

Margaret Shirk: serving the Red Cross since 1966

Marsha Henry Goff

Margaret Lewis Shirk, 98, lives in the rural Lawrence home, built by her grandfather in 1922, where she grew up. At 10 years of age and for many years after, Margaret — who learned to drive in an alfalfa field — drove the family car to their bank in Lawrence and returned with \$1,000 in cash which her father used to pay the potato pickers. “My dad trusted me. He would call the bank and they’d have the money ready for me. I did that for 5 or 6 years. And the bank knew I was capable of doing it.”

Young Margaret pulled her weight on the farm and considers her childhood idyllic. She also recalls riding her pony, with a jug on each side, to the fields to “feed the potato pickers.”

She graduated from Liberty Memorial High School in 1935 and entered KU where she studied economics, worked during the summers and graduated in 1939. She is an avid Jayhawk fan. “I’ve had season football and basketball tickets since I was married in 1940. No matter where we lived, I always worked at KU in the summers because my mother lived here and I could bring the kids and leave them and she was always glad to have them and they were glad to come. My children were born in 1942 and 1944 and my husband went to the service for four and a half years.”

Her late husband, David, was a high school physical educa-

tion teacher and coach and the family lived in several different cities where he was employed. “I gave KU some money in his honor for the school of education. I told them ‘I don’t want it for football or basketball. I want it for physical education because that’s what he was: a physical education teacher.’”

When her mother died in 1966, she and David moved into the farm home. Margaret worked as a broker selling stocks and bonds. “I came by it naturally, because — when I was five years old in 1922 — my dad bought me a hundred shares of Kansas Power and Light and said, ‘I want you to keep it and add to it.’”

She began her Red Cross work in 1966. “I wear my Red Cross costume that I’ve had since then and I’m the only one who has one left in Lawrence and we had them for everyone when I was chapter chairman. I don’t know what they did with theirs, but I still have mine, so I wear it.” During the October Red Cross blood drive, she was presented with a cake celebrating her 98th birthday.

In 1960, Margaret, then living in Topeka, was diagnosed with breast cancer. She had a mastectomy, but she and her husband agreed she did not want further treatment. However her doctor told her that the Mayo Clinic was giving a one-shot treatment and suggested she try it. “So I said OK and after he gave it to me, I asked what it was and he said ‘horse serum.’ That’s what he said. I’ve been galloping ever



At 98, Margaret Shirk is productive, energetic, volunteers to help others and loves her Jayhawks.

since.”

“You know — well, I’m not bragging because I’m fortunate — but I don’t have an ache or a pain and I’ve never had anything wrong with me since I had cancer in 1960. Asked if she can explain her longevity, she says, “You know what? I think part of the problem with people is they worry and they don’t relax. I don’t worry. I try to relax.” She plays bridge and has a multitude of friends. She also exercises and loves to walk her daily “30 laps around the house, but I’ve got it down to 10 when it’s hot.”

Margaret is rich in family and greatly loved and appreci-

ated by children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. She is proud of a grandson who owns a dance studio in Chicago and is internationally known. “He gets that dancing from me,” she says. My husband could never dance. I love to dance. My dad taught me to dance when I was four years old up here at Midland. The neighbors would get together and he just had me dancing all the time. I still get in front of the TV and dance. And then when I go to the basketball games, every once in a while Baby Jay dances with me. I just always liked to dance.”

You go, Margaret! It doesn’t get any better than that!

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