

Compassion, humor and sleeping with the window open lead to long life
Local woman prepares to celebrate 100th birthday

By Amy Blum

Her lineage can be traced to a signer of The Declaration of Independence, Commonwealth politicians, English knights and Scottish lords among many others. However, to those who know and love her, Lois (McNeil) Duxbury wears a badge of humility decorated with compassion, loyalty and humor.

Though she's not sure where the last century went so quickly, Lois will turn 100 on August 21. An open house celebration will be held Saturday, August 18 from 2-4 p.m. at the Presbyterian Fellowship Hall in Miller.

Lois was born on the family homestead south of Wessington in 1912. Her parents, Clyde & Sarah (Dahlman) McNeil, raised their six children to appreciate each day, care for others and keep a positive attitude no matter the circumstances. Their example has been valuable in Lois' life. She has weathered many storms in her 100 years with true strength and a smile.



Lois Duxbury credits good humor, fresh air and compassion for others to living a long, healthy life.

In her simple, uncomplaining manner, Lois recalls the struggle of transitioning from country school to town school in Wessington as a lesson in appreciating others.

"Going to school in town was very hard," she said. "They [her parents] took me to town on Sunday night, and I stayed until Friday evening. I am so grateful for the friends I had and the family I stayed with. It wasn't an easy time."

Obvious challenges include the Great Depression years. Lois recalls the importance of not wasting anything, and she can still see the grasshoppers devouring wood fence posts. The suffocating heat and blinding dirt was too much for many people in the 1930s. Those years, however, mark some of Lois' most joyful times.

On September 14, 1933, she married Joy Duxbury. Over the next years, the couple welcomed four children—Robert "Bob" (Rose Radcliffe), Joyce (Gene Rowen), Wendell "Jack" (Shirley Orr) and Jean (John Lakner). Whether sewing flour sack dresses, cooking delicious meals or sleeping in the back of a truck at the State Fair, Lois has always been dedicated to her family.

"Mom has always been such a help to all of us," her son Jack said. "She is a patient, understanding, calm and caring woman. I've carried the way she helped us with our 4-H projects as an especially great memory and valuable lesson all these years."

Daughter Joyce added, "As an adult, I've come to appreciate Mom's genuine interest and concern for the whole family, her friends and those around her. She's always pleased for company and continues to be such a hospitable woman."

Five generations later, Lois' family remains her pride and joy. She continues to dote over her 14 grandchildren, 33 great-grandchildren and finds special joy in her seven great-great grandchildren. In fact, five years ago when her oldest great-great grandchildren were born six weeks early, she loaded up with daughter Jean and headed to Sioux Falls for some good old-fashioned baby-rocking in the NICU.



A visit from a child always lights up Duxbury's face with a smile, especially when she is under the weather.

"The excitement Mom still gets over every new baby is so great to me," daughter Jean said. "I love it when Mom answers the phone, and kids are the company she has. I can always tell the difference in her voice when she's holding a baby or absorbed in the energy of little ones!"

Lois believes staying involved with family, friends and community is key to a long, rewarding life. Her belief has been evident in many ways throughout the years.

She cared for her father-in-law in later months of his life, could almost always be found with a grandchild or two and stayed with her mother Sarah during the last months of her battle with breast cancer. Lois also displayed great strength for her family in 1986 as she cared for and said goodbye to her husband of just over 50 years.

"Mom was so strong through Dad's sickness and passing," son Bob said. "I know she cried. I know she hurt. But, even though we were adults, she stayed strong and positive for all of us kids. Mom is such a supportive, compassionate, loyal woman. She remains a wonderful example to all of us."

During life's storms and joys, Lois has also cherished knowing she could count on dear friends like Marge Duxbury, Marge McNeil, Beth Potter and Dwight Stubbs. The friendships she built over the last decades led to rousing card games, serious Scrabble contests and excellent tea time conversations.

While Lois hasn't lived an easy life, she does live a blessed life. Her mind is sharp, and reading the daily paper helps her stay on top of local and world events.

As her birthday nears, Lois admits no longer being able to walk is a frustrating disappointment. But, she enjoys the exercise bike in the nursing home's rec room, and with a trademark twinkle in her eye, has decided her 100th year might be the perfect time to see just how many miles she can put on those two wheels.

"I think I'll start by riding to Rapid City," she said.

Friends can call on Lois anytime at the Good Samaritan Center in Miller, and everyone is welcome to share in the birthday celebration at the Presbyterian Church in Miller on Saturday, August 18 from 2-4.