

'It Was A Very Special Honor'

A 94-year-old former VFW Buddy Poppy girl recalls her visit with President Herbert Hoover and her time at the VFW National Home for Children in Michigan

Jun 03, 2022

Chosen as a VFW Buddy Poppy girl at the tender age of 4 in 1932, Betty Joan (Christian) Adamson can still recall the long train rides to Washington, D.C., and Sacramento, California. Adamson, who celebrated her 94th birthday in late February, even saved the small, pink dress she wore the day she met President Herbert Hoover and Vice President Charles Curtis at the White House.

"It was a very special honor to be selected at such a young age," Adamson said. "Like other children that age, I was full of energy and curiosity. The adults who accompanied me tried to keep me occupied and entertained."

Though the memory of her meet-and-greet with Hoover and Curtis at the White House dissipates under the currents of time, that period of her life remains distilled into a photo album of her youth. She often turns to such photographs to dissect her younger self, understanding what a 4-year-old felt and performed in the presence of the heads of state.

"Having looked at the photos of both meetings, I believe that I was more relaxed with President Hoover than with V.P. Curtis," Adamson said. "According to a letter Mr. Adams of the Home wrote to my mother, I conducted myself well in my presentations."

Adamson was groomed as the VFW's Buddy Poppy girl of 1932 while a resident of the VFW National Home for Children in Eaton Rapids, Michigan.

The daughter of World War I veteran Wilmer Holmes Christian, who served with the Army's Quartermaster Corps from Oct. 13, 1918, until May 18, 1919, in France, Adamson arrived at the Home on Jan. 10, 1930, with her two siblings.

"The unexpected death of my father from complications of heart disease in July 1929

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created an overwhelming emotional and financial crisis for my mother,” Adamson said. “As the widow of an Army veteran, she received her husband’s service certificate, but the amount of money was not enough to provide for her family beyond a year.”

Since Adamson’s father belonged to VFW Post 1459 in Benton Harbor, Michigan, her mother sought the Post members’ advice in finding a means to provide for her three children.

“They recommended my mother to the VFW Department of Michigan to help her apply for admission of her three children to the VFW National Home,” Adamson said. “On Jan. 10, 1930, my mother brought me, my sister, Katie, and my brother, Wilmer, to the Home. I was placed in the Massachusetts Cottage with Mrs. Ethel Kennedy.”

During her time at the Home between 1930 and 1942, Adamson blossomed into a young woman determined to succeed. There is a fondness that looms over her stay at the Home, a recollection of schooling, a healthy lifestyle, new clothes and shoes each year, frequent trips to church and lots of playmates over the years.

“They helped me survive by providing everything I needed to live and grow into a useful person,” Adamson said. “We were given the opportunity for a good education at school, and we were taken to church on Sundays. We had good health care with our own hospital, and we lived a healthy lifestyle in the food we ate, and the fact that no matter what the weather, we were at the playground every day.”

Now in the twilight of her life, Adamson can still recall how the Home changed her life. From lessons on good manners to learning how to work with others to accomplishing a goal or task, she considers her lessons at the Home invaluable.

“Even though you often thought about being an orphan, the Home was a wonderful place to grow up,” Adamson said. “I learned how to get along with others, and I also learned how to work hard to get chores done every day. I was better prepared for the adult world [when I left], and I am thankful for having had the simple and basic things in life.”

This article is featured in the 2022 May issue of [VFW magazine](#), and was written by [Ismael Rodriguez Jr.](#), senior writer for VFW magazine.