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Dick Morse: 98 and Still Going Strong

Westminster hasn't changed much through the eyes of Richard "Dick" Morse, 98. He remembers growing up in North Westminster, learning to swim in the Saxton's River, picking berries, and having fun all around the area. He remembers Interstate 91 coming in and taking all the traffic off Route 5. He even thinks of how the floods have gotten better and worse over the years. Yet he says the people of Westminster haven't changed much. He even joked that the only thing that changed are people's last names.

Dick was born in Keene in 1913. He moved to Gageville in 1921 when he was 8. Then he moved to Westminster, on the corner of Henwood Hill and Route 5, in the early 50's. He worked in refrigeration, and still owns birds like he did those many years ago.

Dick went into the bird business because the farm house he bought on Henwood Hill was all set up for raising chickens, so he decided to try it out. He started with several thousand Rhode Island Reds, for their eggs, and after a few tries he got the hang of it. He sold eggs retail to stores and restaurants in the area and from his farm. He has been raising birds ever since, although no longer for egg sales.

Dick has had many jobs through the years. He used to work at the corn canning factory in Westminster Station where Community Feed is now. He remembers unloading bags of sugar that came in by railroad for the factory. Farmers in the area used to supply sweet corn to the plant, he said.

He worked at a wreath factory, located near the present-day carwash, as a wreath inspector in his late teens. Through most of his adult life, he worked in the refrigeration business. He began with household refrigerators, and ice tanks that cooled milk cans on dairy farms. Then, when new bulk tanks came in in the 1950's, he worked on those. Because a bulk tank had to be installed between a farm's twice-daily milkings, he would start early in the morning and keep on working until it was finished, often late at night. He thinks about how many more farms there used to be in Westminster in the past.

Dick to this day still splits his own firewood, and he and his wife Ruth work in the garden together. I see him out there all the time, doing what most people stop doing in their 60's or 70's, but Dick has continuously done to this very day.

Julia Waldron, 13, is the daughter of Dan Harlow of Westminster. She will be a freshman at Portsmouth High School this fall.