



By Carolyn Lee

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Sitting around the table with three centenarians is a humble experience. Discussing 100 years of life is even more astounding.

That is an experience anyone can have at Imperial Manor/Heights, as there are three residents at the 100-year mark or over now.

Emma Mae Colson will be 105 on April 17. Olan Wallin will be 101 on July 14. And Valeria Thayer, as the youngest, will be 100 on Saturday, Feb. 16.

What's wonderful about the three, Activity Aide Sherry Coleman noted, was, "They're not only 100 but they have their minds and wonderful attitudes."

Aide Brenda Cahow added, "They're very positive. It gives me hope!"

All three grew up on farms, which they attribute in part to their longevity.

Colson said other than that, "It's something I can't answer. I never played much" as a child, as there were always other children to take care of.

Wallin doesn't know if he's done anything "right" about living to be 100. And Thayer said, "I just kept on going."

Thayer was born in Wymore, Neb. She drove a wagon and just about anything else with horses. She attended a rural school, then high school in town, obtaining her normal school certificate.

That allowed her to teach at her high school, as well as at a rural school.

But before that, when she graduated from high school at age 16, her mother took her and her brother to visit family in Czechoslovakia as a graduation present.

Thayer moved from Grant to Imperial last fall.

Colson was born just over the state line in Colorado. Her family moved to the Lamar area when she was six months old, then to the Sterling, Colo. area, then back to Nebraska.

She also took normal training to become a teacher while at Chase County High School, subsequently teaching in rural schools in the Lamar area.

Wallin was born in Phillips County, Colo., where his grandfather homesteaded. His family moved to the Chase County homestead, 12 miles west of Imperial in 1917.

Wallin attended Dist. 66 school northeast of their house, leaving after the eighth grade to farm with his father.

Colson worried about the possibility of her father having to serve in World War I. Then she worried about her husband possibly serving in World War II.

Wallin was visited by the U.S. Army during WWII, when he was farming and raising hogs. The Army decided he was doing more good raising rations for the troops than by being a soldier.

However, both Wallin and Colson's husband Loren would have been called up had the war not ended when it did.

Thayer said that although she and husband Marion lived in Grant during the war, her mother

still lived on the farm, and kept them supplied with food.

Interestingly enough, the Thayers lived in what was the library at the Grant High School during the war. Two other couples also lived at the school, due to a lack of housing.

All three remembered rationing of sugar and butter.

“We were pretty lucky on the farm and had our own food,” Colson commented. Wallin added that he could take his wheat to Champion to have the local mill grind it into flour, which was also rationed.

It should be mentioned that Wallin and Colson have “been friends for years,” Wallin said. “I’ve always known Olan,” Colson noted.

The two and their spouses used to fish together at Enders Reservoir. Wallin claims that Colson always caught the most fish.

They would back their campers up to each other, and Olan and Mary would provide the table while the Colsons provided the stove. Then they’d cook their fish.

Wallin remembers his first telephone, attached to a barbed wire fence.

Colson said her husband helped build the first telephone building, somewhere around 1946.

Now, Wallin marvels at the fact that his grandchildren and great grandchildren can take pictures with their cell phones and send them to a “thing in my room that rotates the pictures,” an electronic picture frame.

Houses with electricity were one of Thayer’s most memorable changes in 100 years.

And laughter exploded at the table when Colson exclaimed, “One of the most important things to a woman is the washing machine.” Wallin made a circular motion with his arm and added that he had been a manual washing machine.

Toilet paper. Now, that was a biggie.

And the introduction of cars was a big memory. Colson’s family’s first car was purchased when she was 14 years old.

Also, all three had farmed for years with horses hitched to wagons or old farm machinery. “If they could just see some of these combines now,” Colson said of farmers of the early 1900s.

Valentine’s Day

As today (Thursday) is Valentine’s Day, Colson’s thoughts turned to her grade school days, when the students made Valentines out of wallpaper books and catalogues.

They made Valentines for everyone in school. The teacher would hand them out for the students to put in their Valentine mailboxes, which they also made.

Thayer also remembers homemade Valentines.

Wallin said he and Mary probably celebrated the holiday by eating out, “because we ate out a lot. That was what we really enjoyed.”

If you’re visiting the Manor, where Colson and Thayer reside, or the Heights, where Wallin can be located, stop and learn more about life in the last 100 years. It’s fascinating!