

Thelma's still bubbly at 100

By LINDA CALLAGHAN

High tea was served in fine bone china when Thelma Sullivan celebrated her 100th birthday on Wednesday.

And she swapped the cuppa for a couple of glasses of champagne.

A china buyer for P. Falk and Co. in the 1920s, Thelma appreciates the delicate touch of bone china, with Royal Doulton and Shelley ware her favourites.

"It is so much nicer to drink from than the thick china they have today," Thelma said.

About 60 family members and friends, including a couple who told her of their engagement before they told their parents,



"There were lots of parties," Thelma Sullivan remembers of her younger days in Kalgoorlie.

were at the party at the Mt Claremont home she shares with her daughter Margaret.

Margaret baked the birthday cake.

"Oh yes, it is a fruitcake," Thelma said.

"She soaked the fruit in scotch for a couple of days."

Margaret iced and decorated it with a pattern of rose petals.

Thelma's lifelong love of roses had a devastating effect on her

the congestion, then held the baby close to her all the time to keep her warm."

Thelma Nicholson was born in Coolgardie.

Her father was a railway engineer and gold prospector and the family soon moved to Kalgoorlie.

"My brother Arthur was three years older than me," she said.

"He was a good brother, he

It was like Piccadilly Circus ... we would dance on the verandah

when one scratched her leg in the garden of her home of 60 years in Colin Street, Dalkeith, a few years ago.

A severe infection set in, and Thelma collapsed and ended up in intensive care.

Margaret said Thelma had been told she would never walk again.

Now Thelma is not only on her feet again, but also walks without aid.

When she was 90, she had a bone density test when doctors told her she had the bones of a 32-year-old, she said.

Thelma puts it down to eating well, particularly fruit, growing up playing tennis, enjoying ballroom dancing and always walking a lot.

She rarely wears spectacles but says going deaf is awful.

Being a survivor is a thing Thelma knows about. She still has a photograph of Nurse Penglaze, the Goldfields pioneer who helped her through diphtheria as a baby.

Margaret said: "She scalded a chook's feather and put it down Thelma's throat to bring up all

looked after me."

Her mother was artistic and would organise the decorations in Kalgoorlie Hall for all the big social events.

The family lived in a house on the corner of Piccadilly and Keenan streets.

"It was more like Piccadilly Circus because we had verandahs all around and that was where all the parties were before the balls," Thelma said.

"We would dance on the verandah.

"There were lots of parties."

Thelma moved to Nedlands when she got a new job.

Through family friends, she met widower James Sullivan, a fabric buyer for Charles Moore.

They married at Holy Rosary Roman Catholic Church in Thomas Street, Nedlands.

They had Margaret and her brother, John.

Their grandchildren are stockbroker Stephen Briggs, Loreto Primary School teacher Pia Sullivan and Olympic swimmer Eamon Sullivan.

Thelma used to babysit her



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Thelma Sullivan, celebrating her birthday at her Mt Claremont home, said she could not believe she was 100. Photo: Billie Fairclough

grandchildren, and Margaret said they loved her endless patience for playing games with them.

"When she was in her 70s she would throw a big rug over the dining table and crawl under with them to have a picnic," she said.

Thelma's tea-making and cake and biscuit cooking talents became legendary when she worked as a tea lady at the WA Petroleum company, in St George's Terrace.

Retired and recently widowed, she went there to help out for a few days during a staff shortage.

"The MD would send his

chauffeur-driven car to pick her up when she was needed," Margaret said.

In her 100 years Thelma has seen quite a few spectacles.

"The first time the train came to Kalgoorlie, my mother took me down to have a look," she said.

"There was quite a crowd. I still wonder at things. I used to think, how can they get someone to the Moon? But I accept everything as it comes.

"I cannot believe I am 100 years old.

"I have had a wonderful life.

"It has been one big party."