

Turning 100 with a splash

People • Viola Krahn has been America's 'mermaid' for nearly 80 years. So what's her secret for longevity? 'All the no-nos.'

By PAIGE AUSTIN
The Orange County Register

LAGUNA WOODS

There's a springboard above Viola Krahn's fountain of youth, because, as with everything, she can't help but dive right in.

"My mother always told me, 'Go while you can,'" said Krahn, who turned 100 Saturday.

Krahn, who lives at Leisure World, is one of the world's oldest competitive divers. She holds a number of the records

for senior diving because, more and more, she's the only diver in her age bracket.

But even 80 years ago, at the peak of her competitive days, she was a national champion. She was also a famous swimmer and surfer who helped give the Roaring '20s its wild reputation.

"You can never find her sitting still," said neighbor Dottie Ross, one of several friends and family members from around the state to celebrate with Krahn.

"She's inspiring, really. It's

her spirit," said family friend Sam Flowers, whom Krahn taught to dive when she was 75.

"What's the key to longevity, Vi?" asked her friend Margery Cole.

"Candy and ice cream - all the no-nos," laughed Krahn, who really does eat a bowl of vanilla and chocolate ice cream every day.

"I've never known anyone 100 years old before," said Krahn. "I wonder how you're supposed to act."

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VIOLA KRAHN, right, of Laguna Woods shares a laugh with fellow diver John Samuelson after reading his card at her 100th birthday party Saturday. 'I've never known anyone 100 years old before,' Krahn says. 'I wonder how you're supposed to act' • Photo: Mike Schwartz / The Register

VIOLA: She's competitive at 100

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Krahn's never been one to worry about proper behavior, said friends who know all the tales from her youthful, star-studded days as a diver and surfer to the outrageous flirting she still does today.

Born in Arizona, horseback riding was one of her first and longest loves. In her youth, she was a trick rider, and she still makes annual drives to Arizona for a week of riding. She also hunted and played a mean game of polo.

"I think of myself as relaxed, quiet, and easygoing, but get me in a game like polo, and I'm one of the roughest players. I come out on my horse with my mallet, and I just push everyone out of the way," Krahn said, chuckling.

"I'm so competitive sometimes I scare myself."

Krahn didn't take to the water until she moved to Long Beach when she was 18, yet throughout the 20th century, she made headlines as the nation's "mermaid" in the 1920s and later graced the cover of People magazine in 1992.

In 1928, she was one of a handful of swimmers who relayed to Catalina Island.

She was also a champion diver headed to the Olympics in 1924 until she decided to marry the coach, Fred Cady, a

Hall of Fame diving instructor.

Krahn's beauty and athleticism made her a media favorite among Olympic hopefuls, and she was a noted part of California's early surf scene.

Cady coached some of the nation's top athletes as well as a number of film stars, such as Al Jolson, star of "The Jazz Singer," the first movie with sound. The two worked and played to the fullest throughout the Roaring '20s.

She retired from competitive diving during her marriage and didn't take it up again for 50 years. But at age 76 in 1977, after Cady died and she remarried, she took up the sport again with a vengeance.

For more than two decades, she's been a medalist in the Master's National Diving Championship.

"Now I get a medal no matter how I do because there's



WHEN SHE WAS YOUNGER, Viola Krahn hitched a ride with surfing legend Duke Kahanamoku off Main Beach in Laguna Beach. Krahn was a great surfer in her own right. Today, at 100, she sticks to diving.

no one in my age group to compete against," said Krahn. She's slowed down her swimming to twice a week in the winter months, but she's still ready for the 2002 nationals.

In her 100 years of sheer vitality, Krahn knows one thing

for sure.

"When you go for it, head all the way for the bottom. Never shortcut it, or else you'll spoil the dive."

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