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## A Century of Living

By Cathy Tyson



Homer Thiele with his wife, Patricia Photos provided

Homer Thiele jokes that he was born just a few days after World War I broke out, Aug. 1, 1914, back when Woodrow Wilson was president. In his estimation, it's been a "wonderful life" with unimaginable changes over the course of 10 decades that all started in tiny Orofino, Idaho. Friends, family and neighbors celebrated his birthday with a get together at Atria, a senior living facility in Lafayette recently. He stays busy as president of the Residents Council.

When he was a toddler, his family moved to Grandview, Wash., a small town in the Yakima Valley. Thiele started mowing neighbors' lawns for the princely sum of 25 to 50 cents per lawn, and saved up enough to purchase a bicycle, which he then used as a paper boy, delivering three different newspapers per day, which earned him \$5 a week. He attended the University of Washington during the Depression, but "dropped out, and didn't have any money so I went to work as a junior clerk for American Mail Lines."

He eventually joined the Navy and worked as a supply, disbursing and commissary officer in Port Angeles, Wash., when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor in 1941.

He met his future wife Patricia Clapp, proudly reporting that she was the Apple Blossom queen of Wenatchee, on a trip home to Washington state. After knowing each other a total of 23 days, they married in 1944, because Thiele had to report to Oak Knoll Naval Hospital in short order. Thiele was 30, Patti was 22 at the time - they remained married for 68 years, until his wife's death in 2012. They had four children.

A variety of assignments moved the family to a number of bases, from Oakland to Brooklyn, to his favorite, a 15-month stint at Kwajalein Island, part of the Marshall Islands in 1956 - a miniscule atoll in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. "I really enjoyed it there," said Thiele. At that point he had risen to Lieutenant Commander in the Navy and had a young family that enjoyed the tropical lifestyle the island offered.

After eventually retiring from his naval career, Thiele worked for Cutter Labs in Berkeley. The family settled into a lovely home on Valencia Drive in Orinda, where they stayed for the next 17 years. During that time all the kids graduated from Miramonte High School. As empty nesters, he and Patti moved to Rossmoor, then to Atria, where she passed away two years ago.

Asked if he has any advice for reaching the century mark, Thiele replied: "I don't feel qualified," and shrugs. "I've tried to live a good life." Adding, "I've made a lot of mistakes, but lucky to be where I am."



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