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Elsie Battaglia is already planning 101st birthday party

Friends, fun and family fill the entire day on Dec. 12

BY BARBARA SHERMAN
The Regal Courier, Dec 29, 2011, Updated Dec 29, 2011

Ron and Eleanor Hight, owners of the Original Pancake House, threw Elsie Battaglia one heck of a 100th birthday party Dec. 12.

About 75 friends and relatives came from Canada, Indiana, California, Colorado and other places to celebrate at the restaurant on Barbur Boulevard in Portland.



FAMILY REUNION - Elsie Battaglia's two sons, Gerald (left) and Robert Warnock, came to visit her in December before her 100th birthday party Dec. 12. Despite losing their dad early in life, both went on to earn their doctorates and enjoy successful careers.

Elsie, who is a longtime King City resident, first met the restaurant's original owner, Lester Hight, the father of Ron, in 1950 when she asked him to cater a meal for 300 for her sorority convention at Jantzen Beach shortly after it opened, and they became longtime friends.

Now Ron and Eleanor not only run the restaurant, they have 120 franchises all over the U.S. and one coming in Japan; last year, they asked Elsie if they could throw her a 100th birthday party, and the restaurant was packed for the occasion.

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Elsie, dressed in pink with matching boa and crown, first greeted guests as they entered the restaurant and then sat at a place of honor at a table with family members, including her sons Gerald and Robert Warnock.

The pink beribboned invitation said it all, capturing the "modern inventions" that have occurred over Elsie's lifetime:

- "From my pigtails being put in an inkwell... to ballpoint pen ink all over my fingers;
- "From wood stoves... to microwave ovens;
- "From ice boxes... to Frigadares... to ice cubes falling from the refrigerator door;
- "From my Quinnie Horsey on the farm... to my Pogo Dog and Smokie Kitty;
- "From my horse and buggy accident... to whizzing around in my pink VW bug;
- "From listening to Crystal sets... to laughing at Jack Benny... to looking at pictures on a phone;
- "From Prohibition... to bathtub gin... to gin and raisins every morning;
- "From meeting President Roosevelt at the Timberline Lodge dedication... to watching the first African American President on TV;
- "From getting married at 16 and widowed at 23;
- "From having the two most remarkable sons ever... to the most amazing four grandchildren to ever be born;
- "To the most extraordinary and awesome great-grandchildren ever..."

During the breakfast at the Original Pancake House, a steady stream of photos of Elsie throughout her life played on a video, and several relatives and friends told "Elsie" stories.

But no one tells her life story better than Elsie does, starting with her birth in Boring, where she grew up; she attended her first year of high school in Gresham before her family moved to Portland, where she attended Franklin High School.

However, on the way to finishing high school, Elsie got married.

Elsie could almost be called the original groupie: A friend of hers played in a band, and she went to one of his Friday night sock hops with a friend to hang out; playing in the band that night was a University of Oregon student in Portland for the weekend.

"He was just darling," said Elsie, who gave him her phone number.

The cute guy, Bob Warnock, called Elsie at 10 p.m., which made her grandmother "very leery," but he was invited over.

Elsie, who was all of 16 at the time, said, "I lit a fire in the fireplace, and we talked for 15 minutes, and he asked me to marry him. I said yes, because I thought it was a college line. We dated for six months and got married. It was a wonderful romance.

"My father-in-law owned the Rex Arms Apartments at 12th and Southeast Morrison. We went there to manage them when I was a bride."

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