By Amy Morgan

77-year-old Elaine Slubar had an idyllic childhood. She grew up west of Uvalde on the Fischer Ranch owned by her mother’s family. Her home was built of river rock with outbuildings of D’Hanis tile. Trips to town took more than an hour on unpaved roads, so the family also owned a house in Uvalde, coincidentally two houses away from the home of former United States Vice President John Nance Garner.

Third of four sisters, Elaine was a cheerleader and homecoming princess at Uvalde High School. Beloved family photos depict the girls sunbathing on the banks of the Nueces River that borders their property. Elaine followed her older sister to the University of Texas. She met John Sheedy, whose family had deep roots in Brackettville, his father serving as Kinney County Sheriff for decades.

Sheedy, “the best dancer in five counties,” swept her off her feet. They married and returned to South Texas where the movie industry was changing the landscape. John Wayne had built a movie set complete with an 1836-era Alamo replica at Alamo Village in Brackettville. After The Alamo was filmed, the area was a popular film destination. More than 72 movies, six documentaries, six music videos and 13 commercials were filmed there, according to the Alamo Village website. Popular titles include Lonesome Dove, Arrowhead, starring Charleton Heston, Two Rode Together, with Jimmy Stewart, and The Great Waldo Pepper, featuring Robert Redford.

Elaine obtained a commercial license and became a professional driver to the stars. “As a driver, I had to be at their beck and call. They might send me out to get a six-pack or a new shirt,” she said. She has pictures of herself with Redford (she watched him get his hair cut), Jimmy Stewart and Dean Martin. Her favorite story is when she, his driver, jumped into Dennis Weaver’s lap for a picture. Her two sons were able to meet Redford and Ken Curtis from Gunsmoke, among others.

The movie business slowed, and Elaine’s life changed. She divorced and went to work at the County and District Clerk’s Office in Brackettville. As her career progressed, she spent 15 years working for Customs and Border Protection under the Department of Homeland Security. It was there a friend introduced her to Leroy Slubar. She describes Slubar as a kind gentleman who was fluent in three languages. They were married for 12 years before his death.

Her son John Sheedy IV, who Elaine still calls “Tiger” – a nickname left over from the movie days - lives in Del Rio with his wife. Elaine moved to Independence Hill Retirement Community three years ago. Her lovely apartment is decorated with pictures, filled with plants, and boasts a collection of Nueces River rocks and a nail sculpture – mementos from her life on the ranch. She enjoys singing alto with the Hilltopper Chorus, plays bridge and dominoes several times a week and always looks forward to the dances.

“I think I’ve had an interesting life – especially for someone who grew up in a small community - first Uvalde, and then Brackettville – which is just a dot on the map,” Elaine said.