



LOIS KINDLE PHOTO

Marianne Finke, a resident of Freedom Plaza Memory Care, will be 100 years old March 19. Despite the many challenges she's faced over the years, she finds life both meaningful and beautiful. She has three children, seven grandchildren and two great grandchildren, with one on the way.

## Sun City Center centenarian a role model for hope, being positive and staying engaged in life

■ By **LOIS KINDLE**  
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**F**reedom Plaza Memory Care will celebrate the birthday of a centenarian this week, and no one is more excited about it than the birthday girl, Marianne Finke.

"I'm going to have two parties, one here and one at Temple Beth Israel," she said, her eyes twinkling. "And I'm going to have a story about me in the newspaper!"

Ten decades of living haven't affected this woman's cheerful, amazing spirit. She is a delight to everyone who knows her.

"She's one of the most incredible women I know," said her dear friend, Joanne Sudman, who is 25 years her junior. "What drew me to Marianne was when I heard her say 20 years ago in a speech at Beth Israel, 'Every morning you should look in the mirror and say, 'This is going to be the best day of my life.' I knew then I had to know this woman.'"

"I could go on and on for hours about her," Sudman said.

Longtime friends, Connie Lesko and Peggy Burgess, agree.

"Marianne has a fabulous sense of humor. She's so warm and hospitable," Lesko said, noting her friend's support during her years in Freedom Plaza's marketing department and beyond. "She's a bright light in any room. Everyone loves her."

Burgess, who wrote and directed Freedom Follies at Sun Towers for 25 years, noted that Marianne played parts in almost every one of them.

"I always featured something for her to do her high kick," Burgess said. "She just loved it, and audiences came to anticipate it. She's a genuinely wonderful and joyous person."

### An amazing life

She was born in southern Germany on the northern edge of the Alps in Kostanz, Germany, on March 19, 1921, and had what she describes as an idyllic childhood: Her family lived on the shores of Lake Constance, and from the very beginning she was a nature girl. She loved to hike, bike, ski and swim with her family and friends and enjoyed all sports, especially gymnastics. She lost her position in her school's elite water ballet class after telling the teacher she could not



do one of the formations, a Nazi swastika, because she was Jewish.

In September 1937, when she was 16, Marianne was sent to America by her family to live with friends in Tulsa, Okla., to protect her from Hitler's rising power. Traveling alone as a teenager who knew very little English, she arrived at Ellis Island and with emigration papers in order, boarded trains to St. Louis, Mo., and then to her final destination.

Marianne's parents followed her to the United States in 1938. They escaped the infamous event known as Kristallnacht later in November that same year, when German Nazis burned down Jewish synagogues, vandalized properties and murdered more than 90 Jews.

Her dad, who spoke no English, took a job as a ditch digger here in the states to support his family. He had been an attorney in Germany. Her mother was a baker.

Once settled in Tulsa, the teenager graduated from Central High School, earned a scholarship and went on to the University of Oklahoma in Norman. Her first job was at the Tulsa Chamber of Commerce, and after a brief stint there, she went to work for Fenner and Beane (now known as Merrill Lynch), where she later became the first female

stockbroker in Oklahoma.

That job ended when Marianne married her second husband, Herman Finke, and became mother to his two children – Mark, 6 months, and Vicki, 4 – both of whom she officially adopted. (Her first husband, Erich Gunzburger, had died after less than five years of marriage from ALS, Lou Gehrig's Disease.) The Finkes later had a daughter together named Nanci.

Herman accepted a job in Maryland for the U. S. Department of Energy in 1975, and Marianne served as a docent for 15 years with the Museum of American History in Washington, D.C. She absolutely loved it.

"It was one of the happiest times of my life," she said.

When Herman retired in 1983, the couple moved to Sun City Center to lead very active lives of golf, dance and entertainment.

"She dragged my father everywhere," said her eldest daughter, Vicky Tisdal. "I think that's why he lived as long as he did."

In 2002, they felt it was time for them to move to independent living at Freedom Plaza, which offered continuous care. Herman died eight years later at age 92.

A year or two later, Marianne moved to Freedom Plaza Assisted Living. In January 2020, she became a resident of

Freedom Plaza Memory Care, where she enjoys the music and lots of friends.

This tiny woman looks at everything she's experienced as an adventure. She's always been active, even ziplining in her 80s. At 99 years old and soon to be 100, she remains a dynamo. Unfazed by some of the normal declines of aging, she finds joy in daily living.

"Marianne is very intelligent and thoughtful," said Carla Freedman, her rabbi at Temple Beth Israel. "She reflects on her life experiences, both good and

bad. She's a role model for being hopeful, positive and engaged."

And she still loves the outdoors and being as active as possible.

"Even now, when we go walking, it's hard for me to keep up with her," Sudman said.

"My mother is like the Energizer Bunny," Tisdal said. "She keeps going, going and going. She's a woman of deep faith, a very determined individual. She looks for the good in every situation.

"And she still enjoys showing off her high kick."



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**Marianne Finke describes how in 1937 when she was 16 she was sent from Germany by her parents to live in the United States to escape Hitler's rising threat to the Jewish people.**