

# Margarete Hicken



## Salt Lake City Centenarian

Most people, on average, would like to live to 89, according to the Pew Research Center. German-born Margarete Hicken has checked that off of her list — and added another 14 years. Hicken, 103, is as lucid and quick-witted as most people hope to be in their 60s. She attributes her long and healthy life to eating breakfast every morning (cold cereal with blueberries), dancing (barefoot) and doing yoga (the kind that stretches your mind).

By Kathryn Peterson

Photo by Kevin Kiernan

“Every morning, I look at the obits and if I’m not there, it’s a good day,” Hicken says with a German accent. Two silver bobby pins hold her white hair back, and she wears a red cardigan sweater, turquoise necklace and antique rings. She’s lived through the end of the Victorian Age, the Great Depression and two world wars. She remembers when Neil Armstrong walked on the moon, and celebrated when women won the right to vote.

Hicken emigrated from Pforzheim, Germany, to Utah when she was only 22 years old. Since then, she has lived a full life, including being the oldest living former member of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir and one of the first female employees at Zions Bank. Her Salt Lake City home is filled with memories: dolls made by her sister who has since passed on, photos of family, German opera scores, and biographies of greats like John Singer Sargent, Dwight Eisenhower and Wilhelm Wagner.

“I was a very adventurous girl. When I came to Utah I lived in the Beehive House for \$25 a month and worked as an alteration lady. At night, I went to comptometer (a key-driven mechanical calculator) school and that’s how I eventually ended up at Zions, although back then it was called Utah First National,” Hicken says. “I remember Orval Adams was the president when I began working there; he was a jolly fellow.” She began working as one of the first female bank tellers in 1939 and later became a comptometer operator in the accounting department. She worked at Zions until 1971 when she turned 65.

Although she is quite sturdy and healthy for her age, Hicken says she’s had arthritis for years. “I miss playing the piano and violin.” But she still practices her scales, fingering them in the air as she waits for tea to brew in her kitchen.

Her biggest fear, like most elderly people, is falling. In fact, almost two years ago Hicken lost her balance and fell but debated whether or not to call for help for fear they might think she was unfit to live alone. Her story was featured in the *Deseret News* in a series about Utah’s aging population. “I’m fairly independent,” she says. “Besides, my years of modern dance taught me to fall without hurting myself.”

Hicken, who never had any children, is the last survivor in her family. “I’ve been married twice and I’ve buried both of my husbands. But don’t worry, I didn’t kill them,” she chuckles.

The greatest lesson she’s learned in her long life? “Don’t go around trying to change people,” she says. “Take them for who they are. Enjoy them like you’d enjoy a summer breeze.” ❖