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Celia Yoder Looks Toward 99th Birthday With an Attitude of Gratitude

Exactly three years before the peace treaty ending World War I was signed in France, Celia Bell Yoder was born on November 11, 1915, on a farm in north-central Oklahoma.

In 1930, she contracted polio, which affected her left hip and leg, which is a half-inch shorter than the right. She was never hospitalized, but remembers being in pain. She was diagnosed with infantile paralysis after the fact.



Celia Yoder

Following high school and two-and-a-half years at Northern Oklahoma College, Celia earned a teaching certificate and landed a job teaching all eight grades in a one-room country school. Starting pay was \$75 a month, but it was enough to afford her own 1928 Ford.

One of her most memorable days in the classroom involved one of the many dust storms that blew through Oklahoma in the 1930s when she was teaching: “The little country schoolhouse was suddenly enveloped in an eerie darkness of dust with wind rattling the windows of the old building. I soon needed to light the Coleman mantel lamp on the piano and two kerosene lamps on the walls. Eventually, the room was so filled with dust that the students needed to intermittently blow the dust off of the work on their desks. The children were coughing and scared.”

She walked one girl, who lived nearby, to her home. “Returning I loaded the rest of the pupils into my 1928 four-door Ford sedan. Driving close to the grader ditch with my lights on, I drove to each one’s home and dropped off the remaining children.”

Celia left teaching for marriage and to raise her family. Bored after her sons were grown, she went back to work in the business office of a medical clinic, retiring in 1977 after 17 years doing bookkeeping and transcription.

“I never lamented any ‘can’t-dos,’ but enjoyed all the ‘can-dos’ – college, teaching, Cub Scout den mother and working in the clinic,” she said.

After she and her husband, a builder/contractor, retired, they enjoyed being “snowbirds,” pulling their RV to the Rio Grande Valley in the winters where they took painting classes. “My husband said many times that he took me from the farm, but couldn’t take the farm out of me.”

In 2001, her husband of 61 years died. “At the age of 86, I was alone and ill. I was living in the dream home my husband built for us in 1946.”

She and her family agreed that she should move to a retirement home in Olathe, Kansas, with two nieces nearby to look after her.

“I said goodbye to Oklahoma and hello to Kansas. I am a descendant of pioneers, so moving is an adventure. (Her maternal grandfather made The Run, the Oklahoma

Q: *What did you find out about Roosevelt's initial diagnosis?*

Tobin: The key doctor who examined FDR at first – a famous surgeon – didn't even diagnose an infectious disease, which should have been obvious from his high fever. This delayed a correct diagnosis by more than a week. There's at least a slim possibility that a correct diagnosis at the outset could have led to a quick treatment and a better recovery – but since polio was probably a net plus for FDR's later career, a better recovery might also have cost him the presidency.

Q: *In researching the book, what did you learn about FDR's treatment and exercise regimen?*

Tobin: I learned that one of the hardest things anyone can face is a prolonged course of physical rehabilitation with no guarantee of recovery. It's often a matter of subjecting yourself to indefinite pain – severe pain – and failure. So it's both a physical and a psychological ordeal. FDR was not the perfect patient he has sometimes been made out to be. He slacked off sometimes. But he worked at it hard

enough to make significant progress. The most important thing he did – after several years of frustration – was to follow the advice of smart physical therapists. They showed him that learning a new way to walk was more important than sheer muscular recovery.

Q: *Your research draws on many primary sources – what was the most difficult part of the research?*

Tobin: Robert Caro said an editor once told him: “Turn every page.” Maybe Caro turned every page at the Lyndon Johnson Library; I know I didn't turn every page at the FDR Library at Hyde Park. But in the papers that cover these years in FDR's life, I turned an awful lot of pages. I had to, because FDR revealed very little about his private thoughts and emotions about his condition. It was a process of looking for a hundred needles in a thousand haystacks. But after a while, patterns started to emerge, and I realized that his silences about the disease – and his happy pronouncements about getting better, even when he wasn't – were essential parts of the story. ■

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Land Rush of 1889 where 50,000 people lined up for a race to lay claim to unoccupied public land.)

“In Olathe, I have made many friends. I am a member of the Olathe Visual Artists, and I became a member of the local chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution at age 90.”

Celia has written four family histories and two books – *Memories of a Farmer's Daughter* and *Memories of a Carpenter's Wife*.

“I now help people write their memories and teach a landscape painting class in the senior apartment building where I am in independent living. I still paint landscapes, although I am struggling with macular degeneration. My hearing is failing even with expensive aids.”

Post-polio problems in her left leg caused a fall that has left her with stasis ulcers exacerbated by poor circulation and antibiotic allergies.

“But I feel I am still blessed and I am proud to be a polio survivor,” Celia says. “It has made me aware of and empathetic to people with any handicap or disability. I always felt blessed to enjoy a good life even with problems. Now I realize it was with an ‘attitude of gratitude,’ I enjoyed understanding and helpful parents, sisters and brother, a loving husband, two sons, valued nieces, nephews, cousins and friends.” ■

