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'She's seen a lot' in 100 years
St. Charles resident marks milestone

By [Rachel Kaatmann](#)

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She vaguely remembers hearing news that the Titanic had sunk, and merely shakes her head in disbelief when asked about the Great Depression.

But Thelma Cebe vividly remembers the first time she saw an airplane.

"When it flew over, I wanted to go into the storm cellar," she recalled. "It sounded like a big ship. I was about 8 years old."

At 100, Cebe is in excellent shape. Her macular degeneration, mainly affecting her right eye, is her only debilitation.

She credits making it to the milestone by staying active and eating a bowl of oatmeal and a piece of toast and drinking coffee every morning. She lives alone in Jaycee Terrace, a retirement community in St. Charles. She's lived there since she was 89.

Friends say she loves to chat. That's her favorite hobby, although she's won a game of bingo a time or two.

Meals on Wheels delivers her lunch and dinner twice a week. A "nice lady named Yvonne" visits twice a week to launder her clothes and clean her apartment, she said.

On Monday, just a day after her 100th-birthday party, she sat on her blue couch surrounded by birthday cards and opened envelopes.

"I'm tired," she said. "There were so many people there yesterday, but I didn't get to talk to them very much."

Cebe said she picked cotton until she was 16 while living in the rural area of Poyner, 10 miles outside of Doniphan in southeast Missouri. Every Saturday her family would travel to town in a wagon to buy groceries.

"I used to fall asleep on the hay in the wagon," she said.

She came to St. Louis in 1927 to follow her "sweetheart" Pearl Price, who moved to St. Louis to find work. Thelma said she loved the city.

She stayed with her aunt in St. Louis until marrying Price when she was 21.



[Rachel Kaatmann](#) photo Thelma Cebe receives a congratulatory hug from granddaughter Carol Weis. Cebe turned 100 on Sunday.

Price worked for General Motors for several years until his heart problems became serious. Recognizing his illness, Thelma bought an adjoining house and market in Wellston and named it Etzel Market.

"I was just trying to make a living," she said.

Price died just a year after they moved to Wellston, and Thelma was in charge of the store and also served as a butcher.

"We helped her at the store," said her son, Don Price. "She used to send me to the bank on a bike with \$300 to \$500 each week."

Don Price remembers his mother telling him stories about when she first saw automobiles. He said her family never owned one and didn't even have electricity or running water.

"She's seen a lot," he said.

In 1954 she married Dan Cebe, a Pevley ice cream man who delivered products to her market. In 1968, Thelma moved back to St. Louis, so Dan could explore job opportunities. Dan died in 1987.

Thelma also has two daughters, Betty Sullivan and Linda North, and a stepson, Jerry, from her second marriage.

Sullivan said she has fond memories of her mother's gardening, especially her knack for growing roses.

"Red and yellow ones are my favorite," Thelma said.

Being a member of the Westend Church of Christ in St. Charles is extremely important to Thelma. She said she always prays before she goes to sleep.

"They're building a new building, and I'll soon be in it," she said.

Thelma seemed amazed that all of her family as well as members of her church showed up for her party, but she said it's definitely not something she wants to do every day.

"I hope I don't have too many more, because it's tiring," she said.