

A remarkable woman finishing nurse's training at 55

During Licensed Practical Nurses Week in Minnesota, the Mesabi Daily News salutes Clara Niemi, 55, of Virginia, who will become an LPN following her May 28 graduation from the Eveleth Area Vocational Technical Institute.

To say that Clara Niemi of Virginia is leading a fulfilling life is an understatement.

Consider this:

↳ At 55, she will graduate May 28 from the licensed practical nursing program at the Eveleth Area Vocational Technical Institute.

↳ She is the mother of 14 children — seven boys and seven girls — ranging in age from 18 to 38. Clara and her husband, Matt, a blacksmith-welder for the county, also have 25 grandchildren with one more on the way.

↳ She started taking piano lessons when she was in her 40s and has made good use of her training as music director of the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints (Mormons) at Midway Terrace. Clara also teaches at the church.

↳ She took a Red Cross water safety instruction course 10 years ago and since then has been teaching swimming for the Mountain Iron Recreation Commission. Clara also has been waterfront director for Mormon church camps.

↳ She was a nurse's aide at the Virginia Municipal Hospital

Range Writer

Bill Hetland



from 1960 to 1965.

↳ She raised money to go back to school at EAVTI by delivering 185 Duluth News-Tribune newspapers a day for two years.

↳ She bicycles at least one hour a day and also tries to find time to work in the family garden.

Clara Niemi, a woman who loves learning and teaching, calls the past year at EAVTI "the most fulfilling year of my life. I find it exciting to learn the reasons for illnesses and bodily functions. The human body is a marvelous complicated structure. It's thrilling to learn about it. Even if I don't get a chance to use my training, I think it's been worth the effort."

Following her graduation from Virginia High School in 1941, Clara had planned on going to Kahler's School of Nursing in Rochester. But marriage and raising a family changed those plans.

With only one daughter, Peggy, 18, a VHS senior, at home, Clara decided she would have the time to realize her longtime dream of becoming a nurse.

"Friends think I should have done this long ago. But I just couldn't because of the family," Clara says. "One of the nice things about getting older is that you have fewer responsibilities and more time to do things you've always wanted to."

She smiles when she talks about the winter of 1978-79. "I sat around the house too much and read and ate. I gained 40 pounds. It was then I decided to do something. Also, I wanted to do it because my husband (he's six years older) wants to retire. If anything happened to him it would be a few years before I would claim social security and I want to have some financial security myself."

Was age a handicap when she started the course work at EAVTI in August?

"I was a little apprehensive because it had been so many years since I had studied," she replies, "but there haven't been many problems. There's no such thing as being too old to learn. I may have problems with memory, but not learning."

Clara is enthusiastic about the teachers at EAVTI. "The teachers here are marvelous," she says. "They're very knowledgeable and they know how to impart that knowledge. I've liked all of them."

And the teachers are enthusiastic about her. Josie Elioff, a practical nursing instructor, says, "I can't think of anyone more excited about learning. She makes the whole class sparkle because her enthusiasm rubs off."

Of her classroom colleagues, Clara says, "I get along fine with the younger people. They're very friendly and they seem to have forgotten about the age difference."

Clara is especially excited about the family reunion later this month when her children will come home from California, Illinois and other Minnesota communities. They'll attend her graduation May 28 and Peggy's graduation May 29. "There's been only one other time we've all been together as a family and that was at Jerry's wedding in 1972 in Virginia."

Of her lifelong love of teaching and learning and doing, she says, "There are so many people who are bored. Why be bored when there's so much to do. I don't like being bored."



WEARING THE UNIFORM of a licensed practical nurse, Clara Niemi examines a model of a human body in the laboratory-classroom at EAVTI.



SHE IS ACTIVE in the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints (Mormons) at Midway Terrace, serving as music director and teacher. (MDN photos by Paul Williams)



CLARA NIEMI, who at 55 will graduate from the licensed practical nursing program at the Eveleth Area Vocational Technical Institute, washes dishes in her Virginia home after school.