

## **101 YEARS OF FUN MEANS: “TO KNOW HER IS TO LOVE HER”**

**by Marie Coady**

**I spent a pleasant afternoon recently with my old friend Ruth Boyden. I know my friend will not be upset to be called old, because she is happy to claim each and everyone of her 101 years. But she did pose an interesting question.**

**We were discussing her upcoming 101st birthday this July 20th, when she suddenly quipped, “Since there are so many of us now, what do you suppose we should do with all the old people?” That got me to thinking. What indeed? So I researched the question for Ruth through a timeline she could well understand.**

**According to a study done by Duke University, 20 percent of all people in the US who live past their 65th birthday will most likely become centenarians. In fact, the over 65 age group increased by 87 percent while the 25 and under age group increased by a mere 13 percent. Duke also found that a child born today has a 10 times better chance of living to 100 if they lived past the age of 65. So it seems 65 is a kind of benchmark for surviving into very, very old age, and the more people who survive past their 65th birthday, the more centenarians.**

**So what will we do with all those centenarians? Our historical record of caring for the elderly is not very good. Throughout colonial and post Revolutionary times the system in place for caring for those who couldn't care for themselves was based on servitude. The poor and elderly were auctioned off to the highest bidder and as such were at the mercy of the person who got the contract. So much for privatization.**

**So, about 1825, communities decided that it would be cheaper and more efficient if they set aside one place to put the elderly and indigent and thus the “poorhouse movement” came into being.**

**But by the mid 1800s questions began to arise about the management of the poorhouses and investigations found that not only were there horrendous abuses, they were no more efficient at saving the taxpayers money than they were at reducing the number of poor. What a revelation!**

In spite of findings of abuse and inefficiency in the “poorhouse movement”, nothing was done until much later, because the country had more important things on its mind. Like the Civil War, which unwittingly fed into the poorhouse system by creating more widows and orphans and depriving the elderly of family members who could support them.

Those revelations of abuse had reached monumental proportions by the late 1800s and may have been just the catalyst that prompted William Tidd, grandson of James Thompson, to deed the property at 74 Elm Street, Woburn in 1889, to the Home for Aged Women, renamed the Tidd Home in 1953. Since then our system for caring for the elderly has improved by leaps and bounds, as Ruth Boyden, a resident of the Tidd Home can attest. Ruth thinks of the Tidd Home as her home, a stark contrast to the poorhouse system.

Ruth has always called Woburn her home and wouldn't consider living anywhere else. Her memories of the city go back a ways, but I won't bore you with them. If you want to know more, all you need do access a Web site called Celebrate Life at: <http://www.celebratelife.com/boyden/page1.html>, and you'll find everything you ever wanted to know about Ruth Boyden. That is, everything Ruth wants you to know. But since Ruth is a personal friend, I know some things about her that are not on that Web site.

For instance, Ruth always wanted to own a dress shop. She is very fashion conscious, but not having realized her dream, she had to content herself with running the Thrift Shop at the Trinity Episcopal Church. So she ran it as though it were a fashionable boutique. If you visited the Thrift Shop when Ruth and her sister Ada held the reins, you didn't just come there to rummage through old clothes no one else wanted. Instead, you got to choose from coordinated outfits that Ruth's innate fashion sense put together and displayed as if you were shopping at Lord & Taylor.

But Ruth can also be somewhat obstinate. She is a task master and used to getting things her own way. Rev. Bruce Young teased her about her tendency to insist on having her own way no matter what at her 100th birthday party last year.

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Ruth also loves to entertain. Each time I visit, she has a chair set out for me and an entertaining story to tell. She is well versed in current events and can hold her own in any conversation. In fact, when I had Ruth as a guest on my Voices of Woburn cable access TV show, she was more than capable of keeping up her side of the conversation. After the show aired, I got calls from people who questioned whether Ruth was indeed 100 years old. I assured them she was.

Even when recuperating from hip surgery, Ruth didn't neglect her duties as hostess. When I dropped in to visit Ruth at the Woburn Nursing Center Rehab unit last year, she greeted me with delight, introduced me to her companions at her table, and we all shared a pleasant meal together as though we were lunching at the Baldwin Landing Restaurant, her favorite watering hole by the way.

And with her penchant for gracious entertaining, Ruth wants to invite you all to her 101st birthday party, tomorrow at the Tidd Home. She will be receiving well wishers this Saturday, July 22, between 2 and 4 P.M.. If you decide to attend, I'm sure you'll discover, as they did in 1921 when they wrote in her college yearbook, that "To know her is to love her."