

Message in a Bottle

A Biographical Series on Tyler County Folks

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Officer Eveline Brunson – a.k.a., Bulldog, Shorty or Shortstop

When looking for a particular photo of her “pinning” her daughter Rosa at a Houston Police Department (HPD) graduation, Eveline began pulling out her albums, one after the other. After about ten or eleven photo albums were searched, with a few albums having some photos stuffed loosely inside, Eveline said, “I will have to get these organized after I retire.”

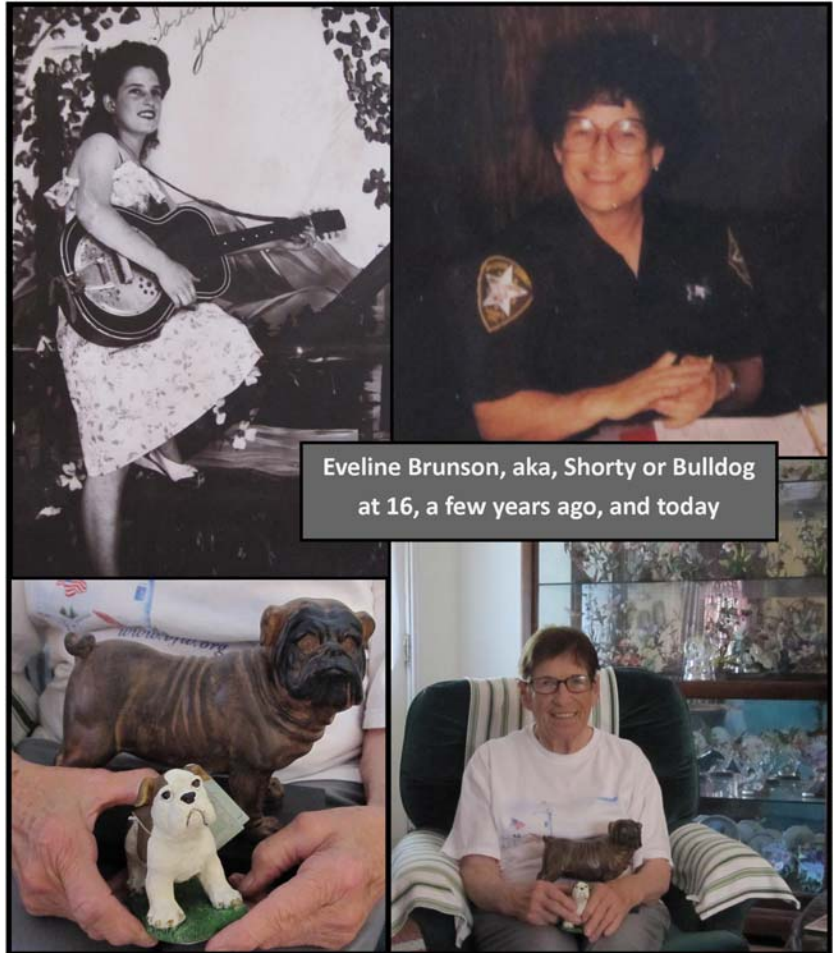
In November, she will be 84.

She is not ashamed of her age, or anything for that matter. Her calm, smooth voice is resolutely calm.

She is five feet tall, now, “Though I used to be 5’2” – I guess it is my age. I have lost a couple of inches,” she said, raising her brows a bit.

As a Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) correctional officer, she has distinguished herself as a kind and caring person at the Gib Lewis Prison in Woodville, always available to help. *Always*. The prison chaplain has referred to her as the “den mother” of the prison – she smiles at that. Years ago she led the construction of the Gib Lewis Employee Park, on acreage allotted by the prison warden. A few years ago, she donated the materials and her time to supervise the construction of a miniature golf course at the park, “So the officers can have some fun time when they get off.”

Eveline was reared in Paris, Texas. When five years old, her family moved to Polk County. They lived in a “log house with a dog trot through the house, a very wide



Eveline Brunson, aka, Shorty or Bulldog at 16, a few years ago, and today

hallway through the middle.” Electricity? “Oh no,” she said, “We stuffed the cracks with moss because we didn’t have newspapers. We even used moss to stuff mattresses.”

Eveline always finds something positive to say about people, though, to her friends and sometimes even to the person

themselves, her police persona will force her to “tell it like it is.”

“I am not going to cover for anyone, not anymore. They need to obey the rules,” she said, several times, as our conversation shifted to prisoners or fellow officers.

She is fair and caring to all.

After her mother died, Eveline was sent to live with her aunt in Canton, Missouri.

At 16 years old, she got her birth certificate and left to go to work on her own. You can see her at 16 with a guitar. Was she a good guitar player? “I thought I was,” she said, with a smile. She loved music.

Her first job was in a little factory “bagging some kind of seeds and working the machine that sewed the top of the bags.”

Eveline moved to Mesquite, Texas, to help her sister who had birthed her second baby. They had a dairy, and Eveline helped them out for about six months, then moved to Dallas.

Shortly after that, in Wells Point, Texas, she met her husband, Willie V. Bunson, and they were married in 1945. He was just out of the military, after WWII, and a diabetic. He died in 1951.

Because Eveline’s son had asthma, she moved around for a while, to San Angelo, Amarillo, and Lubbock.

Her daughter Rosa was born in Arlington, Texas, and the next week after Rosa’s birth they moved to Alvin, Texas.

In 1963, Eveline finished her high school education through correspondence while working on a nursing certification at the same time. She received her high school diploma two weeks before she went to the state board. That is, nearly unheard of, the nursing school allowed her to continue her nursing knowing that Eveline could not take the board *without* a high school diploma.

“They had that much confidence in me that they let me continue,” Eveline said.

That continues to this day, as friends and employers have always had confidence in

her. She is reliable and kind and never stops trying to find ways to bring people together.

In Alvin, Texas, she worked for Dr. Jimmy Hayes and the Alvin Memorial Hospital until the hospital closed down in about 1979. She very much enjoyed her time working in the emergency and operating rooms, though – as all emergency medical persons can resonate with – “It was especially sad when a child would come in, because of a car accident, or something,” she said, “always hate to see a wreck with an injured child.”

In 1980, she went work for the Brazoria County Sheriff’s Department, starting out as a certified jailor and was placed over the medical care in the jail.

One day, she received “the sweetest little bouquet,” she said, from her fellow jailors.

“To Momma Brunson, from all her kids,” was written on the note.

Found memories from her early days in law enforcement.

“On my off days I would ‘ride patrol,’” she said, as the second officer in the unit to learn more about it. Then she became a deputy.

As a juvenile officer, and when Child Protective Services (CPS) did not have a place for kids removed from home, Officer Brunson was asked to take care of the kids. “I took several kids into my home when CPS was overloaded. Those kids they took out of homes because of abuse. I would take them in for a while.”

Eveline shook her head. “Most of the kids made false accusations,” she said. “We would take them back home with a strict talking to.”

She also started a Law Enforcement Cub Scout Group for boys and girls.

Taking care of people ... of all kinds – she loves it.

At that time in Brazoria County, the women officers had to wear vests and carry purses. “I did not like that,” she said in her

typically calm but resolute voice. "I told the sheriff, 'We were just like the other officers.' I did complain on that." And the sheriff did away with that.

In the top photo, you can see Deputy Eveline Brunson at her desk in Brazoria County.

From 1985 to 1988, she worked for the Manvel Police Department, about 10 miles north of Alvin, as a city patrolman.

"I loved police work," she said.

Eveline is very proud of her daughter Rosa. It may be a coincidence (or not) that throughout Eveline's home there are many pictures or figurines of roses, graciously decorating her living room among her large collection of porcelain humming birds.

Rosa was an accomplished dancer, even had her own studio for a time in the 1980s.

"I made all of her costumes," Eveline said.

Rosa left the dance studio and entered the Houston Police Department Academy.

On the evening that Rosa was going to graduate from the academy, Eveline was called to the scene of an auto accident. "A vehicle had lost control and went through a fence into a man's pasture. I was the only officer on duty (Manvel had three officers on the force). It was my shift," she said. "I had to notify the owner in case he had some cattle that could get loose."

It was rainy and muddy.

On her way to Houston, Rosa stopped at the scene of the accident that her mother was working.

"Hey ... let's go mom," said Rosa, and Rosa followed her mother back to the Manvel Police Station where Eveline dropped off her cruiser. They hurried to Houston.

"We barely got there on time," said Eveline. Rosa already knew what to do, and Eveline found a seat just in time. It is a tradition that a family member in law enforcement could "pin" a newly graduating

officer, if they wanted to, and Eveline sure was proud.

"When I crossed the stage," Eveline continued, "My granddaughter Rachel Lynn yelled, 'There's mama.'"

Today, Rosa is a HPD sergeant, with 25+ years experience.

Like mother, like daughter.

In 1988, Eveline entered the TDCJ as a nurse at the Darrington State Prison, also called "Little Vietnam" because of troublesome prisoners. It was rough. She helped AIDS patients in the prison hospital.

"Many staff did not want to help the AIDS patients. I would do little things for them, and most of the patients were protective of me. They were a sick person, and I was there to take care of them. They are human too and need the same kind of care as others," she said.

In the 1990s, Eveline became a correctional officer and moved to Woodville, Texas.

She became a charter member of the TDCJ Post Trauma Staff Support Officer team, later named the Crisis Response Intervention Support Program (CRISP), a specialized team ready to help an officer who was attacked or hurt on duty.

"What I tell them as a part of the CRISP team," she said, "that you don't have to say *anything*, 'just be there.'" She has always *been there* for so many.

You like being there for people? "Ahh-hmm," she said, pursing her lips, raising her eyebrows a bit, and nodding, "always have."

Many of the prisoners respect her. One day, after correcting a prisoner, she was kind of worried as he appeared to be on edge. One has to be careful with prisoners, as many do not have good impulse control and some are very dangerous. After a little coaxing, he said, "When I was arrested, I lived in a garbage can. I have always been treated that way."

Eveline retorted, “You won’t be treated that way here.”

It is no wonder that some prisoners have told her, “If something comes down, get to me, because I will go down before you do.”

“I have had several tell me that. Some fellow officers might take that as ‘what is she doing for them?’ but that is not so.” She shakes her head. The more experienced correctional officers sometimes understand that respect goes a long way.

In 1997, her daughter Rhonda died from a terminal illness, and Eveline grieved so much that it affected her work. So she retired from the prison.

“I cried for six months,” she said. To this day, Eveline remembers how much her fellow officers cared for her, especially then Lt. Moore and Sgt. Beard (both are TDCJ Majors now, chiefs of security for their respective prisons).

“At Rhonda’s funeral, everyone I worked with came to the funeral. I was really touched by that. I remember they were all there,” she said.

“I was so low,” she said. She had a couple of dreams and recalled how she worked through her grief. “Then I prayed. And I got better.”

“Six months later,” she continued, “after I felt I had grieved enough, in 1998, I put my application into TDCJ for the second time. After the mandatory year, they called me and I came back to the Gib Lewis Prison.” She could retire a *second* time today from TDCJ ... if she wanted to.

She is a member of Hillister Baptist Church and thinks a lot of her pastor, the Rev. Dr. Clark Mahoney, who—she carefully noted—just lost his wife to cancer. She understands his deep grief, very well.

As we stood in front of the glass bookcase filled with her vast collection of humming birds, she was asked, “Which one is your favorite?”

She did not hesitate—surprisingly—and reached passed the delicate humming birds and picked up a little bulldog! “This one,” she said.

Years ago, TDCJ Officer Donna Lee’s son, Eric, gave Eveline the little porcelain bulldog, for her long-time help.

Donna Lee, a long-time fellow correctional officer at the Gib Lewis Prison, said, “They broke the mold when they made her,” smiling and shaking her head, even lighting up at Eveline Brunson’s name. Donna continued, “She is an angel from heaven. She helps anyone, at any time. Even if she does not feel well, she will be there for you.”

A few years ago on Eveline’s 82nd birthday, her daughter Rosa conspired with some TDCJ staff—including Donna Lee—to hold a surprise birthday party at the Ivanhoe Community Center. As they got people there, they kept Eveline busy, then drove there to be greeted by a host of family, friends, and coworkers. What a surprise!

The table centerpiece was a bronze bulldog. See the photo of her holding both bulldogs, both dear to heart.

How did she get the nickname “Bulldog”?

She had been dubbed that a little while, before she found out. That is her manner, too, as she simply does not let things bother her very much or very often. She is too busy caring for people to notice other people’s negativity or care much about snide comments.

Noticing that nickname, she asked a fellow employee about it. “Why are they calling me ‘Bulldog’?” she finally asked.

“Because,” the officer replied, “When you come on a wing, you come barking!”

Eveline reflected, “I had to make up for being short ... by using an authoritative manner.”

She smiled, and laughed at that story. She recalled with affection that the previous Gib

Lewis Warden Michael Roesler had written about her nickname in the prison newspaper.

Current Senior Warden Cody Ginsel of the Gib Lewis State Prison said, "Ms. Brunson is an employee all managers wish they had. She never misses a day of work, outworks most half her age, is as feisty as a lioness, and has a heart of gold."

"Oh, I got to tell you this," Eveline said. "We were on our way to Houston a few weeks ago. I warned Rosa to slow down."

Her daughter Rosa replied, "We'll be alright." Rosa is an award-winning HPD police trainer, with top marks handling police cruisers.

"Then a policeman pulled her over!" Eveline, smiling wide, and quoted Rosa, "'Moma,' Rosa said, 'You keep your mouth shut.' She got pulled over!" Eveline giggled again. "Rosa showed the officer her badge, and the HPD Officer gave her a warning. I did *not* say, 'I told you so.' It was funny."

Helping her daughter, as she always has, Eveline is always ready "to be there" if you need her. We do *need* her, and many more like her.