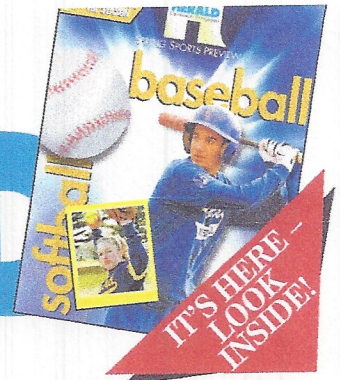


# Bellmore HERALD

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## L.I.'s oldest Girl Scout

By NANCY HILER

The first time Florence Meiselbach raised her hand to take the Girl Scout Promise in 1925, little did she know that more than 80 years later she would still be living up to its pledge of service to God, country and other people.

The 94-year-old Bellmore resident — just a year younger than Girl Scouting itself, which celebrates its 95th anniversary this month — is believed to be the oldest Girl Scout on Long Island, according to Girl Scouts of Nassau County. Beyond that, it's conceivable that Meiselbach may be the oldest in the state or even the nation, but that doesn't particularly interest her. What does interest her is pretty much everything else that has to do with Girl Scouts.

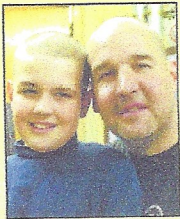
After about a dozen years as a very industrious Girl Scout herself during her youth (she earned dozens of merit badges), Meiselbach became a troop leader in the 1940s for her two daughters, and for one of her granddaughters in the 1970s. She has kept her membership in the organization current ever since.

"It's a way of life," she said. "Becoming a Girl Scout is the best



Nancy Hiler/Herald

**LONG ISLAND'S OLDEST GIRL SCOUT**, 94-year-old Florence Meiselbach of Bellmore, holding her original scout uniform from 1925, on which some of her many merit badges are sewn.



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### BALD IS BEAUTIFUL

Calhoun athletes  
shave heads  
for a cause

Page 10

### Library budgets

Votes approaching

Page 7

### X-men unite

Kennedy lacrosse

See AT 94, page 3



GIRL SCOUT LEADER FLORENCE MEISELBACH, center, with her troop in 1961, marching in one of many parades.

Courtesy Florence Meiselbach

## At 94, she's still very much a scout

Continued from front page

thing a girl can do. I tell them if they want a full life, join the Girl Scouts. There's no better way. It teaches them good citizenship, responsibility and respect."

Get Meiselbach talking about the Girl Scouts and she will take out a thick photo album devoted to her years in scouting. She will point out who most of the people are in each picture or talk about the various events captured in the images.

She will tell you about marching in parades — "too many to count" — all over Long Island, including Islip Terrace, where she grew up, and attending numerous scout assemblies, including some held in the auditorium of Mepham High School in the 1970s.

She will recount how she went door to door selling her share of Girl Scout cookies. "We were never afraid to do that back then," Meiselbach said. "Today the parents go with the girls, or they sell the cookies outside of stores."

She will also tell you how her childhood troop camped in cabins at Heckscher Park in the 1920s. "It was beautiful," she says, remembering acre upon acre of trees and wilderness.

She will recall trips taken to Camp Edith Macy in Pleasantville, N.Y., named after the wife of Valentine Everitt Macy, the Manhattan philanthropist who donated the land in 1926 as a training camp for scout leaders.

A Time magazine article of the time noted that the camp's opening was attended by Girl Scouts of America founder Juliette Gordon Low, then-president Lou Henry Hoover, the wife of President Herbert Hoover, and then-national director Jane Deeter Rippin. At the camp's dedication, Rippin said that leadership training was needed because "We have the problem not only of helping growing girls, but of bring-

ing to maturity a generation of women who shall not be nervous wrecks."

### Knife, compass, cup

Meiselbach still has the original khaki uniform she wore as a girl. She will tell you that the uniform's belt originally had a knife, a compass and a collapsible cup attached. "We carved things with the knife, and used it and the compass and cup when we went camping," she explained.

Stitched onto the sleeves of the military-style uniform are a many of the 25 to 30 merit badges she earned and the stripes representing years of service. She pulls another dozen or so stripes and badges from one of the pockets, saying she wishes she still had the dexterity herself or knew someone who could sew the rest of them on for her.

"I loved doing badges," she enthused. She earned them for mastering such skills as cooking, nature study, arts and crafts, first aid and sewing.

Meiselbach said she would have preferred that the uniform stayed the same or been less modernized over the years, as the Boy Scout uniform has. "Today I see a [Scout] leader and she is wearing a T-shirt," she said. "Can you imagine? A T-shirt with a G.S. on it for Girl Scouts. And the girls wear a vest, and that's their so-called uniform. Some changes are nice, but some are not."

What she believes to be nice today are the opportunities that the girls are given. "We didn't have that," she said. "Today they have more advantages. They can do anything. They have so much to look forward to."

After she married Joseph Meiselbach in 1937, they moved to Bellmore in 1943, where they raised two daughters and two sons. Today she is the grandmother of 13 and great-grandmother of 21. Her daughters



Courtesy Florence Meiselbach

A PART OF BELLMORE'S HISTORY, Florence Meiselbach's Girl Scout troop is shown during an assembly in the Mepham High School auditorium in the early 1970s.

recently moved in with her, she said, but she still makes most of her own meals and does her own shopping.

Breathing heavily after she talks for a bit and dependent on an oxygen tank sometimes at night to sleep, Meiselbach explained that she quit smoking cigarettes in 1981. Remarkably, she gave up driving just two years ago. "Too many narrow escapes," she declared. "It was getting too dangerous."

### Lamb Award

Earlier this month, the nonagenarian was honored with the Lamb Award, a national recognition bestowed on Lutheran adults acknowledging their distinguished service to youth. A special ceremony was held at the Grace Lutheran Church in Bellmore on March 4. "It was very unexpected," Meiselbach said. "I thought they were having a little social after the Sunday service,"

she said of the award ceremony. "I feel very honored, humbled."

She went on, "I loved working with the girls. It's amazing how they can find themselves in their accomplishments." She explained that she had seen many a girl who had little or no confidence, and really couldn't do much of anything. "They couldn't even tie their shoelaces. Then you teach them and 1, 2, 3, they learn it." Among her troops over the years, she explained, no one was allowed to say "I can't." "They had to say, 'I'll try,'" she explained, adding that she is still available to guide girls.

Adamant about her decisions to quit smoking and give up driving, Meiselbach is, if anything, even more certain about another choice she has made: She will never stop being a Girl Scout. "You need me? I'm here," she said.

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