

KNOW YOUR NEIGHBOR FOR JUNE 17

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SHE MOVES WITH FORTITUDE AND GRACE

Small towns are known for their town characters, and when you mention a name familiar to many people, there is always an unspoken agreement about that person. There are no maybe he or she is this, maybe that; it's just a sure thing, a confirmation among everyone that the one in question is one fine person. Must be nice to be in the company of Gladys Calhoun, that is, Gladys Calhoun Shelton. One of nine children born in Edgecombe County, five girls and four boys, with four still living at the ages of 99, 92, and 90, Gladys is about as active as an atom bomb about to blow. To listen to her daily schedule is to make you wonder where she gets all that energy to keep going. Let's go back and see where it all started.

Her daddy was a farmer, and he instilled a love of the farm in all of his children. Gladys worked on the farm as a young girl, and she learned what her daddy taught her: "Always do a job right the first time or do it over again." That lesson followed her into her adult life as a productive employee, manager, and elected official for many years. So where did the Shelton side enter the scene? Well, she met P.G. at a young peoples' dance in Pinetops when she was 13. Her parents wouldn't let her go to dances without supervision, but she lucked out when her two sisters agreed to chaperone her at a dance, with the admonition, "Keep her inside and don't let her go outside for a minute!" That night, she was asked to dance by a good-looking blue-eyed young man, three years older than she. When the time came for intermission, they left to go to the corner store for an Orange Crush, and her sisters were glad to get rid of her for an hour. When Gladys began to play basketball (do you wonder where her daughter, Sandra, and grandson got their start?) at West Edgecombe, P.G. came to her games and they got to know each other better. He left school and went up north for a year, returning when she was a senior. He gave her a ring, but she said it wasn't an engagement ring, because she needed to know him better. He entered the army in 1942 and spent his time in England until 1945. He was a tail gunner on a B-17 bomber. The letters across the Atlantic were frequent. When he returned home, they were married and moved to Denver, Colorado, then to Texas where he finished his contract with the Army. When they returned to Edgecombe County, they began their family of three children until they moved into the Shelton home place. P.G. farmed until he had a stroke at 49 years of age, dying at 52. Their youngest, Marvin, was only nine years old.

P.G. used to tell his children stories that he made up from his years of typhoid fever, fantasizing about wild animals and such. Gladys had taken a business course during the war years, working a bit while learning typing. She also got her first taste of volunteering as a Red Cross worker. That carried her a long way after P.G. died, and she said, "You get back from volunteering more than you give. God has been good to me so I should give back." Gladys has been active in the March of Dimes and the Heart Fund for many years. In 1957, she began working at the County tax office until 1979, then at the County manager's office. In 1980 she was elected as the Register of Deeds, retiring in 1996 "I like people and I liked every job I ever had," she said. She was honored by her peers as the most efficient Register of Deeds in the state. That active life

led her back into volunteer work, where she was on the Board of Directors for the Community College for 20 years. Her input in helping Dr. Hartwell Fuller push for the construction of the Keihin Auditorium was her most memorable accomplishment. Gladys was also on the Nash-Edgecombe Mental Health Board, and was in on the establishment of the Edgecombe County Biotechnology and Medical Simulator Center. Gladys has a quiet way about her, but make no mistake, her keen mind has challenged a few of her peers from time to time, and she's no stranger to controversy. She has been an active Episcopalian, getting her start at the Saint Ignatius Mission Church in Old Sparta. That was a mission church of Calvary Episcopal Church in Tarboro. She worked on bloodmobiles for many years; was on the Council on Aging for the county, and the Nursing Homes Advisory Council. But that didn't keep her from attending her grandson's basketball games at Southwest Edgecombe High School, or her daughter's games that won Sandra Langley championship titles only recently. She has always put family first, and if you think she wasn't a strong role model, just ask her grown kids today!

I doubt there's a day when Gladys doesn't get up early and hit the road on some errand or meeting, driving herself wherever she needs to go to help an aging sister, a neighbor, or just keeping up with friends. With that lovely head of white hair, she looks like an angel, but an earthly one, for sure. As Robert Frost wrote, "But I have miles to go before I sleep, and miles to go before I sleep." He must have been writing about Gladys; she has too much to do before leaving us!