

Parker McKee helps his 90-year-old grandmother Nita Parker receive a honorary diploma from Gresham High.



OUTLOOK PHOTO: JOSH KULLA - Grandson Parker McKee surprised his grandmother, Nita Parker, by helping her receive an honorary Diploma from Gresham High School.

Nita Parker and her grandson, Parker McKee, share a close relationship. They value their chats, weekly lunch or dinner dates, and board games. Nita even attended Parker's football games.



OUTLOOK PHOTO: JOSH KULLA - Nita Parker had to drop out of high school her senior year for medical reasons and was recently presented with an honorary diploma.

But now, the pair share something even more binding.

"I found out that (my grandma) didn't get her diploma from Gresham, so I was like, 'I'm getting my diploma, why not get her a diploma?'" Parker said.

Nita is not your ordinary 2017 Gresham High School graduate. She's a 90-year-old who hasn't attended high school since World War II. And with guidance from Principal Michael Schaefer, Parker helped Nita receive an honorary high school diploma on the same day he walked across the stage to collect his own at the Veterans Memorial Coliseum in Portland.

For Nita, some things are worth waiting for.

In 1944, complications from an appendectomy kept Nita from graduating with her class. She received her General Education Diploma (GED) in the 1970s, but never really felt like she completed school. That is, until Tuesday, June 13, more than 30 years later.

"You gotta remember, (I went to high school) during World War II. Most of the boys went into the service and we had a lot of Japanese students, and they were taken to camps," Nita said. "So when it came for graduation, I didn't really think much about it. It wasn't important to me at the time."

Born and raised in East Multnomah County, Nita worked in advertising for the former Portland Shopping News and Oregon Journal newspapers. She married her late husband, Allan Super, in 1948, and spent the following years caring for her family before deciding to go back to school for her GED.

She remembers mentioning to someone that she never received her diploma, and they pitched the idea of pursuing a GED.

"It was very spur the moment," said Nita, who then took a few classes at Portland State University.

It wasn't until 10 or 15 years ago that she decided to return to her old high school. She went with three high school friends to look at a mural her husband's aunt had painted. To her disappointment, it was painted over.

"It was a strange feeling, (being back in the school)," Nita said. "Nothing had changed much. They've done a lot of adding on since then, but the front of the building when you go in was exactly the same as when I went to high school."



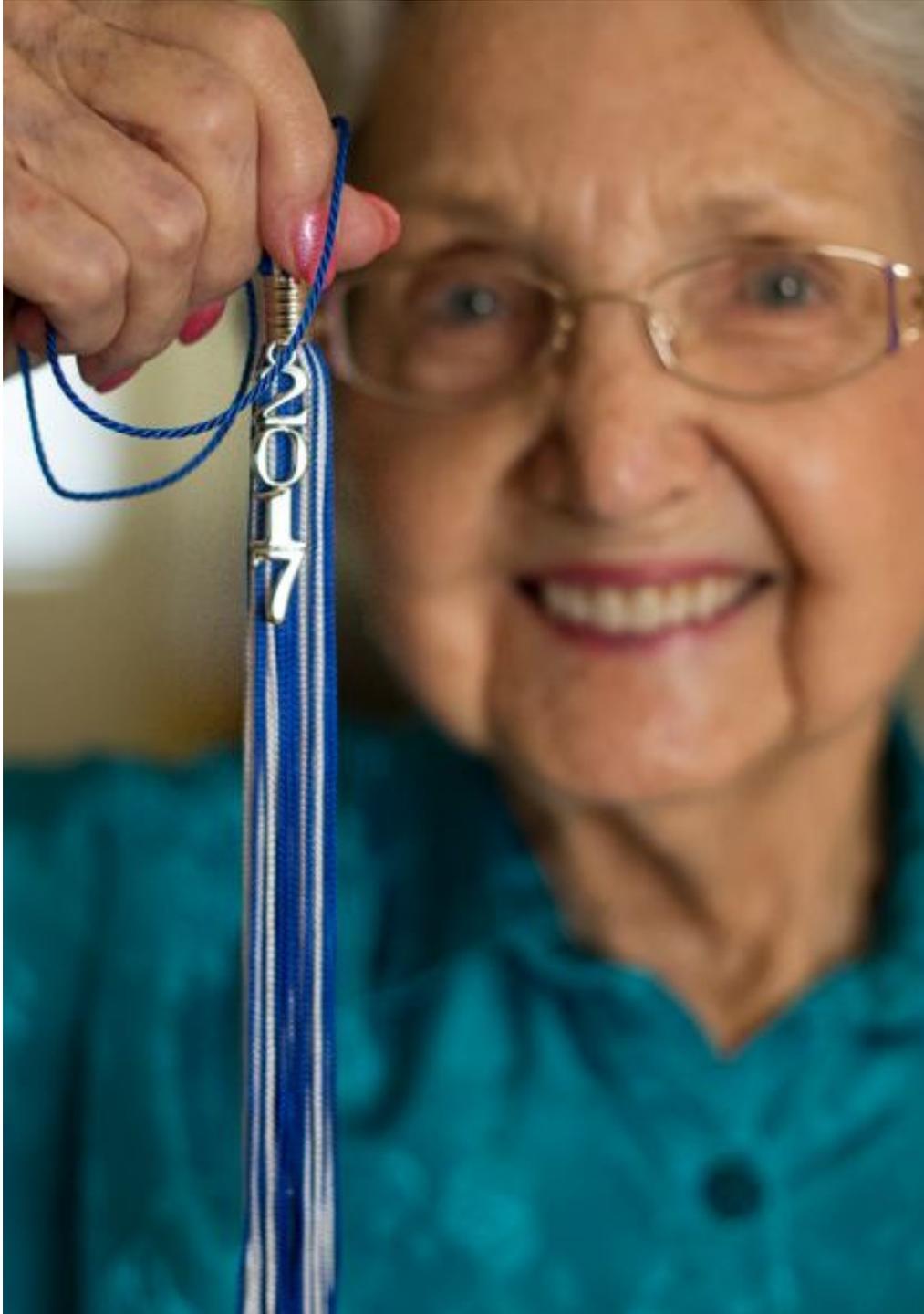
OUTLOOK PHOTO: JOSH KULLA - Nita Parker receives a Gresham High School certificate of attendance as a 90-year-old.

Parker gets an idea

During the final countdown of his senior year, Parker approached Schaefer and told him his grandmother's story. Schaefer met with the family. A couple phone calls later, he was able to get his hands on a certificate of attendance the day before graduation.

"It's one of those chances that falls in your lap, and for a little extra effort on several people's behalf, you're able to do something that's really positive for a family and for our community," Schaefer said. "It's just a neat thing."

Once graduation ceremonies were completed, Parker's family struggled through swarms of people to gather everyone and find Schaefer. Nita, who thought they were trying to find a mutual gathering spot, was overcome by exhaustion and swollen feet.



OUTLOOK PHOTO: JOSH KULLA - Nita Parker attended Gresham High School more than 70 years ago. She was just presented with an honorary diploma.

Nita receives her surprise

When they located Schaefer, Nita wanted to find a place to sit, but instead, what the principal presented her with cemented her feet to the ground.

"It was kind of a little ceremony and everything," Nita said. "When you're shocked, I don't know how you feel. I didn't faint or anything."

Nita's daughter, Taunya McKee, remembers the "awe-struck" look on her mother's face when she received a rose, tassel, the same medal worn by all GHS graduates, and the honorary diploma.

But Taunya and her family weren't the only ones to witness this moment. More than 30 people, including teachers and friends, crowded around to support the new graduates.

"It was just a big thrill and a surprise," Nita said. "I would have teared up but I tried not to. Parker's very special."

Parker said the feeling he had when he held his diploma on stage made his excitement for his grandma skyrocket.

"I guess it was more (about) making a night that was special for me special for her as well," Parker said.