

NEWS LOCAL

At 105, Superior woman recounts history she lived through

Isabell Tusin remembers Superior before Concordia Lutheran was built and when two synagogues graced Hammond Avenue.



Isabell Tusin, front, is pictured with her son, Barry Tusin, back, from left, daughter-in-law, Linda Frantsen Tusin, and family friend, Rick Arnold, in her room Monday, Nov. 7, at Superior Health and Rehabilitation. The family gathered to help her celebrate her 105th birthday Wednesday, Nov. 9. Shelley Nelson / Superior Telegram



By **Shelley Nelson**

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SUPERIOR — When Isabell Tusin was born, streetcars were still on the road in Superior, many stores lined Tower Avenue downtown, and there was practically a grocery store on every block, including

People's Market, which was owned and operated by her dad at 1119 Tower Ave.

And Concordia Lutheran Church, which is across the street from where she lived as a child on John Avenue, hadn't been built.

"I held a couple of the stones up for them," she said, remembering when the church was built. She said she was there the day the cornerstone was put in and she'd held that, too.

Her son, Barry Tusin, of Chicago, said he believes his mother must have been between ages 8 and 10 when the church was built based on a photo he saw of her. She had just turned 12 when the cornerstone was laid on Nov. 17, 1929, according to the church's website.

"My grandfather was a tailor on Fifth Street," Isabell said. "Every ... older man that didn't work, sat in a chair in his tailor shop. Sometimes the place was full. You thought, 'Oh my god, he's busy,' but it was just people sitting there while he was working. It was a social thing."

Isabell said while her grandfather was a skilled tailor who could craft a dress from a description, he never made her anything.

This week, friends and family gathered at Superior Health and Rehabilitation to reminisce and help Isabell celebrate a milestone birthday. Born Nov. 9, 1917, Isabell turned 105 on Wednesday.

Isabell remembers attending Blaine School, located on North 14th Street, not the one on Belknap Street her son attended before it, too, closed and became the Blaine Business Center. Like the high school she attended in the 1930s, the building is no longer there. And she remembers walking across a balcony to get to Central High School, where she graduated in 1936, now the site of Central Flats.

Isabell went on to study dental hygiene at Marquette University and graduated in 1938 before attending Barclay Business School,

located in a Superior bank.

"Your dad thought everybody needed the business background," her daughter-in-law, Linda Frantsen Tusin, said. "So after she came from college, she had to go to secretarial training ... he wanted you prepared for everything."



Isabell Tusin prepares to attend Yom Kippur services at Temple Israel by Zoom with her son's help. Contributed / Barry Tusin

Isabell said after she finished school, she went to work for a dentist in Ashland where she worked as a hygienist as well as a bookkeeper.

"There wasn't a job in Superior," Isabell said. "The dentists were afraid you're taking their job away from them. They didn't

understand that a dental hygienist helps them. It took them a while to wake up."

However, boredom prompted her to move on from Ashland, she said.

"It was the same three guys that had supper with me, and the same three guys that had lunch with me," Isabell said. "It got boring."

She said she also worked in Washington, D.C., Detroit and Chicago.

"You got an award because you figured out the bolt for the tank and the bolt for the Jeep were the same size, so why send two boxes when you can send one," Barry said. He said the story she told him was that she figured this out and she got a certificate, an award, and her boss got check.

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By 1947, Isabell was living in Superior again. It's where she met her husband, Jake Tusin, of Chisholm, on a blind date.

"When he came, he was chubby," Isabell said. "And my mother said she almost said he's such a good-looking chap but he's on the chubby side. But she said she took one look at my face and never said it. I married him after three dates. I knew I had him ... and I kept him too. He was a nice guy."

The couple married at the smaller of two synagogues on North Sixth Street and Hammond Avenue, she said, and their reception was held in the ballroom of the Androy Hotel, a block from her father's store. She remembers tables full of food being pushed up Tower Avenue, filling the air with delicious smells.

"That was a party," she said.

After the couple married, she said they lived in Chisholm for a while before her husband decided they should move back to Superior.

Barry Tusin said they were married nearly 40 years when his father passed away in 1987.

Isabell remembers Thursday nights on Tower Avenue. "Oh, it was fun to go downtown," she said. "You had to push yourself a little bit" because there were so many people. "Saturday night was fun. We had four theaters."

As her son sought to hear more of her memories, now part of Superior's past, she said: "You're pointing me out as old lady."

When Barry asked how many children she had, she responded "two," teasing her only son.

"I thought I was one," said Rick Arnold, who plays cards with Isabell.

"I'm counting you," she told Arnold.

"You were RH-negative," Barry Tusin said. "I remember you telling me this. You were in labor for a week. You could never have another kid. You nearly died. I'll tell you that story ... I'm the only guy with in-utero guilt."

Laughter filled Isabell's room.

Frantsen Tussin said Isabell and Arnold met when he retired and started playing cards with seniors.

"She was a young lady then; she was only 98, 97," Arnold said.

"In all the years I've known Isabell, if she wasn't out to dinner or out to cards, or bingo, or the casino, she was not happy," Linda said. "We knew she was slowing down when she said she was going out only once a day. If she was going out for lunch, she would stay home in the evening ... She loved people and always said the key to her well-being was that she was active and seeing people all the time."

Isabell said that has been her secret to a long life.

"You fall into place and you meet people, and you meet some more people and the next thing you know, you're part of the people," Isabell said. "And that's the way I like it. I like people."

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