapsody in Blue” with the band when I was a senior. I always loved playing the piano.

I majored in applied piano and music education at DePauw University, graduating in 1961. I performed duo piano “Carnival of the Animals” with the Quincy High School Orchestra, and again with the DePauw Symphony. I taught at Washington Grade School in Quincy and completed a year of graduate school at the University of Illinois. As an adult, I attended Quincy College, later Quincy University.

In the early 1960s, I worked in New York City in the editorial department for the Association of Mechanical Engineering. I decided to return to Quincy and worked for four years at the *Quincy Herald-Whig* as a reporter, and then developed



Janet her sophomore year, Quincy High School, 1955

and edited the “Youth in Action” page and edited the Home Section. That’s where I met Joe.

## GATES RADIO

My dad, Parker Gates, and his parents founded Gates Radio in 1922. The company really struggled, but it made it. They got through the Depression, and then my dad traveled for a year studying and working on transmitters at other radio stations. There were not many back then.

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**HE LEARNED ALL HE COULD ABOUT TRANSMITTERS AND THEN CAME BACK AND DESIGNED ONE.**

The transmitter was successful, and that became their anchor product. They developed microphones, transcription turntables, transmitters for radio, and later TV transmitters. Harris Intertype merged with Gates Radio in 1957. The Gates division of Harris was successful, and most recently, the company became GatesAir.

## TAUGHT TO WORK AND HELP

My father stressed to us (Barbara, Mary, and I) that you work, take care of your family, and volunteer to



Top photo: Parker Gates, bottom photo: Gates Radio, 1920s



*Janet's mother, Millie*

help your community in some way. Parker Gates was President of The Community Chest, Rotary Club, and served on the City's Airport Commission.

My mother, Millie Lichtenberger Gates, raised the children and took care of the house, but she was active in PEO, which is a women's organization that provides scholarships for girls.

During the Second World War, my mother had a victory garden out on 24th Street - it was huge. She and a couple of other women canned vegetables at what is now the Quincy Junior High School and made them available to people in need in the community.

She was a Sunday school teacher for many years; she loved it, and the little children loved her. So, I would say my parents were both very active in the community.

## POPULAR COUPLE WEDS IN CARMÍ; TO LIVE HERE

Miss Mildred Lichtenberger, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. G. H. Lichtenberger, of Springerton, Ill., and Parker Gates, son of Mr. and Mrs. H. C. Gates, 2315 Jefferson street, Quincy, were married Saturday afternoon at 4 o'clock in the manse of the First Baptist church in Carmi. There was an improvised altar of ferns and palms and the minister used the single ring ceremony. Mr. Lichtenberger escorted his daughter to the altar and gave her in marriage. Miss Dorothy Mann, a school friend of the bride, was bridesmaid, and her brother, Hayward Lichtenberger, was best man. The bride wore a gown of white lace embroidered in gold, over baby pink taffeta, made with tight bodice and trimmed with French rosebuds. She wore her grandmother's wedding veil and carried a bouquet of bridal roses. Miss Mann's gown was of white crepe silk and she carried sweet-peas.

The parents of both the bride and groom, the bride's sister, Miss Ruby Lichtenberger, and her brother-in-law and sister, Mr. and Mrs. Waldorf Springer, of Springerton, were among those present for the ceremony. Preceding the ceremony a wedding dinner was served in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Springer.

### MARCH BRIDE



MRS. PARKER GATES.

*Parker Gates and Mildred Lichtenberger wedding announcement in the Quincy Herald-Whig on March 26, 1933 (Janet's parents).*



*Gates and Lichtenberger families, gathered for Mildred Gates 100th birthday. Mildred is in the center with a green scarf. Photo was taken November 18, 2012.*

# Meeting Joe

AS TOLD BY JANET



Janet's senior photo at DePauw University, 1961

Joe grew up on a farm in the Lima area. His brothers, Leigh and Phil, were both very athletic in basketball and coached. Joe's sister Ruth married a coach and principal. Conversations at their family dinners were mostly about sports. Joe liked to play the piano and write.

After Joe graduated from college, he worked at a newspaper out West for a while and then joined the service. He was in the Army for almost four years. Then he took his discharge in Okinawa and went to work for the *Japan Times* for three and a half years. He was gone from the United States for almost six years.

When he came back, he took an interim job at the *Quincy Herald-Whig* while applying for a job with the United States Information Agency. It was during his interim job with the *Quincy Herald-Whig* when we met.

I was working there as a reporter and then an editor. Joe and I had a lot of things in common. We both liked to write, read, enjoyed music, and were interested in what was going on in the world.

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**LOOKING BACK ON IT, WE DIDN'T KNOW EACH OTHER THAT WELL BUT IT SEEMED TO WORK OUT (AFTER 56 YEARS OF MARRIAGE).**

We met in May, got engaged in January of the next year, and married that May of 1967. We then moved to Washington, D.C., during the height of the Vietnam War. Joe was 31 years old, and I was 27.

While living in Washington, D.C., Joe worked for the United States Information Agency, Voice of America, Far East Division. I was a copywriter in the advertising department for the Julius Garfinckel Department Store. We returned to Quincy in the spring of 1968.

We were both mature, ready to marry, and wanted children at that point.

We have two sons, Joseph Gates Conover, born in 1968, and Robert Smith Conover, born in 1971, and Robert's partner, John Nord.



*Janet and Joe's wedding day, May 28, 1967*

# Joe's Story



Joe, learning to walk on first birthday in Los Angeles, 1936.

# Family Origins

AS TOLD BY JOE

I have a Mormon connection. So, the family story goes this way: a woman named Hannah Carter was sick in bed in Newry, Maine, in 1834. These two young men from a new religion came by, and they laid hands on her and healed her. She went down to the river to be baptized in this new religion, the Latter-day Saints. Her husband never joined the church; six of her nine children did, three did not.

They did the Mormon trek to Ohio and on to Missouri. Hannah and her husband, John, settled in Monroe County with some of their unmarried children. They moved into Walker Township, in Hancock County, in 1841. They had a farmstead there as part of a Mormon settlement called Morley Town, named for Issac Morley, who was a counselor to Joseph Smith, while the Mormons went up to Nauvoo.

When the Mormons were driven from Illinois in 1846, Hannah went west with Brigham Young and the Mormons and left her husband here. The six Mormon children went with her. The three non-Mormon children came from the East and settled in Hancock County.

Her one son, Phillip Libby Carter, joined his father in Walker Township and expanded the farmstead into a farm. When he came here, he had a four-year-old son named Charles, who was my great-grandfather. Phillip died in 1871. Charles married in 1876. He didn't marry when his father was still alive. Phillip was sort of a mean character, I am told.

## HOME IN HANCOCK COUNTY

Charles built a new house there, on the Hancock County line, a mile north and east of Lima. He built the house in 1885. It is the house I grew up in with my brothers and sister.

My great-grandfather Charles had four children, one of whom was my grandmother, on my mother's side. The Conovers are all completely different, descendants from a Dutchman who settled on Manhattan Island in 1625.

There had been a log cabin up closer to the road that apparently my great-great-grandfather had lived in. My mother used to talk about playing in the remnants of it. My dad put central air in the house in

the late 1950s. He couldn't put ducts in the wall because it was solid log. What they had done was move part of the cabin over to build the rest of the house around the original house.

## JOE IRVIN CONOVER

I was born in Quincy on November 7, 1935, the son of Glenn Argus and Elsie May Bolt Conover. The home I grew up in, mentioned previously, was known as Carter Hill, in Hancock County, on the Adams/Hancock County line northeast of Lima.

After graduating from Unity High School in Mendon in 1953, I attended the University of Illinois to study journalism.

My grandmother's brother became a newspaper reporter and then an advertising executive with McCann Erickson in Chicago and then New York. I



Joe's parents, Glenn and Elsie Conover, at a Unity High School basketball game.

discovered after a semester in music school that I started that process too late. My other interest was journalism; my Uncle Arch encouraged me on that.

## WORLD TRAVELS

I was due for the draft after I graduated from the University of Illinois in 1958, so instead of waiting to be drafted, I enlisted in the Army Information School.

I was stationed in Fort Slocum, New York, and then they sent me to California and then on to Okinawa. I was an information specialist in the military police group there. I took discharge there and then went up to Tokyo to work for the *Japan Times* from 1962 to 1965.

The cheap way of getting back to the States was through the Soviet Union. When I returned to the United States, I wrote a story about this trip and took it down to Allen Oakley, who was the editor at the time. Allen offered me a job.

## CAREER IN NEWS

I started at the *Quincy Herald-Whig* on May 1, 1968. I was on the copy desk initially. I worked nights part of the time. I became the associate editor and did the editorial page, and then in 1983, Tom Oakley made me the editor of the paper. Back in its heyday, the newsroom had 24 staff.



Joe, far left, TI&E unit Ford Ord , California

After graduating from Unity High School in Mendon in 1953, Joe graduated from the University of Illinois in 1958 with a bachelor's degree in journalism. He served in the U.S. Army as an enlisted information specialist from October 1958 to February 1962, stationed at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri; Fort Slocum, New York; Fort Ord, California, and with the Military Police Group at Sukiran, Okinawa.



Sitting at copy desk of Daily Illini, University of Illinois 1954-1958



Joe, left, with Japanese friend in Joe's apartment in Shibuya, Tokyo, 1962-1963

After honorable discharge on Okinawa, Mr. Conover worked in Tokyo on the copy desk of the English-language *Japan Times* from February 1962 through August 1965.

He also taught conversational English at Kyoritsu Women's University (next page, bottom photo) and played guitar in a folk group called The Gallihooters (next page, top photo).



# Community Impact

AS TOLD BY JANET

I joined Quincy Service League when I was 22 years old and am an Associate Member today.

I am a member of Friends in Council, a women's literary group, and served as president for two years.

In the late 1970s, I served on the restoration of the John Wood Mansion, and in 2022, along with others who helped with the restoration, I was honored by the Historical Society of Quincy and Adams County.

In the early 1980s, I was asked by Mayor David Nuessen to organize and serve as the first chairman of the Quincy Preservation Commission.

Working with two attorneys and an outstanding ordinance committee, an Establishing Ordinance was written and passed by the City Council in 1981, and several months later, the Landmarks and Historic District Ordinance was approved—and for this service, I was honored by the Quincy Society of Fine Arts.

I served 15 years on the Preservation Commission and served as chair three times.

## BLESSED SACRAMENT CHURCH

I have been fairly active as a member of Blessed Sacrament Church. I served on their school board and parish council and developed and co-chaired the Alumni Newsletter for Blessed Sacrament School.

I was awarded the Catholic Woman of Distinction Award for Blessed Sacrament Church in Quincy, having been nominated by Monsignor Michael Kuse. I was awarded that honor at the Cathedral in Springfield by Bishop John Paprocki.

I worked alongside Father Mike Kuse to organize a Laudato Si' study group, and for six years have prepared a monthly Reflection Calendar that is sent to parishes in the Springfield Diocese.

## SAFE & LIVABLE HOUSING BEGINNINGS

When I was working with Father Mike Kuse on the Laudato Si (translated to love of our common home)



*Janet pictured with Father Mike Kuse*

study group, we had group meetings every other month. Everyone was welcome to attend, and not everyone was Catholic.

In one of those sessions, a retired teacher said we should have the Superintendent of Schools, Roy Webb, at that time, talk to us about life skills being taught in the schools.

Roy gave a really good talk, and in the midst of this said, “You know, I am just wondering if you know that every day 700 to 800 students are truant.”

We almost fell out of our chairs. Someone asked why. He said there are lots of reasons for this, but a lot of these children live in substandard apartments that do not have hot water to bathe. They get to

school; they smell and are bullied. He said he had been in a lot of these apartments and seen the rotting floors, leaking roofs, and deplorable conditions.

At the end of that meeting, both Father Mike and I said we would join the Safe and Livable Housing Committee, then known as the Poverty Project.

This group put together an ordinance that called for landlords to pay \$35 for every rental unit and register once a year with the city. This would allow the city to hire two inspectors and a clerk so that rental housing properties would be inspected every three years. It just didn’t go. Mainly because of the fees.

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**THE IDEA IS TO TRY TO TURN THIS AROUND SO MORE CHILDREN, FAMILIES, THOSE WITH DISABILITIES, AND EVERYONE IN QUINCY LIVE IN SAFE AND LIVEABLE HOUSING.**

As we weren’t getting anywhere with a city ordinance, we supported the “Minimum Housing Complaint Form,” already offered by the City’s Inspection Department.

If a tenant feels that he or she is living in a unit that is run down with problems and needs repairs, they are first asked to call their landlord to notify him or her on what needs to be fixed. After two to three weeks go by and nothing is done, the tenant is encouraged to fill out the form and file it with the inspection department.

Recently, after a tenant filed a complaint, the property that was deemed unlivable was closed by the inspector. Two Rivers Regional Council, Salvation Army, Quanada, the YWCA, and other organizations worked together to find those tenants somewhere safe to live.

It is a slower process than having a rental housing ordinance, which is what we need, but it is another way to approach it.

In 2021 and 2022 combined, there were 24 housing complaint forms filed. In 2023, at least 46 forms have already been filed.

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**TENANTS ARE OFTEN AFRAID TO FILL OUT THE FORM, FEARING EVICTION OR RETALIATION IN SOME WAY.**



*Janet Conover*

Because of this we have developed an advocacy group made up of churches and organizations that will help people fill out the form and go to the inspection with them.



*Joe at his 10th Street studio during QAC's ArtCrawl, 2015*

AS TOLD BY JOE

## ART & TEACHING

I retired in 2001. Janet found me a room that I could use as my art studio. It was in the old Emerson School on the second floor. I have enjoyed developing my youthful interest in visual art by taking up printmaking, collage, and abstract painting in hot and cold wax. I conduct hot wax (encaustic) and cold wax workshops in my work studio, and I am a member of Gallery 310, a co-operative gallery in Hannibal, Missouri. My work has been shown in Quincy and Tri-State area exhibits, and in exhibits in Alabama, Connecticut, Iowa, New Mexico, and Sofia, Bulgaria.

I have also taught art classes with the kids from Teen Reach. That led into also teaching English, poetry, and cursive writing.

## STAYING INVOLVED IN THE COMMUNITY

During my newspaper working years, I served on the boards of various civic and cultural organizations, including the Quincy Highway Committee, the Quincy Public Library, United Way of Adams County, the Quincy Symphony Orchestra Association, the Quincy Civic Music Association, and the then Quincy Little Theatre.

After retiring, in addition to my art, I remained involved for several years with the New Philadelphia Association, the Quincy Sister City Commission, Friends of the Dr. Richard Eells House, the Quincy Parks Foundation, Citizens Advocating Racial Equality (CARE), Quincy Teen Reach, Quincy Drum Circle, and was a two-term public member of the Illinois State Board of Pharmacy. In 2001 to 2002, Janet and I co-chaired a volunteer group that raised over \$400,000 for a new Indian Mounds Pool.



*Joe hanging his work at the Keokuk Art Center show.*

# Big Picture

AS TOLD BY JANET

## FAITH JOURNEY

We went to church every Sunday growing up. There was really no choice unless you were ill.

Joe grew up in a home where they were very good people, but they had stopped attending church for some reason. When we married, I attended church by myself. When we moved back to Quincy and I was pregnant, Joe agreed to join a church, and we joined the Vermont Street United Methodist Church.

We decided we wanted something a little more formal and became Episcopalian. We were at the Episcopalian Church for 33 years, and then our youngest son told us he was gay and had a partner. The Episcopal church in Quincy was dividing. Some of the leaders and the priest there at that time took a strong stance on the gay issue, so Joe and I left.

I went back to the Methodist Church for three years and then decided to become Roman Catholic. Joe became a Unitarian, and sometimes we attend church together.

Faith helps me get through a lot of issues that come in life: tragedies and difficulties that everyone faces at some point or another.

“

**WITHOUT MY FAITH I WOULD HAVE  
GIVEN UP A LONG TIME AGO.**

## WORDS OF WISDOM

Don't criticize unless you really have to. Instead of criticizing, give love and support. Loving and supporting people will go a lot further. It is easy to get up and be discouraged, but I have learned that doesn't work.

Every morning, I get up and pray and ask God to guide me through the day. If I keep focusing on that, the days go better. I don't always succeed, and many times I fail, but I try to make that my daily focus.



*Janet awarded the Catholic Woman of Distinction Award at the Cathedral in Springfield by Bishop John Paprocki.*

AS TOLD BY JANET AND JOE

## JOY IN LIFE

Janet said, “I find joy in life, having dinner with my husband, friends, and family. Joy is in the good times with my sons and Joe.”

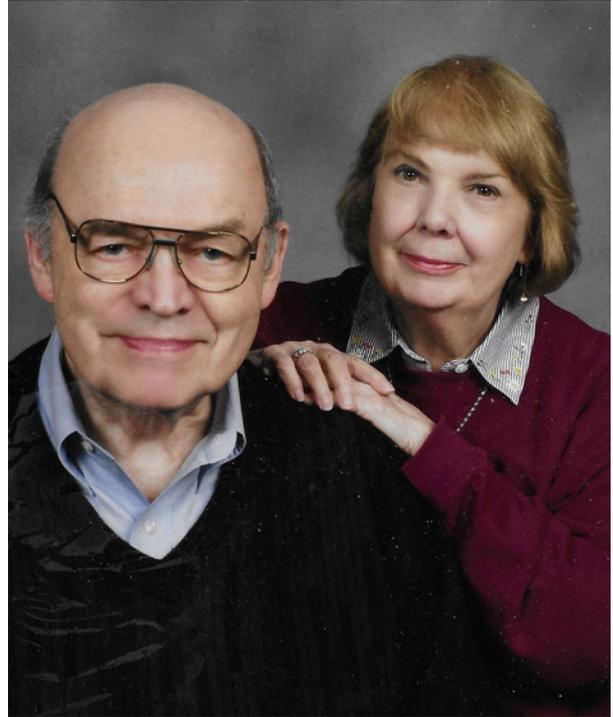
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**THE TENANT WORKSHOP HAS BEEN A JOY IN MY LIFE. EVERY WORKSHOP IS A CHALLENGE. I AM SEEING IT SUCCEED.**

“I find joy in cooking, my garden, and more of the simple things in life. Picking up a leaf and studying it and seeing how it is put together - what a beautiful thing that is. What a gift that God has given us in something as simple as a leaf and we examine the variations in it and see the beauty.

“We need to not lose focus in finding the simple things in life: sunsets, beautiful days, and even the rain, those kinds of things. Our animals - how much love we give and receive from our animals. We have always had dogs and cats.

“Going to mass is very important and meaningful for me.”



*Joe and Janet in their church photo*

## MARRIAGE ADVICE

Joe said, “Don’t go to bed angry. We stay out of each other’s way. We each do our own thing, and then we get together over dinner and talk about our day. I think there is something to that.”

Janet added, “We are fortunate that we live in a large house and have the flexibility to have our own space. We enjoy going out for dinner. We travel together. Joe loves to travel.”

## PURPOSE IN LIFE

Joe said, “None of us ask to be here. We are not here of our own accord. We are here because someone else thought we ought to be.

“Your purpose in life is whatever you choose to make it. You are born with certain instincts and talents. Some people find them easily, and some people never find them.”

“

**IF YOU FIND WHAT MAKES YOU FEEL  
WORTHWHILE, THAT IS PROBABLY  
YOUR PURPOSE.**



*Joe and Janet at a family dinner in 2010*



*Left to right: John, Robert, Janet, Joseph, and Joe at Busy Bistro in 2005*

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**WE GREATLY VALUE OUR FAMILY AND FRIENDS, HOPE FOR TOLERANCE FOR ALL RACES AND RELIGIONS AND THOSE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS, AND PRAY FOR PEACE THROUGHOUT OUR WORLD.**

- Janet and Joe Conover



Memoirs  
by  
Maureen

Life Storyteller, Maureen Klues