

100 Years of Life, Transition, and Love for ADP Member Annie Margaret Kesler

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Annie and family celebrate her birthday.

Annie Margaret Kesler said her job as a teacher at her church was to teach children to “get rid of their stage fright.”

“I would give the children a verse to learn and when they were called up on stage they would recite it, bow, and then go off the stage,” Miss Margaret said. “I had them trained because you know kids can drive you crazy if you let them.”

However, no one can accuse Miss Margaret of having “stage fright.” During her birthday party on November 1 at CHEER’s Sand Hill Adult Day Program, she entertained and fascinated fellow seniors, staff, and guests with her memories of her 100 years of life.

Some of those memories included ironing clothes with a heated rock put inside a sock so she didn’t burn her hands. She lived with no electricity and no telephone. “My mother always said, ‘make do with what you’ve got,’” Miss Margaret said passing along her mother’s sage advice.

The highly alert, feisty birthday girl was also very proud of her sister who, at the time, was the only Black woman working at the Pennsylvania Gas Company. “They had this big window in the front of their building along the street where my sister sat and worked along with two White girls,” Miss Margaret explained. “Both of those other girls were gone, and my sister was the one who stayed the longest with the company.”

Growing up in Philadelphia, Pa., Miss Margaret was the second oldest of eight siblings – four girls and four boys. She is the last surviving child in her family. Miss Margaret revealed that her father always called her “Big Daughter.” She retired from the Philadelphia School District at the age of 70 after 25 years as a teacher’s aide. She was very active in her church and for many years was the Bible Study Superintendent at United House of Prayer of All People Church.

Miss Margaret laughs when she says she was “fortunate to marry a young man” who was a serviceman in World War II and the Korean War. The couple had four children – three boys and a girl. Her daughter, Linda Miller, lives in Washington, D.C.; son, Matt, lives in North Carolina; son, Walter, passed away two years ago; and son, James, lives in Georgetown, Del. She sometimes calls James her “older brother” because now that she has aged James’ nurturing of her reminds her of her older brother.

Miss Margaret lived independently until she was 95 years old in an apartment in West Philadelphia until the Covid pandemic hit the nation. The state took the social workers out of the center Philly apartment complexes so five years ago, James became worried about his mother’s safety and insisted she move to Georgetown and live with him and his wife, Tammy, who are both now retired. Ironically, the house sits at the corner of Margaret and James streets and is the same exact floor plan as James and Tammy’s former house in Philadelphia.

“She loves to sit out on our second-floor deck and watch the world,” Tammy says about her mother-in-law. “I’ve found her on some chilly days sitting out there wrapped up in a blanket. She loves living in Delaware. She says it is very clean and quiet.”

Miss Margaret began going to CHEER’s Sand Hill Adult Program three years ago after it reopened following Covid. She attends three days a week and Tammy says she loves the friends she has made here. “Everybody loves me,” Miss Margaret joked.

As part of the birthday celebration, CHEER's Chief Executive Officer Beckett Wheatley presented Miss Margaret with a membership certificate for the CHEER Centenarian Club. The honor recognizes the member's 100 years of age and her continued enjoyment of the activities and services of CHEER.

Miss Margaret says she has enjoyed the transition of how different the world is today from what it was 100 years ago. She believes our nation put the world together. "It came about because of education," Miss Margaret stressed. "You can't learn too much. There is always a need for more education." What a beautiful legacy that advice is to leave her four grandchildren and three great-grandchildren, plus all the other young people of the world.