

By Denise Ruttan Statesman Journal , May 17, 2012

### ***Tony Beitel of Sublimity celebrated his 103<sup>rd</sup> birthday last week***

Tony Beitel turned 103 last week. Many people his age might be inclined to take it easy, let someone else do the driving and keep up with the utility payments, and live in a facility where someone else makes most of the cleaning and cooking decisions.

But age is not idling one of Sublimity's oldest residents. Beitel, a retired sheep shearer and World War II veteran, still is operating on his own steam and wondering what all the fuss is about. Beitel lives alone in the Sublimity farmhouse where he raised his family. He still drives to town once every other week to go to the store and pay his bills. And his memory still is pretty sharp.

His daughter, Becky Lourien, who came down from Wilsonville to celebrate at her father's birthday party, said he has made it to 103 through "stubbornness and working hard."

"I don't know if it's stubbornness or that he's truly got a purpose or something," Lourien said. "He's always worked really hard. Sometimes it's just meant to be that way."

#### **Born in 1909**

In the days when Sublimity was a village of German Catholics, Beitel's parents were Austrian immigrants. He was born in 1909 in South Salem, one of four brothers and three sisters. His family moved to Nebraska briefly and returned to Oregon to settle in the Sublimity hills.

He spoke German at home and learned English at school.

Beitel made it through the eighth grade at St. Boniface Grade School in Sublimity, then went into farming. "There was no high school in Sublimity, and Stayton was too far to walk," Beitel said.

#### **Married 50 years**

In 1950, Beitel married Mildred. The couple had one child, Becky.

"It was almost a miracle how we met," Beitel said. "I started going with (Mildred) for a couple of years and then I married her."

[ Ed: We can explain the "miracle" part. As Tony recently told Ray Heuberger,

When Tony Beitel came back from service in WWII, he decided that he needed a bride. This was a very typical thought of many of the soldiers and servicemen. Tony decided to go to a bar in Salem and it was there that he met a lady to his liking. He thought she was a fine lady who liked to drink beer with him.

One day he was once again on his way to the tavern in Salem. He started down the road in his car, but he felt someone holding his wrist. He turned the car around and stopped at a house to ring the bell. Mildred came to the door and said, "Would you like something to eat?" He said, "Yes" and went inside.

Just before he died in November of 2005, Ray Rauscher told Tony that Mildred had prayed all that day that she would meet someone to marry.]

Mildred passed away in 2000.

Her last few years, she struggled with Alzheimer's disease. Beitel learned to cook and he took care of her.

But in Mildred's good years, she was a diligent historian. Her work still is preserved in the boxes of well-loved handmade books and faded yellow photo albums that hold the Beitel family history. Until last year, Beitel was a volunteer historian for the St. Boniface Archives and Museum.

#### **World War II**

Beitel served in the Army during World War II and fought in various battles in Europe for 17 months. He was a member of the 242nd Field Artillery Battalion in his 30s.

"We lived in foxholes and fought all the time. We were shot at every day," Beitel said. "I was never injured, but I came darn close to it. Bullets have flown over my head. One went through my hair. My truck had bullet holes in its seat cushion."

He served as his company's translator because he spoke fluent German.

In March of 1945, he crossed The Rhine river into Germany. The town of Mannheim, Germany, had been bombed. Beitel remembers the brutality: bodies pushed up in the streets like cord wood, piled six feet deep.

He fought in the Battle of the Bulge. During a long standoff, his company ran out of fuel.

"I was a truck driver and I was sent to the Paris Airport to get new loads of gasoline," Beitel said "It took 25 hours just to get one trip. For three days I didn't get a wink of sleep. Can you imagine that? I fell asleep against the steering wheel when I came back."

He recalls having to drive around foxholes and blown-out bridges.

"On the third trip I went to an apple tree and thought I'd hide," he said. "The captain saw me so I had to go and carry another load. He said, 'You've got to go, you're the only one I can trust to go at night. You have good night eyes,' I had excellent night vision.

(An old photograph shows Tony Beitel and his wife, Mildred. She passed away in 2000. He turned 103 on May 9.)

### **Small-town life**

After the war, Beitel returned home to the farm and the quiet life of Sublimity.

"It was altogether different from fighting," Beitel said.

Now there are no sheep in the Sublimity hills; it's mostly grass seed. Back then, the Beitels raised about 250 sheep, as well as goats, pigs and dairy cows. They sold their milk to Mt. Angel Creamery. He also learned commercial sheep shearing.

"I would shear 170 sheep in a day. It was an Australian style of sheep shearing that I learned from an expert," Beitel said.

Elizabeth DeAngelis is Beitel's niece. Her dad was his older brother.

"He's just a tough, tough guy. He's a very determined spirit and that's kept him going all these years," DeAngelis said.

DeAngelis remembers all too well the fire of 1985 that claimed her family's old farmhouse and snatched away the life of her mother.

"We had to fill a hole in the foundation. The guys had rocks piled on top of a field and my Uncle Tony dragged them in on a wheelbarrow," DeAngelis said. "He had to be in his 70s then."

### **Still driving**

These days, Beitel lives alone in his musty farmhouse.

A caretaker brings him

meals and does his chores. His nephew, John Beitel, who lives one house over, mows his lawn.

Beitel needs a walker to get around. He had hip surgery a few years ago, and his back gives him pain. He has hearing loss, but he's not complaining.

"I still drive, I don't drive much, I just drive to town when I have to," Beitel said. "I'm afraid to drive to Salem."

Beitel said that he enjoys spending the twilight hours of his life watching the deer eat his blueberries. Or he'll sit in his car and watch traffic pass along his lonely country road.

He still feels most at home around a crowd. About 40 friends and family came to wish him well at his birthday party.

They stayed late and talked long.

His friends appreciate the model of his strong work ethic.

"I think hard work is what has kept me going. It makes you tough," Beitel said.

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