

Glencoe centenarian celebrates the big 101

FOUAD EGBARIA, Editor

Henrietta Sachs turned 101 recently — the longtime Glencoe resident is still as sharp as they come.

Sachs, who grew up in Chicago but moved to Glencoe on Aug. 1, 1952, turned 101 on April 30, and that Saturday, May 2, she had some neighbors and a few friends over to celebrate the occasion.

At 101, one has to ask: What's her secret? In a family where many of those around her reached their 90s, Sachs said a lot of it is, quite simply, genetic.

"I tell people I would eat everything and I never exercise," she said, laughing. "I'm always asked that. 'How did you manage?' As if I had anything to do with it."

She has two sons, six grandchildren and 12 great-grandchildren. After going to medical school at the University of Illinois School of Medicine, she spent much of her life advocating for awareness and research of lead poisoning — particularly problematic on Chicago's South and West sides — a problem which persists today. In fact, she published 20 papers over the years on the subject, a cause to which she devoted much time and effort.

After all that, you'd think she'd want to take a break to relax. But no, she still runs her Glencoe home (designed by architect George Keck).

Sachs graduated from Theodore Roosevelt High School in Chicago's Albany Park neighborhood, a school of about 3,000 students (in fact, her freshman year was the school's first, in 1927). There, her sister Sylvia became editor of the school's weekly publication, for which Sachs started writing herself by her sophomore year. When she graduated,

the nation had entered the crippling Great Depression. Her family didn't have much money, so she continued her schooling during the day and went to work in the evenings. President Franklin D. Roosevelt New Deal created job opportunities — Sachs found herself doing clerical work in a state office.

"It's something that gradually grew from the time I finished high school," she said of her interest in medicine. "Just an increasing interest."

Eventually, she had enough credits to enter medical school, so she entered the University of Illinois School of Medicine in Chicago, graduating in 1942. She then interned and did her residency at Cook County Hospital, with a focus in pediatrics. She also did a six-month internship at the Municipal Contagious Disease Hospital in 1943, a time in which Chicago grappled with a polio epidemic. After that, she went into private practice.

In 1947, she married Solomon Sachs, a lawyer and also a Chicagoan.

"A friend introduced us," she said, smiling. "She said we both liked the same movies. ... The introduction was a favorable one and we were married in about six weeks."

In March 1949, they moved to Seattle for a year, but came back to their hometown. Upon having their second child, she did not return to private practice, but she did go back to teaching.

Eventually, however, she began going down a road that she would stay on for a long time.

She began working for the Chicago Board of Health in 1964. Two years later, she was asked to open a lead poisoning clinic, where children would be diagnosed and treated for lead poisoning. She ran the clinic there

for six years, after which she turned to research of lead poisoning and its effects.

"It was a study that really went on for the next 20 years," she said.

Most of her patients, she said, were usually between the ages of 1 and 5, with an average age of 2 years, 8 months, and a significant majority of the lead poisoning cases came from Chicago's South and West sides.

"Now they'd be in their 40s and 50s," she said. "I still have a little contact with them."

She said she saw approximately 10,000 children over the years. She beamed when she recalled some of their stories: where they went

to school, what became of them, and so on. One of her 5-year-old patients, she said, went on to become a pediatrician.



Henrietta Sachs, a native Chicagoan and Glencoe resident since 1952, celebrated her 101st birthday on April 30. FOUAD EGBARIA/22ND CENTURY MEDIA

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Henrietta Sachs — Longtime Glencoe resident who recently turned 101 on her secrets to longevity

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"It was a very personal thing because I was seeing these kids again and again," she said. "Sometimes for 20 years."

Around 1990, she said, she "finally had to let go." At that point, she stopped recalling former patients for physical and psychological examinations, conducted to see how those patients were adjusting as adults after dealing with lead poisoning as young children. Most of them, she found, were doing very well in life.

However, as time went on,

court cases against landlords increased, at first leading to five-digit settlements, but one case in New York City, she said, settled for \$3 million.

"Certainly in Chicago the greatest accomplishment was to publicize lead poisoning, to treat children in a way they had not been treated before, as outpatients and treated very intensely," she said. "And we publicized lead to the extent that everybody was talking about it."

Many old homes were coated with lead-based paint, which young children would find ways to consume when it chipped. As a result of many years of research, treatment and education, she said parents around the city were made very aware of the dangers posed by children, not knowing any better, eating lead-based paint or being exposed to eat in some other way.

And of course, other cities picked this up throughout the country. There has been a real change."

At 101, she no longer engages in that research and advocacy that she once did.

Even so, she still keeps her mind sharp.

She reads *The New England Journal of Medicine* and a number of pediatric journals, and makes trips to the Glencoe Public Library to read them. She keeps orchids, too, noting that a few she's had since last year have started to flower again.

"Don't water [them] too much," she said, offering some universal gardening advice.

She also grows basil in her house, which she recently used to make pesto.

The 101-year-old said getting older means not having as much strength to do things she once did — but make no mistake about who's in charge.

"I still run the house," she said. "And enjoy living here."

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