By Amy Morgan

Ninety-year-old Dottie McCammon “never does anything small,” she exclaimed, as she described highlights of her life. Her adventures included runway and television modeling acting on Hollywood’s Silver Screen, and world travel as an Air Force officer’s wife.

Dottie was born in Houston, but moved to San Antonio where she attended Jefferson High School. Her family moved to Burbank, California in 1941, for her father to work on warships. At age 16, Dottie started making the rounds of the film studios, taking small parts in movies. She received her Screen Actor’s Guild card under her stage name, Denise Kay, and signed a contract with Warner Bros. as an ingénue. Although a working actress contracted to Warner Bros., as was common at the time, she was “loaned out” to other studios and appeared in 15 films such as Sweetheart of Sigma Chi, Janie, Betty Coed, and Stage Struck. One Houston paper titled its story of her success, “Deep In the Heart’ Girl Plans to Make Drama Career.”

“They had a big audition for a Texas girl for the movie Two Guys from Texas,” she said. “There must have been 500 girls there! But I still had my Texas accent and was not all gussied up with a lot of rouge, and that’s why I was picked.”

Working on that picture opened the door for her to travel with the rest of the cast to the grand opening of the Houston Shamrock Hotel, owned by Wildcatter Glenn MacCarthy, a notable figure of that day.

While acting, Dottie caught the eye of Barbara Brinton, a top designer of wedding gowns and bridal trousseaux. Dottie became a favorite bridal model, worked on the television show, Bride and Groom, and was on the cover of Bride Magazine in 1942.

Dottie said it was customary for the actors of that day to visit other sets hoping to catch the eye of a director or make an acquaintance. “We would meet the stars at the commissary or the studio when we weren’t on the set,” she said. “That’s how I got to know a lot of them. You wanted to put yourself in front of as many people of importance as you could.” She developed quite an exciting coterie, including Fred Astaire, Katherine Hepburn, Grace Kelly and Shirley Temple, whose signed pictures with personal well wishes still grace her copious photo albums.

In 1948, James (“Jimmie”) Lugar, a high school chum from San Antonio with whom she had corresponded throughout the war, came calling dressed in a hula skirt. His sudden appearance was shocking, as the military reports said he had perished in a submarine accident. Thankfully, he returned safely to ask for Dottie’s hand. She traded modeling bridal gowns for a real one of her own, and began the next phase of her life: as wife and eventual mother to two sons, Michael and Garry, and a daughter, Karen.

Prior to her wedding, the family moved back to Texas where she continued her modeling career with Joske’s department store. After marriage, the couple travelled the world as Jimmie pursued an Air Force officer’s career. They were stationed everywhere from California to Tennessee, including a 4-year stint in Japan. Dottie fondly remembers their time at Langley Air Force Base in Virginia, where they lived across or down the street from John Glenn and other astronauts who piloted space crafts in the early years of the space program. She taught modeling tips remembered from her previous experiences, water ballet at the officer’s club pool, and organized charity fashion shows featuring officer’s wives and their children.

“I enjoyed being a military wife,” she said. “There’s such a bond.” During their 20 years in service, Dottie volunteered for everything from the Red Cross to Cub Scouts to Brownies, and hosted many cocktail parties in support of her husband’s career.

After Jimmie retired, the family moved home to San Antonio. After his death Dottie met and married “Mac” McCammon, and they blended their families to include his sons, Timothy and Rex. She credits her faith with the ability to manage five teenagers under one roof. The McCammons spent many years together until Mac’s death.

Dottie joined the Independence Hill Community and moved into her apartment in Assisted Living a few short months ago. She greatly enjoys the view of the greenery from her window and the plant-filled courtyard just outside her door, in which she can sit and greet fellow residents and friends. A people person, she is especially grateful for the camaraderie of her tablemates, with whom she enjoys sharing meals.

“I am so fortunate to dine with a group of loveliest people you could ever ask for,” she said.

Her daughter and two sons live in San Antonio and are able to visit often. Her family honored her with a glamorous 1940s movie starlet-style party complete with dancing and live music on her 80th birthday.