

## Eileen Rudder still a little ornery at 100

Written by Darci Tomky

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What is the secret to long life? “Being ornery,” said Eileen Rudder with a chuckle.

They say laughter is the best medicine, and Rudder certainly comes with a unique sense of humor.

She will celebrate her 100th birthday Sunday, Dec. 6. and will become Holyoke’s third centenarian this year.

Her family is hosting a celebration Sunday at SunSet View Community Center in Holyoke, from 2-4 p.m.

Eileen Dorothea was born Dec. 6, 1909 in Union, Neb., the youngest of Henry and Maria Eichel’s 11 children. The couple had immigrated from Germany in the 1880s, married and had four daughters and seven sons, three of which died at birth.

The family traveled to Holyoke by immigrant car in 1911. Eichel bought a team and wagon, loaded up their belongings and headed to the sod house on the Pat Loughman place where they would make their home 15 miles southwest of Holyoke. Wages with its Post Office, store and church was just three miles away.

Within the next several years, Rudder and her family moved to a couple different farms. Either riding a horse or walking, she attended Lakeside School #87 and then North Star School District #34 in Yuma County where she completed her education through the eighth grade. Her older sister Pearl was a teacher Rudder’s last year there for the 12 students in the North Star School.

Working on the farm was something Eileen was accustomed to, milking their 13 cows and helping out with the horses, pigs, chickens, corn and wheat. Rudder said they had a large garden and grew a lot of the food they ate.

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While living on the farm as a child, Rudder said her dad was really protective when storms threatened the family, always making them go to the cellar. While they did have some bad storms, she said they never had any tornadoes get too close to their farm.

As a farm girl, Rudder loved riding horses. With an ornery smile spreading across her face, she recalled one Fourth of July in Wages. Along with several other women, Rudder raced her horse in a course across the countryside. Even though she didn't win, her horse still took her on one wild ride she won't soon forget.

Living so many miles away from Holyoke, Rudder remembers her parents made their way into town only twice a month.

"There weren't too many businesses in Holyoke back then," she said. First National Bank, the grain elevators, the grocery store and the Golden Rule store are some of the Holyoke landmarks that came to mind.

Saturday night, said Rudder, was the night all the farmers would go to town and visit with the people they knew. Besides the Saturday night dances in Holyoke, Rudder said they would go dancing in Wauneta and at barn dances on friends' farms.

As a teenager, Rudder had the opportunity to experience life in Holyoke when she lived with Mr. and Mrs. George Garland, working for her room and board while attending high school in Holyoke. Getting up early to do work, going to school and then preparing the supper meal became a daily routine for Rudder.

A new chapter in her life blossomed when Eileen met Earl Rudder. During corn harvest at the Eichel farm, the women cooked meals for the men that were helping with harvest, one of whom happened to be Earl. It was over these meals the two met and soon started dating.

The couple married Oct. 26, 1928 when Eileen was just 18 years old. They had two children, Earl and Gwen.

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One of Rudder's many jobs over the years was waitressing. She waited tables for Mrs. Anna Burress in a small cafe just north of Holyoke's Zimmerman Hotel with a small dining area that could only hold 14 people at a time. The young wife made \$1.50 a week, including Earl's breakfast and lunch.

Other jobs included a telephone operator and manager at Phillips County Telephone Co., a clerk at Holyoke Drug Store and Smythe's Department Store and an employee of the ASCS office in Holyoke. Earl worked as a State Highway Department employee.

While her husband died in 1982, Rudder has since been blessed with many grandchildren, great-grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren who she loves spoiling and spending time with. Rudder also had a tea-cup apricot poodle named Copper Penny who was her pride and joy.

Some of Rudder's hobbies over the years included camping, traveling, crocheting and cooking.

Family and friends can attest that one thing Rudder still has after all these years is her sense of humor. "I like to give the ladies a bad time," she said. "They want to know something, and I'll tell them just about anything."

At almost 100 years old, it's good to know she still has a bit of orneriness left in her!