

HALLOWELL

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[102-year-old: Get out and do it](#)

Hallowell woman looks back on long life she still enjoys

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HALLOWELL -- Beatrice Robbins looks at the painting on her wall and smiles. The dark, mingling colors create an image of a vase of flowers that is both ordinary and comfortable.



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FOREVER YOUNG: Beatrice Robbins, 102, plays the piano after the birthday party held in her honor Saturday in the lobby of her home at Granite Hill Estates in Hallowell. Robbins, who turned 102 on Monday, said her hearing is slightly diminished but she still loves the sound of music.

Staff photo by Andy Molloy

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But what keeps Robbins coming back to the painting as she talks to a visitor is not just the quality of work, it's the story underneath. How the woman who painted it hid it away, fearing others would notice the shortcomings so obvious to the creator, and finally decided to be rid of it. The artist shipped it off to a rummage sale, to be sold anonymously, only Robbins heard the story before the artist could make a clean getaway. Someone has since offered Robbins \$50 for the painting. She wouldn't sell it for twice that.

"That lady painted that picture and put it in the attic because she didn't think it was any good,"

Robbins said. "I have enjoyed it."

Robbins turned 102 Monday. The most important thing she has learned in all those years is right out of a Nike commercial: Just do it.

"The important thing is to do it," she said. "It's maybe not going to be great, but do it."

Robbins holds tight to the proof of her convictions. There are the hundreds of pages of stories she has written recalling days of her childhood on her parents New Gloucester farm. Robbins put the stories to paper after her daughter was born when Robbins' aging mother realized her granddaughter was unlikely to ever really know her. Robbins children had the book bound and entitled it, "Ways of Her Household," a reference to a passage in Proverbs 31 extolling the virtues of a Godly woman.

Next to that book is the collection of poetry Robbins has written, also bound by her family, inspired by her favorite poets: Robert Frost, Edna St. Vincent Millay and Emily Dickinson, who like the painter of Robbins' flowers, hid much of her work from public view. Robbins can't help but marvel at the thought.

"Do it!" she exclaimed.

Robbins was the first child born in New Gloucester, arriving Jan. 2, 1910; two year before the Titanic sank and fans first spilled into Boston's Fenway Park.

"They expected me on Christmas," Robbins said. "I was late. I was born on a Sunday morning."

She graduated from New Gloucester High School in 1927 and worked toward a teaching certificate, taking breaks from learning to earn money teaching during the depression. She graduated from Gorham Teacher College in 1933 and later earned an education degree through University of Maine extension courses.

The depression helped shaped Robbins in ways she still has not completely understood. She recalls walking in the cold because there was no money to buy fuel for the car. Her father was a selectman and Robbins would sometimes help him hand out food collected by the town. She remembers clearly the time she wanted to get a gift for her mother, so she splurged two cents to buy peppermint candy.

"She said, 'Beatrice, you shouldn't have,' " Robbins recalled. "We were counting pennies."

The extravagance eventually proved worthwhile.

"She ate the patty," Robbins said, smiling wide at the memory of her mother's enjoyment.

Robbins married Rev. Douglas Robbins in 1942. A year later Douglas Robbins began ministering at the Unitarian Universalist Community Church on Winthrop Street in Augusta. The couple stayed at the church for the next 30 years. Douglas Robbins passed away in 1980.

"When I was getting married people would say, 'Don't marry a minister,' " Beatrice Robbins said. "I'd say, 'Why? Would you rather I married a jail bird?' "

Douglas and Beatrice Robbins had one daughter, Carol Robbins, who works as a nurse at

MaineGeneral Medical Center. Carol and her ex-husband had four children who have given Beatrice Robbins five great-grandchildren. She delights in spending time with all of them. A few of them will be on hand tonight when the Hallowell City Council presents Robbins with the Boston Post Cane as the city's oldest resident.

Beatrice lives comfortably at Granite Hill Estates, where she has lived since it opened in 2000, but poor eyesight and hearing and other health concerns make it difficult to continue many of things she has enjoyed.

"Most things are in the past," she said.

Still, Robbins doesn't hesitate when asked if she still enjoys life after 102 years.

"Yes I do," she said. "It doesn't seem to be any concern of mine what day the ultimate is going to happen or the year or anything. Why should I dwell on that? I won't know it."

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