

Novelist undeterred by vision challenges

By **SUE REID**

Chagrin Falls resident Garry Gooding is living his dream in retirement – one page at a time.

Mr. Gooding, 76, a resident along South Main Street for the past 2 1/2 years, has penned five novels, honing his creative side since retiring in 2010 from a career in management.

His recent accolade, though, speaks to one of his personal life's hurdles, ocular histoplasmosis syndrome, resulting in vision challenges that led him to the love of audiobooks.

Recently, Mr. Gooding released the audiobook edition for his award-winning novel, "Fresh Snow on Bedford Falls," with narration from industry titan George Guidall. A sequel to the classic film "It's a Wonderful Life," one of Mr. Gooding's all-time favorite movies, the novel is a historic mystery that returns to the life of George Bailey on the day after the iconic movie ends.

"When my vision started going bad, I could not easily read printed material," said Mr. Gooding, who goes by the pen name GL Gooding.

His condition resulted in four major retinal detachments, with Mr. Gooding having to spend 18 to 20 hours a day lying on his side in his native Northern California home while allowing each eye to heal.

As a result, he began listening to audiobooks, which gave him an outlet to continue to enjoy the stories, he explained. "Reading books, for

me, is a two-dimensional and internal process. You read the words, process them and create an image in your head," he said.

"Audiobooks, to me, is adding a third dimension," Mr. Gooding said. "When you have a performer of books, you really sit back in the theater of the mind with a third element to it."

Regardless if one experiences vision loss or not, Mr. Gooding is pro audiobooks.

He still writes on a computer, despite his vision challenges, and once attended a class in Santa Rosa, California, for the visually impaired to hone his computer skills.

"My vision is not at that level," he said of complete loss, although he experiences blind spots regularly and no longer drives, "but I'm scared to death it will be.

"I went to those classes to see, no pun intended, the options out there down the road."

His wife, Sarah, also has health challenges, battling Alzheimer's disease. "We are no different than anyone else," he said of meeting life's ups and downs. "The two enjoy regular walks to town and sitting in the park with their dog Cooper.

While he used to write each and every day, Mr. Gooding has been busy creating audiobooks.

Mr. Gooding, who holds a Master of Business Administration from the University of Illinois, pursued his creative side at the urging of his late mother, Velma, finishing his first book in time for her 100th birthday. She died in 2018 at the age of 102 and was an inspiration to the



Chagrin Falls author GL Gooding, pictured with his beloved dog Cooper, recently released an audiobook of one of his popular novels. Vision challenges led to his love of audiobooks, with more planned in the future.

whole family, he said.

In the dedication for "Where Courage Began," he wrote, "To the two women who

inspired by writing: my wife Sarah, who has endured and encouraged me, while giving me honest feedback, and my late mother Velma, who nurtured my creativity, taught me persistence and instilled in me the joy of life."

In conversations with his mother about her life, growing up on a farm in Iowa with no power or electricity, he said it taught him the importance of capturing that information for future generations.

Also, in telling these stories, Mr. Gooding keeps his brain going, he said. "At my age, I didn't want to just sit in a chair." He said he was very active once in the business world, and writing gives him that stimulation. "I've always enjoyed the creative-writing process," he said, and have had abilities in the English language.

All of Mr. Gooding's works are fiction, and he is developing two more novels.

His intent for those who finish his books, which are available on Amazon, is to be uplifted and feel positive about the message he delivered, he said. "That's what 'It's a Wonderful Life' was for me. I wanted to write a book that continues that on."

He said writing a book on Chagrin Falls, an area he and his wife could not help but fall in love with after visiting, is not out of the question. "It would certainly be a good setting for a book," he said of the iconic town. "It is like a 'Wonderful Life Main Street' to me, not only with the people but the whole vista."