

# *Resident has touched many young lives during almost a century of living*

By John Koning

Whenever I have the privilege of interviewing someone in their 98th year, my mind is bursting with questions.

This was the case when I visited with 34-year-resident, Martha Engelhart.

How did a farm girl from Indiana end up here at On Top of the World? What was it like in the early days? How many young women actually teach their fathers how to drive a car, and how on earth does someone drive for 74 years without a single speeding ticket?

Here's what I learned.

Martha's life began in the summer of 1915 in typical rural style. As a child, her duties included gathering eggs each morning, getting corn to the horses and leading them as they pulled hay up into the mow.

One of Martha's earliest memories was that of their farm cat who was quick to relocate her newborn kittens, saving them from burial by hay during the harvest. She can still recall the cat's disgruntled cries as she carried each kitten to safety by the scruff of the neck while casting suspicious glances Martha's way.

As a schoolgirl, Martha recalls a unique opportunity to cut school with her father's blessing. The purpose was to take a 40 mile trip to Indianapolis by Model "T" to see presidential candidate F.D. Roosevelt, who was campaigning in the area. Her plan to play hookie would certainly have met with a different fate if the distinguished visitor had been a Republican.

Martha began playing piano at the age of 9 and dreamed of becoming a music teacher. Although she never taught music, she continues to tickle the ivories to this day. It is easy to see her love of music as her nimble fingers dance across the keys, filling her home



Martha Engelhart and her piano have been making music together for almost 90 years. (Photo by Sandra Lee-Engelhart)

with happy tunes. Certainly, this must be a factor in her remarkable longevity.

Martha considers the opportunity she was given to attend college to be a significant event in her life. The country was in the grips of depression at the time. Life was hard. Money was scarce, and, for millions of Americans, education was secondary to survival.

From Martha's high school graduating class, only she and another male classmate were able to attend college. Unfortunately, enrollment would have to wait until tuition money could be gathered.

While Martha waited for her collegiate opportunity, she worked as a nanny for a wealthy family who owned

thousands of children with her wit, wisdom and joie de vivre for the next 30 years.

While some teachers might question the impact they've had on the lives of their students, Martha need not wonder. Sometime in her early 90s, Martha received a letter from a former student, who had gone to the trouble of tracking her down. The student thanked her for her tutelage and informed Martha that she was the reason she had also become a teacher.

Charles Caleb Colton said it best, "Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery."

Not long after retiring, while Martha and her husband Ed were in line at Morrison's Cafeteria, in Clearwater, the couple behind them were praising an upstart condominium complex in the area called On Top of the World and encouraged them to have a look. As they passed through the massive front gate, Ed shot Martha a dubious glance and said, "We can't afford to live in a place like this."

Thirty-four years later, it's obvious that Ed was wrong on that count.

Martha has enjoyed watching OTOW grow and evolve. While the orange groves on the west side of Belcher Road and their aromatic blossoms have given way to buildings and traffic, this community we call home has blossomed in terms of activities, and social opportunities.

As she always has, Martha is taking it all in stride. You can see it in her smile and hear it in her infectious laugh.

By the way, Martha did actually teach her dad how to drive their first car after first learning from her boyfriend. Martha's 74 year driving legacy, from Model "T" Ford to Buick Century, concluded 100 percent ticket free and accident free on her 90th birthday.

Now that's something few of us can imitate.

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