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Family and friends gather to celebrate centenary of Melba Self

Written By **Joshua Drakes**

Family, friends, and neighbours gathered at the Shelburne Long Term Care home to celebrate the 100th birthday of Melba Self, one of its residents.

Born in 1924 in Toronto, Self was surrounded by loved ones as she opened gifts and cut the cake that marked her long life on June 5. Despite being a small, private gathering, the guests warmly traded memories shared with Self.

Paul Osland, Self's nephew and CEO of Athletics Canada, said he remembers the simple stories with her more than any defining event. He particularly recalls a trip to a farm with Self when he was a young child.

?We stopped by a farm with a pen of geese,? he said. ?She gave me a warning, a story about someone who had stepped into the pen. She said that they were attacked by the geese, and they broke an arm. It was an effective warning to stay out.?

Osland spent a lot of time with Self when he was younger and was often privy to stories about Self and Osland's father, who was her younger brother.

?When we would stay with her, she would tell me stories about my dad, and not always ones that he would want shared,? he said, laughing.

Seated beside her three grandsons, Self had only two things to say about her birthday.

?I feel old.?

She then laughed as she reflected on her long life and said that one constant always made her happy.

?It always feels good to know that I still have friends after all this time,? she said.

Self also received two letters during the party, one from the Governor General of Canada Mary Simon and one from both King Charles and Queen Camilla, congratulating her on 100 years of life.

?Congratulations on your 100th birthday!? Simon said in her letter. ?During your lifetime, the country has undergone some amazing shifts: evolution of technology, society, community. No matter what role you played in the last 100 years, you have been an essential part of this country, and we are grateful for your contributions. I wish you a wonderful day filled with happy moments and memories.?

Indeed, Self has achieved several significant milestones in Canada throughout her life. She is the first woman in Canada to have received an Honors F.I.I.C. Diploma from the Insurance Institute of Canada. She continued to work with the institute as an examination supervisor and marker. She also became involved in the Toronto Chapter of the Society of Fellows, culminating in the presidency from 1968 to 1969.

Self has friends and family spread across the world who also sent letters and pictures to congratulate her, from the Netherlands all the way to Korea.

?Happy 100th birthday! What an incredible milestone,? Nel and Ed from Holland said. ?We fondly remember your visit to the Netherlands with your beloved Ken to celebrate so many years of freedom. His bravery and sacrifice are forever etched into our hearts.?

Self's husband, Ken, fought for the Canadian Army during World War Two, serving in the Governor General's Foot Guards, part of the Fourth Armored Division, as a tank operator. They were married in December of 1942. During his deployment in Europe, she would write him two letters a day.

Ken unfortunately passed away in 2005. Self also outlived their son, Calvin, who passed away in 2023 at 73 years old.

While their absence weighs on her, Self remains optimistic and full of spirit, surrounded by family and friends as she begins her 101st year.