

A treasured elder...

Mary Annie Nix

A life dedicated to her faith has sustained "Miss Annie" through two centuries

Spend just three minutes with "Miss Annie" and you're readily captivated by her smile, dazzling eyes and the joy for life she shares daily with her fellow patients at Palm Garden of Tampa.

Born September 11, 1903, Nix was the third of 14 children who grew up on a farm in rural Madison, Florida, about 55 miles east of Tallahassee. "My mother tended to the seven girls and my father tended to the seven boys," Nix said of her strict upbringing. "In those days the parents ruled the children. Today the children rule the parents."

Nix was no stranger to hard work. Farms in the south at the turn of the 20th century were mostly without mechanization and electricity, so the work days were long and hard. "Six days a week we worked sunrise to sunset, and on Sundays we went to church, came home and ate dinner and then we went back to church." Nix was baptized at age 12 and credits her strong faith in God and active church life for helping her live a long and happy life. She reads the Bible daily and remains active in the Temple Terrace Missionary Baptist Church, which recently honored her before the congregation for her longtime service and dedication to others. Nix says humbly, "Each day I just ask Jesus to give me the strength."

Mother, matriarch

When she was 21 — while Woodrow Wilson was in the White House — Nix married. Four years later she gave birth to twin sons, Joseph and Josie, but only Joe survived childbirth. Today he is a retired construction company executive and lives in Tampa, the father of three children and 19 grand-

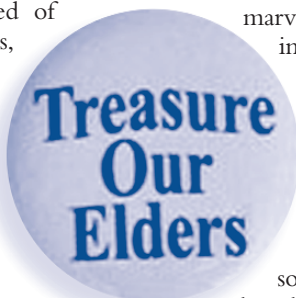


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children. Nix's husband died of heart failure in the mid-1950s, she later remarried, but her second husband died "sometime in the 1970s, I don't remember."

Consider the many historic milestones Miss Annie has witnessed personally:

- She was a year old when the airplane was invented
- She first learned to drive on a Ford Model T her father owned
- She was 26 when the Great Depression began and almost 40 years old when it ended



- She saw her brothers serve in and return from World Wars I and II
- She was 52 when she first saw a television program
- She was almost 70 before she voted for the first time

Young at heart

At Palm Garden where she has lived since August 2002, Nix is practically everywhere. She helps newcomers adjust to the facility's gentle rhythms and spends extra time with patients or staff who are having a particularly hard day. "I've not seen a lonely day since I've been here. I don't feel old, because I don't know how old people feel."

Palm Garden administrator Scott Allen says Nix is a one-of-a-kind treasure. "Miss Annie lights up any room she enters. She's just amazing."

Nix praises the facility's nurses and CNAs who take good care of her and who marvel at how her mind, health, hearing and eyesight are remarkably good for a woman her age. In fact, her health is so good she's able to regularly enjoy her favorite dinner of fried chicken, salad, fried okra and cake — along with the Chinese take-out food staff sneaks in for her. "My son says, 'Momma, I spoiled you, but they spoil you rotten!'"

At 101 years old and still going strong, Nix has outlived all her brothers and sisters, save for her "baby" sister, Emma, age 79, who lives in Ft. Lauderdale. The two got together last year and still manage to stay in touch.

It's evening and Nix is on her way back to her room for the night. She still sleeps with a light on, a practice she started as a young girl when her mother would place a kerosene lamp next to her bed so she wouldn't be scared. "I've had a happy life," Miss Annie turns and smiles before correcting herself. "No, I *have* a happy life."

FHCA honors Mary Annie Nix and treasures her many contributions to our nation.

(FHCA Pulse will be profiling one of our state's treasures each month in subsequent issues of FHCA Pulse. To suggest a patient you think worthy, contact Ed Towey & Associates, Inc., at (850) 224-6242, or via e-mail, etowey@fhca.org.)

Wearing "treasure hunter" hats, FHCA Independent Owner Vice President and FHCA Consumer Relations Committee chair Michael Alexander, far right, presents AARP's Bob Jackson with a copy of Gov. Jeb Bush's "Caring for Our State's Treasures Day" proclamation. Part of the celebration were, left to right, FHCA Region III Vice President Jo-Ann Grasso, FHCA Secretary Deborah Franklin, District IX President Connie O'Donnell and FHCA's Debbie Afasano.

