

Agatha Clara Kindopp Chizek

April 10, 1907 – April 21, 2016

Agatha Clara Kindopp Chizek, 109, passed away peacefully at home with family in Kennewick, Washington, on April 21, 2016. A devoted wife, mother, grandmother, and longtime member of South Dakota's Deaf community, she lived a remarkable life spanning more than a century.



Agatha was born April 10, 1907, in Polkau, Germany, to William and Emilie Kindopp. The oldest of eleven children, she lost her hearing at about eighteen months of age. In 1910, when she was three and a half, she immigrated with her parents and sister Pauline, traveling by ship to Quebec, Canada, and then by train to Tripp, South Dakota. She became a United States citizen on May 22, 1944.

At seven, Agatha began attending the Lutheran School for the Deaf in Detroit, Michigan. Her family minister accompanied her on her first train journey, distracting her with a wooden climbing monkey so her father could leave the train without upsetting her. In the years that followed, she traveled between school and home on her own. It was in Detroit that she learned to sew, beginning a skill she would use and share throughout her life.



1926-27 Girls' Basketball Team
Back row L to R: Bertha Albrecht, Ruth Scott, Viola Servold, Mary Rich, and Coach Tillinghast
Front row L to R: Harriet Elder, Minerva Webb, Agatha Kindopp, and Mary Albrecht

In the fall of 1922, Agatha entered the South Dakota School for the Deaf in Sioux Falls. She participated in girls' basketball and other school activities, graduating in 1928. Most importantly, SDSD was where she met her future husband, Lester Chizek. After graduation, she worked as a seamstress at a dry-cleaning business in Mason City, Iowa.



Agatha Kindopp wearing a half-woman, half-man costume for a theater performance.

Agatha and Lester married September 21, 1932, and made their home on a farm near South Shore, South Dakota. There they raised three children: Betty, Lester, and Nina. Farm life required resourcefulness and hard work. Agatha tended a large garden, canned fruits, vegetables, and meats, and helped prepare meals for summer harvest crews of about sixteen men. As a Deaf mother, she found practical ways to care for her babies, placing the bassinet against the bed so their movements would wake her.

After retiring from farming in 1962, Agatha and Lester moved to Watertown. In 1984, they moved to Custer to be closer to their daughter Nina and her family. They shared more than fifty-seven years of marriage before Lester's death in July 1990.

Agatha's commitment to the Deaf community continued throughout her long life. A longtime member of the South Dakota Association of the Deaf, she served as vice president from 1955 to 1957 and

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Agatha Chizek celebrated her 100th Birthday in April 2006 with a reception and catered dinner at the Bavarian Inn in Custer, S.D. Family and friends enjoyed a short program that included a card from the White House and proclamations from the state and the city of Custer. The event was organized by Agatha's children, Betty Jackson, Lester Chizek and Nina Nielson.
Published in SDAD News Summer Issue 2006

helped develop the organization's mission statement. She also served as a member and officer of the former Pasque Club, which brought together Deaf and hard-of-hearing residents of northeastern South Dakota. At age 106, she attended the 2013 SDAD conference in Deadwood with her daughter Nina.

Faith, family, friendships, and creativity remained central to Agatha's life. She enjoyed sewing, crocheting, and making carefully crafted gifts for others. During extended visits with family in Washington and Oregon, she joined Deaf community activities and shared her craft skills with younger members. Later, video relay technology gave her another way to stay connected with friends through sign language.

Agatha was preceded in death by her husband, Lester, and all of her siblings. She was survived by her children, Betty Jackson, Lester Chizek, and Nina Nielsen; sons-in-law Joe and Wayne; daughter-in-law Joyce; nine grandchildren; and seventeen great-grandchildren.

She was laid to rest beside Lester in Custer, South Dakota, on May 29, 2016. Her life is remembered for her steadfast Christian faith, capable hands, devotion to family, and enduring connection to the Deaf community.



Agatha Kindopp Chizek, age 106, receiving the Outstanding Member honor from SDAD President Patty Kuglitsch at the 2013 SDAD Conference in recognition of 60 years of continuous membership.

