

Senior Star: Margaret Berndt

By Necia DeWitt

Margaret (Chapin) Berndt was born July 1, 1912, to Frank and Amanda Jane Chapin in Ellensburg, Washington. She was the fifth of six children, two of whom were twins. All were home births, with their aunt as the delivery nurse. As a child, Margaret has many fond memories of playing together with her siblings in the snow, riding sleds and ice skating. Although Margaret is the only surviving sibling now, her two brothers and three sisters all lived until they were in their nineties.

Margaret's dad was a contract builder. The family moved from Washington to Portland, Cloverdale, and eventually to Myrtle Creek, Oregon, looking for a better climate for Frank's health. At one time, when the family ran Chapin Furniture Store, the family lived upstairs. Margaret's mother, Amanda, was of Scottish descent and was a strong and hard worker. Amanda built coffins and prepared the bodies of people for burial. "She had more guts than me!" exclaimed Margaret.

The family later purchased a large house which the family turned into a hotel, complete with a dining room. The sisters were responsible to change the linens and keep the guests' rooms clean. Their mother taught her children the value of hard, honest work. "Mom thought it was important to learn to work, and she loved to work and work hard," remembers Margaret. "I agree," she stated. Often, road-building crewmen stayed at the hotel. Margaret's mother never hesitated to offer advice to the road workers, often lending sound guidance to these hard-working young men.

In the late 1920's, Margaret's father returned to Ellensburg, Washington, to assist his father in some remodeling work. While there, her father suffered a migraine headache attack and fell off a ladder. He died a few days later. After her father's death, the family moved to Chemeketa Street in Salem, Oregon. The house, situated on three acres, was owned by Amanda's father-in-law. This is where Margaret completed her senior year of high school. Although the country was still in the Great Depression, Margaret worked hard to pay for singing lessons, training her high soprano voice. She also took piano lessons.

Margaret met Bruce Berndt at a dance while living in Salem, too. They courted for about a year and were married in 1936. The Berndts moved to Days Creek, Oregon, renting a ranch there in 1942. Their daughter, Linda, was born that year. Linda was deprived of oxygen during her delivery,

which resulted in a lifetime mental and physical disability. Through the urging of a family friend, the young family moved to Keasey Road in Vernonia, Oregon, in March of 1945. They settled on the 160 acre homestead, which consisted of rugged and uncleared land. Their house, first located near Rock Creek, was moved to its present location nearer the road. Margaret hated the wet, rainy, muddy, stump-laden environment. But as the weather improved, so did Margaret's attitude. She lived in that same house, though remodeled a few times, for 69 years.

The Keasey railroad line dissected the property. There were no fences, so neighbors' livestock often wandered onto other landowners' property and moseyed along Keasey Road. "You had to have good brakes on your car," Margaret laughingly remembered, "and my Model A didn't!" Bruce awakened one morning to hear the neighbor's cattle in their yard. Margaret smiled when she related, "Bruce charged out of the house, hit a cowpie, and promptly slid down right into it and the mud!"

Taking Linda, (who was severely disabled) along with them while they worked together, Bruce and Margaret cleared their land so they could farm and develop it. At first, they used horses, and later a tractor or caterpillar. Margaret explains, "When we started, we would drop the logs into the creek and then pull them up to the saw mill. My job was to pole pike them along the way. It was a hard, messy job, but necessary to get the timber to the mill. At the end of a hot day, we would take turns holding Linda so she could paddle her feet in the creek. She loved it!" The couple cleared an area next to Rock Creek, and later put in septic lines and dug a well to supply water to the sites. Much later, it became known as Creekview Lane. It has several homes on it now. The Berndts bought the railroad right-of-way after it was vacated to add to their property. Another enterprise of the Berndt family was to contract logs for other landowners. Margaret still has an old log scale book which tracked the details of the log loads. "What an improvement when power saws came on the scene," remembers

Margaret.

Keasey Road had its own Home Extension Unit during the 1940's through 1960's. Taught by a County Extension Agent, ladies would meet at each other's homes. Real life skills pertaining to being farmers' wives were taught: sewing, cooking, farming, and gardening skills. There was even a traveling toy box to entertain their children while the lessons were given. Attendees' last names like Devaney, McFarlin, Siebert, Buckley, DeWitt, Counts, Keasey, Conklin, Parker, and



Margaret Berndt and her good friend
Necia DeWitt.

McDonald were on the class roster. These social interactions and training were highly valued by these hard-working women.

Margaret remembers another historic advancement, when West Oregon Electric installed the poles and lines which supplied electricity to their part of Keasey Road. "Oh, boy, was that wonderful! Electricity made our lives much easier," exclaimed Margaret. "Those who lived nearer to the end of Keasey Road already had their electricity supplied from the Keasey Dam. However, there wasn't enough electricity generated at the dam to bring it down to us until West Oregon ran the power lines to us."

In the 50's, the repeated stress on Margaret's back while she cared and lifted Linda led the couple to relocate Linda to The Baby Louise Haven Home, in Salem. Once her health improved, Margaret worked for six years at Tektronics, in Beaverton. When Linda reached the age of 18, however, a restructuring decision meant Linda needed to live elsewhere. The couple decided to bring Linda back home. Margaret continued caring for Linda until 1989, when Linda

passed away, at the age of 47. Bruce and Margaret divorced in the 1970's, so Linda's care fell to Margaret, alone, for many years. "Linda was an important part of my life," recalls Margaret. "She taught me things in my life that I never would have learned in any other way. She was a blessing."

Margaret has a strong Christian faith. She accepted the Lord as her Savior in the early 1950's. She has been a part of several Vernonia churches through the years. She is an avid Bible student, still feeling she has so much to learn from the Bible. "It's the most powerful and fascinating Book ever written. I never tire in reading, studying, and learning from it. The Bible contains all the lessons we need to know while we live this life. When we apply God's principles, things go right. It's when we seek our own ways, whether as a person or a nation that we get into deep trouble," she says earnestly. "I learn my best lessons by going straight to the Lord and His Word!"

After living 69 years in Vernonia, in October, 2007, Margaret relocated to an assisted living center in Beaverton. In July, 2008, she moved to the Beehive Assisted Living Center in Forest Grove. In December, 2008, Margaret's nephew and wife asked Margaret to come live with them in Redmond, Oregon. She enjoys being a part of family activities, plays her keyboard for her own enjoyment, gardens, and attends the Westside Foursquare Church in Bend, Oregon. Margaret has a beautiful view from her living room of the mountains around Redmond.

On June 28, 2009, Margaret visited Vernonia for a few days to celebrate her 97th birthday. The Scout Cabin was filled with people whose lives have been blessed through this bright, sparkly lady who always has a ready smile and kind word. Margaret would be the first to tell us that it is the Lord's light which shines brightly through this Senior Star.

Senior Center Activities For August 2009

Five Area Luncheon: Held in St. Helens this month on August 31st. Join seniors from throughout Columbia County for this monthly gathering hosted by a different community Senior Center each month.

AARP Safe Driving Class: Anyone interested call Karen Miller, Senior Services at the Vernonia Senior Center 603-429-9112.

Connie's Fabulous Breakfasts: Fabulous breakfasts are available to the public on Fridays for a cost of only \$3. The event happens at the Senior Center (446 Bridge Street) from 7:00 to 9:00 AM each Friday. Meal price includes a beverage, too. Enter through the side, parking lot door. What a deal!

Week Day Lunches: The Vernonia Senior Center offers nutritious and tasty lunches each weekday for only \$3. These are available to the public, not just Senior Citizens. (Mealtime is noon; late arrivals may not be served.) You can reserve your lunch by calling by 11:15 AM, or further in advance if possible, to assist the cooks as they prepare the day's meals.

Maple Bars available locally!: Connie King, the cook at the Senior Center, is making maple bars each day. The maple bars are available to the public, too, and only cost \$1 each. Availability is subject to quantity on hand. You can assure yourself of a good supply by pre-ordering them directly from Connie by calling the Senior Center (503-429-3912) any week day, from 7:00 AM-3:00 PM. Please allow one day lead time for larger orders. The Center's front door opens at 9:00, but the side parking lot door opens at 7:00. Ah, sweet treats!

Thrift Store: Bargain prices can be found in Vernonia's Senior Center in their Thrift Store. The retail store is open Monday through Friday, from 9:00 AM until 3:00 PM. The Thrift Store provides funds for the Senior Center's facility and its many activities. Donations can also be dropped off during those same hours, and donated clothes need to be clean and in good condition so they are "sales ready". Buy locally and support your local Senior Center.

Membership Dues: Another way to support Vernonia's Senior Center is to pay the \$10 annual membership dues. Checks may be mailed or dropped off at the Senior Center.



VERNONIA SEEKING RESERVE POLICE OFFICERS

Becoming a Reserve Police Officer is a challenging and rewarding way to serve your community and become a part of the exciting world of law enforcement.

THE CITY OF VERNONIA IS LOOKING FOR INDIVIDUALS TO:

- Help in providing police services to the community
- Gain first hand knowledge and experience in the field
- Make a positive impact in our city
- Receive specialized law enforcement training

Whether you are seeking a career in law enforcement, or simply want to take your interest in community activism to the next level, you can do something positive for yourself and your community.

MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS

- Be at least 21 years of age at the time of appointment.
- Be a citizen of the United States or have applied for citizenship.
- Possess a high school diploma or G.E.D. certificate.
- Possess a valid Oregon Drivers License.
- Be in good physical condition as demonstrated by a physical agility test.
- Take a psychological examination and be found suitable for police work.
- Be of good moral character and pass a criminal record check.
- Have no felony convictions.
- Have no recent or extensive misdemeanor record.

The Vernonia Police Department is also seeking **Office Volunteers** and is helping recruit for membership on the City Emergency Preparedness Committee.

For more information about any of these opportunities contact the Vernonia Police Department at (503)429-7335