



Longtime Crosby and AT&T pro-am marshal remembers when

By LISA CRAWFORD WATSON

IN 2010, golfer Rose Cunningham completed her 38th and final year as a volunteer for the Callaway Pebble Beach Invitational golf tournament. She was 93. As senior marshal, the Pebble Beach great-grandmother was in charge of all volunteers — making sure they had training, food and support.

Until 2000, Cunningham also walked the course as an official scorer for “all the U.S. Opens” and for The Crosby, now known as the AT&T Pebble Beach Pro-Am, scoring for Jack Nicklaus, Johnny Bench, Willie Mays, Johnny Miller, George C. Scott, Clint Eastwood, Dan Quayle, Donald Trump, Telly Savalas, Tommy Smothers, Arnold Palmer and many other pros and celebrity golfers, all of whom she remembers.

“I’m fortunate to have such a good memory at my age,” says Cunningham. “I was scoring golf before computers came into play, when you just had to use your brain. I walked with the pros on Cypress Point during The Crosby, right up until AT&T took over and they stopped using Cypress. I remember scoring for Jack Nicklaus and his sons on Spyglass Hill.”

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PHOTOS/COURTESY ROSE CUNNINGHAM

Longtime pro-am volunteer Rose Cunningham at home in Del Monte Forest today (left), in 1993 with Donald Trump at Poppy Hills (center) and with baseball great Johnny Bench at Pebble Beach in 1994.

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Come August, Rose Cunningham will turn 99.

She was nearly 90 when she gave up golf after she got run over by a golf cart during a tournament in Santa Rosa. “You should have seen the golf cart,” she says.

She didn’t start playing golf until she was 58. During her first round of golf, she achieved three birdies and came in with the lowest score in her group.

“I only took golf lessons, on how to hold the club, on the swing, and on chipping and putting,” she said.

She joined Rancho Cañada Golf Club in Carmel Valley, where she helmed the women’s golf team and played competitive golf until 2006. Her handicap was 14.

She keenly remembers the day, on April 3, 1987, when she scored a hole-in-one at Rancho Cañada. Her husband, Russell J. Cunningham, scored his hole-in-one on the same course, eight years later. But he never beat his wife in a game of golf.

The couple met during high school in Burlingame, when she was a 14-year-old freshman and he was a senior baseball player. The sparks flew early, yet her parents felt she was too young to date. The teenagers got engaged anyway, but she threw her ring at him when he suggested he might have a crush on another girl. He changed his mind.

“I was just shy of 18 when we decided to get married,” she recalled. “It was Feb. 23, 1937.”

The young couple survived a blizzard, ran out of

gas, enlisted the help of a cab driver, and found a pastor who was willing to marry them in his home. When they returned to her home the next evening, her father said, “Mother, put on a couple more plates, we have company for dinner.”

Russell went to work for Bethlehem Steel in South San Francisco but was hired, a year later, by the San Bruno Police Department. His career spanned 40 years, during which he survived gunshot wounds and served 16 years as chief of police until his retirement in 1978.

The couple’s first of two daughters, Roseanne, was born in 1941, seven months prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor. In 1942, Cunningham became the first female steel inspector at Bethlehem Steel, working 10-hour shifts.

“I was one of those Rosie the Riveters, and I even had the right name,” she said. “I was very young to have the responsibility to inspect the steel and rivets for Navy ships.”

The Russell’s second daughter, Suzanne, was born in 1945, not long before her father, caught in the crossfire of a civilian gun battle, underwent more than five hours of surgery to repair gunshot wounds to the abdomen and wrist. He later returned to the police force.

A year after his retirement, the couple moved to Pebble Beach, where they enjoyed 24 years of gorgeous scenery, good health, and great golf before his passing in 2003. They also took four cross-country trips, pulling a 29-foot Airstream trailer behind a Chevy. Cunningham was often at the wheel.

“I passed my driver’s test after my 96th birthday, but I recently gave up my license, which was like giving up my right arm,” she said. “But I get along.”