

# 100 years

and counting...

BY: CARLA VIANNA

*Meet three of Gainesville's centenarians  
who are wise beyond their years.*



# Grace Winslow

Grace Winslow sat on a loveseat in her Turkey Creek Forest home, which is nestled in between towering trees and lush green brushes. Inside, she was surrounded by paintings and family photographs. She was dressed in all pink, from her flowered shirt down to her painted nails.

Looking at her, one would never guess that on April 30, Winslow did something that not many others live to do — she turned 100 years old.

"All you do is wake up in the morning. You wake up, and you have another day on your life. Well, it happened with me, and they kept going on and on and on," she said, laughing.

Her laughter was full of life. A life well lived, she said.

Winslow was born in 1913, and grew up in Yonkers, New York. She recalled her teenage years, chatting about the Great Depression as nonchalantly as one would talk about the weather.

"We didn't have money, we were like everybody else back then," she said. "If I went to school with you and you had a dress that fit me, we'd change dresses for a few days. If you had to go through high school with a couple of skirts and a couple of blouses, it's no fun. But we made out. Everybody was in the same boat; it was the depression."

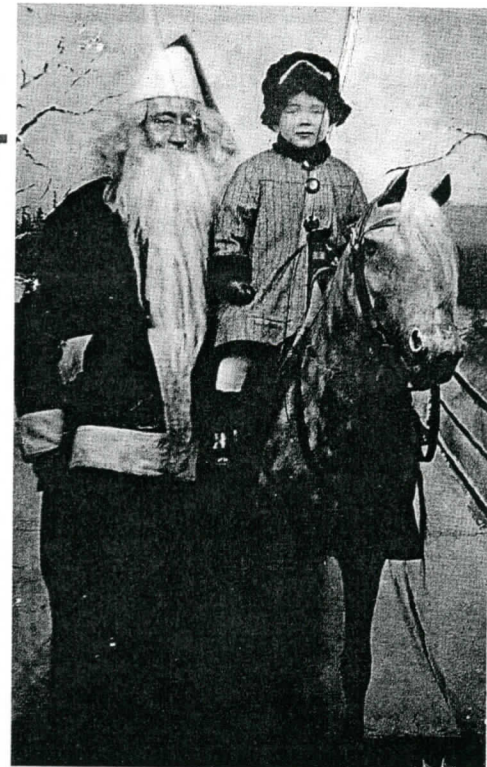
But the depression didn't dampen her enthusiasm. Reminiscing, Winslow said she had a happy childhood. She had a tight group of friends who went to high school together, and everyone knew each other.

"I went to Public School Number 19, and I remember it was up a big hill," she said. "Boy! Those days when you were young, you made that hill like nothing."

In her time, if kids wanted to go to the pool they'd go to the city pool. It was big and didn't cost anything — a hot spot for dating. Winslow said the boys were truly great back then, real gentlemen. She never had to worry about making it home in one piece.

One weekend, she visited a couple of friends in Poughkeepsie, New York, and met Kenny Winslow. The sparks flew instantly, and Kenny Winslow didn't hesitate to ask if he could call her and she said yes.

"The next Sunday I got a call, and he said 'Can I come down next Sunday and we'll go some place?' Which we did, and we went to only the best places! He spent a week's



salary on that Sunday," Grace Winslow said, smiling giddily.

About five months later, they were married. Kenny Winslow took her to the best restaurants, where she'd dance the night away to the classic voice of Frank Sinatra or the piano melodies of Eddie Duchin.

"Oh, what fun!" she said. "Kenny was a wonderful dancer, he was."

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Over the years, fashions have made new statements, customs have gone through transformations and technology has advanced. Sometimes, it was hard to keep up with the fast-paced, ever-changing society.

"Oh, you have to adjust," Winslow said. "As a rule, at least in my case, I had to adjust."

Telephones, she said, always remind her of her mother. Winslow and her sister



Nancy would come to their mother's rescue when the "talking-machine" would ring.

"She was so scared of it!" Winslow said, laughing hysterically. "She would get on it, hold it out and look at it. Then finally she'd get enough courage to quickly get the message. Then she'd say, 'Nance! Grace!'"

In the early 1950s, Winslow moved to Pompano Beach, Fla. She worked as a legal secretary for most of her life, before retiring at 65. But she didn't give in to retirement so easily.

"I remember I went down to social security, looked in the window and saw all these gray-haired ladies sitting there. I said to Kenny, 'I'm not ready for that' and he says, 'Honey you're old, too. Don't forget,' which went over like a lead balloon," she said.

A year later she went back and decided she was one of those gray-haired ladies.

On Christmas Eve in 1986, Grace Winslow and Kenny Winslow spent their first night in Gainesville, at the home she lives in now. She was married to Kenny for 63 years before he passed away.

Today, Grace Winslow has two children, four grandchildren, six great-grandchildren, and two great-great-grandchildren.

Whether she has family members coming over for a visit, or the neighborhood girls going for breakfast, she is always in good company.

When she has some time alone, you can find her sewing. Now that her granddaughter, Kara, has outgrown the need for grandma's handmade sweaters, Winslow sews for charity, and Raggedy Ann dolls are her specialty. Every newborn in the family is greeted with one of Winslow's dolls and hundreds more have been given to children in need.

Winslow's compassion and 100 years of life was celebrated at a birthday extravaganza on a beautiful spring day. The birthday party featured special food platters with the birthday girl's favorites, and the cake was iced in pink, from top to bottom.

"It was wonderful! The family just showed up and kept coming and coming and coming," she said.

So, the question still lingers: How did she make it to 100? Well, Winslow said she has always been very active. Her daily routine after retirement involved working out every morning from 9 to 10 a.m.

Laughter has something to do with it, too. One hundred years may have passed, but her humor and positivity have not been tarnished.

"I guess it was when I turned 80," she said, "people kept saying to me 'Gee, that's a long life to live,' and I figured well, you just wake up in the morning, and you have another day on it."



## Edwin Heims

Edwin "Ed" Heims was born on Sept. 5, 1908. He is 104 years old, living in a spacious and neatly kept room at HarborChase, an assisted living community.

Heims grew up on a ranch in North Dakota. His early childhood was like most at the time, but at the age of 10, he became an orphan.

"It was the first year of the great influenza epidemic, and it killed both of my parents," he said. "My grandfather put me into child labor, and I labored like a man. I lived and worked in child labor until I was about 19 years old, when I decided I had had enough of that. I ran away."

He tried once, he said, and it didn't work. But the second time, he ended up in the midst of people and buildings in downtown Chicago.

Despite it being during the Great Depression, Heims always managed to find one job after another, from restaurant work to bookkeeping.

One Sunday evening, he met Gertrude, a Canadian girl vacationing in Chicago. He married her when he was around 30 years old, he said, and they were married for 60 years. They had one son, Neil, who now lives in Gainesville, too.

For a hardworking man who stayed afloat

*"I lived all my life under a system where you work for a living, and now everybody seems to be scrambling to get money without working"*

during the Great Depression, the way society is today seems a bit warped to Heims.

"I liked living the way it was," he said. "I lived all my life under a system where you work for a living, and now everybody seems to be scrambling to get money without working."

Heims enjoys the perks of being 104 — it's enjoyable, relaxing and the help is great, he said.

"There's no secret ... it's just the case that I got lucky!" he said.



# Alvera Davison

Alvera Davison is 99 and a half years old, happily looking forward to her 100th birthday this December.

Born in Malden, Mass., Davison was quite the basketball player and long-distance swimmer in her day, and she always maintained a healthy diet. She still did not think she would live this long, she joked.

Her childhood was ordinary, she said. The kids would play outside back then. Hopscotch, jump rope, marbles and tag replaced Facebook, video games and TV.

It was a beautiful Saturday morning during her college days when Davison met her future husband, who she proudly described as a Harvard man.

"I was selling flowers outside of the YMCA for a charitable organization, and he came up with his tennis racket," she said. "I thought, 'oh he's cute!' So I said to him, 'Wouldn't you like to buy a flower today to help this organization?' He said, 'I don't have any money with me, but I'll bring some tonight,' and he did."

She was 18 at the time. Four years later, they were married.

Davison taught kindergarten for 20 years at a U.S. Panama Canal military base, where her husband worked.

"I had 36 children in my class and no assistant in those days," she said. "It worked out well. Whenever the governor had visitors, he brought them to my room because the discipline was so good, and my room was so beautifully decorated. I loved it."

At 99 years old, Davison still has the heart of a teacher. Every Thursday, she holds a class for the memory care unit at Oak Hammock, the retirement community that she lives in.

"They love it," she said. "I teach them songs, poems, music, news and games. They love story time because I bring them the story when I'm reading it, and they participate. It's amazing."

Davison stressed the importance of love in each of her classrooms. She thinks that society today lacks this essential ingredient, and that relationships between people have become distant and impersonal.

"It's the way our society is now, it's completely different than when I grew up," she said. "I feel sorry for the present generation. They're having a rough time. A lot of it stems from the home, I think. The parents are not showing the love, concern and interest in the child like they used to." ●



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