

COMMUNITY LIFE

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Approaching her 100th birthday, Elvina Wick sits in her room at Whispering Winds last week with a photo from her 1927 road trip. The girls were crossing the Smith River in Montana on horseback.

The wisdom of years

Bend resident celebrates 100 years of memories

By Jim Witty
The Bulletin

Elvina Wick is a remarkable woman. It's not necessarily that she'll be 100 years old Saturday. Or that she embarked on a cross-country road trip with several girlfriends at a time when such a thing was unheard of. Or that she's raised three good children and now dotes on her six grand-kids and nine great-grandchildren (a source of great pride).

It's all of those things and something else. Sit and chat with this gracious lady for a while and it's readily apparent that Wick has the wisdom to go along with her years.

Humble to a fault, she openly wonders what all the fuss is about. She counsels a reporter to throw out most

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of his notes, to condense her story to a short blurb. She sits, patient but a bit nonplussed, as a photographer snaps off shot after shot. She marvels that they're even there, and interested.

Then she smiles (her entire face lights up) and begins talking about her career and her family and her philosophy of life. And you realize you're in the company of a matriarch who's seen the world go from horse and buggy to fuel injection and adapted with an easy grace.

Remarkable.

Born in 1905 in Moorhead, Minn., across the Red River from Fargo, N.D., Wick attended North Dakota State and got in on the ground floor of a fledgling industry: film processing.

"It was just getting started," Wick recalled. "It was the first plant in Fargo."

The seasonal business (there weren't many snapshots taken in the dead of winter in the north country) afforded

Wick an opportunity to travel, which she did, working at film processing plants from the Midwest to Seattle, Eugene and Portland. Wick worked closely with noted Oregon anthropologist Luther Cressman, who documented the ancient Native American sandals found in the Fort Rock Cave.

But before that there was an epic road trip west to Montana and environs with three friends, where Wick and her chums rode horses, fished and saw the unleavened West from a Model T. She was 21.

In Eugene, she met her future husband, Lester, a former North Dakota cattleman. They were married in 1941.

After the war, the Wicks moved to Alfalfa, where they farmed for 14 years. Then it was on to Pilot Butte, where they grew potatoes, alfalfa and wheat and raised cattle and, at one point, 5,000 chickens.

Besides the home place, the Wicks "rented land and farmed all over Powell Butte," said son Don, a Bend physical therapist.

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Elvina Wick as she appeared in her 20s. She has many vintage photos in her apartment.



Andy Tullis / The Bulletin

Elvina Wick's son, Don, holds a scrapbook of his mother in cowgirl mode.

Centenarian Wicks' son Phil is CEO of Les Schwab Tires

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Along the way, the Wicks raised three sons — Phil, Lee and Don. Phil is now the chief executive officer of Les Schwab Tires and Lee is a retired school principal.

"She was a hard worker," said Don Wick. "She worked right out there on the farm with my dad ... And people always

tended to show up around noon, because they knew she was going to invite them in for lunch."

When husband Lester fell ill and passed away in 1987, Elvina moved to a home on 10th Street in Bend where she lived for many years. She recently moved in to Whispering Winds, a retirement facility in east Bend.

A member of the First Lutheran Church in Bend since 1948, Wick is still very much involved in the church. She's also a voracious knitter and sports fan.

"I love sports," she said. "I follow certain teams (the Seattle

Mariners)."

Wick attributes her longevity to a healthy attitude. She never smoked or drank, but she pretty much ate anything she wanted.

Her guiding philosophy: "Don't worry about tomorrow because it will come anyway."

"She's the best mom in the world," said Don Wick. "I never heard her say a bad word about anyone. She's always said you have to keep your minds and hands busy."

Phil Wick's wife, Lesley, noted that there's just something about her mother-in-law.

"People flock to her because

she has such a wonderful personality," she said. "She's just kind to everyone. Her family and friends adore her."

The Wicks are planning to get those family and friends together for a birthday bash honoring their remarkable mother on Saturday.

Meanwhile, Elvina remains unimpressed.

"If you put all that in there," she told the visiting press, "I'll have to leave town."

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