



# ROCK STARS OF AGING

50 WAYS TO LIVE TO 100  
LIFESTYLE SECRETS OF  
CENTENARIANS

What We've Learned From  
Hanging Out With the World's  
Most Active Elders and How It Can  
Turn You Into a Rock Star of Aging

**MARC MIDDLETON**  
Founder and CEO of Growing Bolder





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# **ROCK STARS OF AGING**

**50 WAYS TO LIVE TO 100  
LIFESTYLE SECRETS OF CENTENARIANS**

Marc Middleton



Bolder Press  
Maitland, Florida

Rock Stars of Aging  
50 Ways to Live to 100  
*Longevity Secrets from Centenarians*

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*"The great use of life is to spend it for something that will outlast it." --  
-- William James, philosopher (Jan. 11, 1842 – Aug. 26, 1910)*

For my colleagues at Bolder Media -- Bill, Jackie, Jason, Jill, Josh, Katy, and Pat who work hard every day to not only build a business that matters but leave a legacy that lasts.

For Joe Lee who taught us that the only way to build a sustainable business is to do the right thing every day.

For the three women in my life who have taught me everything I know about wanting to make a difference; Jill, Kelsey and Quinn.

*"How old would you be if you didn't know how old you was?"  
-- Satchel Paige, Major League baseball player, (July 7, 1906 –  
June 8, 1982)*

### **Satchel Paige's Rules For Staying Young**

(First appeared in the June 13, 1953 issue of *Collier's Weekly*)

- "Avoid fried meats which angry up the blood."
- "If your stomach disputes you, lie down and pacify it with cool thoughts."
- "Keep the juices flowing by jangling around gently as you move."
- "Go very light on the vices, such as carrying on in society -- the social ramble ain't restful."
- "Avoid running at all times."
- "Don't look back -- something might be gaining on you."

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## Chapter ONE

### Why This Book is Different

*“Beautiful young people are accidents of nature. But beautiful old people are works of art.” -- Eleanor Roosevelt, First Lady of the United States (October 11, 1884 – November 7, 1962)*

At the Bolder Media Group, we tell stories of ordinary people living extraordinary lives. Our business is all about smashing the stereotypes of age (all ages) and the limitations of possibility. Our message, very simply, is this -- don't let others define who you are or what's possible in your life. As Ralph Waldo Emerson noted, *“To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you something else is the greatest accomplishment.”*

As you age, it isn't easy to be yourself in an ageist society. We are constantly bombarded by negative images of aging. We've all been brainwashed to a degree by the culture in which we live and the media that reflect it.

We've been told for so long, by so many, what's *not* possible as we age that few of us know what's really possible, that is why we produce the Growing Bolder TV Show, the Growing Bolder Radio Show, and a large and growing online platform anchored by GrowingBolder.com. Our stories are meant to inspire men and women of all ages to realize that it's never too late to improve their lives. It's never too late to make a difference in the lives of others. It's never too late to chase your dreams and pursue your passions. It's never too late to really live. It's a message of hope and optimism that resonates.

We have found that one of the most powerful ways to illustrate what's possible is to share the stories of centenarians -- anyone who is 100 years or older. What makes centenarians so unique, so fascinating and so worth studying is the fact that they are not simply 80-year-olds who have endured 20 more years of physical and mental decline. Most centenarians don't suffer the chronic illnesses associated with

age until shortly before dying. Somehow they have managed to maintain a quality of life that makes life worth living until the very end. But how have they done it and why don't more of us know about it?

This book is not based upon surveys, scientific research or the opinions of scholars, although it occasionally refers to all. Most research is funded by some for-profit corporation and can be easily skewed to serve commercial motives. This book is based upon our extensive, first-hand experience interviewing and observing centenarians and active nonagenarians and octogenarians (those in their 80s and 90s.)

What are our credentials? We were there when 110-year-old Onie Ponder voted in the presidential election of 2008, keeping alive her streak of voting in every presidential election since 1920; when 109-year-old Ruth Hamilton discovered video chatting and became the world's oldest blogger; when Wilhelmina Hoorn danced on her 107th birthday; when Frances Shevenaugh blew out 105 candles with a single breath; when 103-year-old artist Harold Rotenberg flirted with the ladies while being honored at a major museum; when 96-year-old Mary Anne Cooper traveled across the country to compete in the national swimming championships and when 93-year-old George Blair battled back from a case of pneumonia to set another record as the world's oldest barefoot water skier.

We interviewed 108-year-old Bill Hargrove in between games at his local bowling alley; 103-year-old Bill Tapia in between practice sessions for his upcoming live ukulele concert; 101-year-old Virgil Coffman after he walked into a Chevy dealer and plunked down \$38,000 cash for a brand-new, special edition 426 horsepower Chevy Camaro; Nola Ochs after becoming the world's oldest college graduate at age 96; 95-year-old world track and field champion Trent Lane after chopping firewood and flying solo in his private airplane; Mae Laborde after moving to Hollywood to pursue her dream of becoming an actress at age 93; Frankie Manning after dancing with 97 different women to celebrate his 97th birthday.

I could go on and on. If they hold a record as the world's oldest anything, chances are we've interviewed them. The world's oldest woman to reach the North Pole? Check. The world's oldest NASCAR

driver? Got him. The world's oldest showgirl, college baseball player, female Olympian, motivational speaker? Yes. Yes. Yes. And Yes. We've chatted with them all and we've thoroughly enjoyed every conversation.

These were not academic, research-oriented, survey-type interviews because, frankly, centenarians don't like those kinds of interviews and neither do we. Surveys are flawed. Research is biased. These were chats between friends. Conversations that were allowed to wander where the interviewees wanted to take them. Conversations that followed passions and revealed personality.

We have interviewed hundreds of men and women who are or were too busy enjoying life to pay attention to society telling them that they're supposed to be dying. These *Rock Stars of Aging* are as diverse as any group could be but as we talked and as we listened, we learned. Many common denominators were revealed. This book is about those common threads. Threads that when woven together helped create not only a long life but, far more importantly, a life filled with passion and joy. A life without fear and regret.

*"Come to the edge, Life said. They said: We are afraid. Come to the edge, Life said. They came. It pushed them. And they flew."*  
-- Guillaume Apollinaire

## Chapter TWO

### The Lessons of Ruth 1898

*“There is a fountain of youth: it is your mind, your talents, the creativity you bring to your life and the lives of the people you love. When you learn to tap this source, you will have truly defeated age.”*  
-- Sophia Loren, actress

We are at the beginning of a longevity revolution that will change everything we know about life after 70. And 80. And 90. And 100. To many of us, the idea of living to 100 isn't all that appealing. Let's face it, no one wants to become a centenarian if all it means is another 20 years of living alone in a small room, bedridden, “medicated” (drugged), semi-vegetative and in pain while being looked after by strangers who might *provide* care but really don't care about you.

Without quality of life, longevity quickly loses its appeal. It's more punishment than opportunity. The goal of living to 100 is only worthwhile if we can get there in a physical, mental and emotional state that allows us to enjoy it. But what if we can remain active into our 100s? What if we can continue growing, laughing, learning, loving, sharing and giving back into our 100s? Modern medicine, genetic research and most importantly, lifestyle changes are now collaborating to provide that opportunity to just about everyone.

And what if they're right -- the growing number of scientists and researchers who predict that living to 120 *and enjoying it* will soon be commonplace? What if tomorrow's 120-year-olds are not warehoused like many 80-year-olds today? What if they are not a drain on their families and society as a whole? What if they require far less healthcare than the average 40-year-old today? What if they are working, dancing, swimming, driving, volunteering, living alone and enjoying good meals and great vacations? Suddenly longevity is a great thing.

This much is certain -- everything we thought we knew about aging is changing and changing rapidly. Just a few decades ago, the really old

were little more than wrinkled oddities rolled out once a year for an uneasy birthday celebration that usually left us with a sense of sadness and the thought that there was no good reason to live that long.

There now exists an entirely new life stage -- a two-, three- or even four-decade opportunity for meaningful, fulfilling life. This is a life stage that has never before existed in the history of mankind. This is a life stage that can be enjoyed and used to accomplish just about anything by just about anyone. Men and women are starting new businesses in their 80s, taking up new hobbies in their 90s and competing in sporting events in their 100s.

Where are these amazing men and women? They are everywhere. And there will soon be many more of them. Ruth Hamilton was one of them.

When Ruth Hamilton celebrated her 109th birthday, she told Growing Bolder's Bill Shafer, "I keep asking, 'Dear God, why am I living?' And all I hear is, 'Shut up!'" Ruth, like many centenarians, wanted to believe that she had a divine purpose for living so long; a special mission from God. What she came to understand is that she was not meant to question her longevity but to simply enjoy every moment of her life for as long as she was able.

Equally anxious to learn and to teach, Ruth was fascinated by the power and possibility of the Internet. We introduced Ruth to the concept of video blogging when we showed her how to use a laptop with a video camera. At the age of 108, Ruth effortlessly and enthusiastically became the world's oldest blogger. She filed dozens of video blogs at GrowingBolder.com under the name of Ruth1898, sharing her thoughts on everything from the meaning of life to Brittany Spears' personal troubles.

Ruth laughed in amazement and beamed with pride when people actually watched and commented on her videos. This former teacher who had outlived all of her family and friends was suddenly able to connect with people on the other side of the world from her wheelchair on the 6<sup>th</sup> floor of an assisted living facility in Orlando, Florida.

That new reach, that new connection with humanity, recharged Ruth's longevity battery. It gave her purpose and passion — two of the most important ingredients in a longevity lifestyle. It made her feel useful and important again. Ruth passed away shortly before her 110<sup>th</sup> birthday, but she maintained a quick wit, a sharp mind and a *joie de vivre* until the very end.

Ruth represents the new face of the ultra elderly and demonstrates what life can be like with a little luck and a passion for living. And don't think it can't or won't happen to you. There are many more Ruth Hamiltons on the horizon, and for the first time in human history, that seems like a good thing.

*"The tragedy of life is not that it ends so soon, but that we wait so long to begin it. "-- Anonymous*

## Chapter THREE

### The Centenarian Tsunami

*“Centenarians disprove the perception that the older you get, the sicker you get. They teach us that the older you get, the healthier you’ve been.” – Dr. Thomas Perls, Director of the New England Centenarian Study*

Throughout 99 percent of human history, the average life expectancy was less than 18 years. In 1900, the average life expectancy in the U.S. was 47. Today that will barely get you a midlife crisis. Yesterday your chances of living to 100 were 1 in 4,000. Tomorrow they could be 1 in 2. That’s the flip of a coin.

Ready or not, the age of the centenarian is here. Centenarians are now the second fastest growing segment of our population. In fact, the only group that’s growing more rapidly is supercentenarians -- those at least 110 years old. How big of a phenomenon is this? Hallmark is now printing "Happy 100th Birthday" cards, and a cake with 100 candles has become so commonplace that it no longer guarantees a photo in the local newspaper. And forget about getting a Willard Scott shout-out on the *Today* show for your 100th birthday. If Willard mentioned every centenarian’s birthday, there would be no time left for Matt, Ann and Al.

While centenarians will become increasingly common, extremely active, successful and even powerful centenarians will become international celebrities, not just for what they do but what they represent. Unlike others of extreme age, they will not be simply tolerated or ridiculed. They will be revered -- traveling the world, speaking, entertaining, educating and adding true value to society. They will become the first true *Rock Stars of Aging*.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, there are now about 125,000 centenarians in the United States. The centenarians club could reach six million worldwide by the year 2050 with nearly 1 million living in the U.S. And here’s the really good news -- we’re not just living longer, we’re living better.

For many Americans, life expectancy is increasing without a corresponding increase in the length of disability or morbidity. In other words, we're not just adding years, we're adding active years. This may be the biggest news of our lifetime and maybe the biggest news in the history of mankind. This brand-new life stage can span several decades and provides unprecedented opportunity for personal enrichment along with emotional and spiritual growth. These extra years offer the potential to turn ordinary lives into extraordinary lives. If we can maintain our health, independence and an active lifestyle, we should all aspire to live to 100. We should all try to become not only centenarians, but *Rock Stars of Aging*.

*"Anything you can do, or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it." -- Goethe*

## Chapter FOUR

### Life Span vs. Life Expectancy

*“The longer I live the more beautiful life becomes.” -- Frank Lloyd Wright, architect (June 8, 1867 – April 9, 1959)*

Life span and life expectancy are two very different things. Life expectancy is a statistical average. It's the age to which most of us can expect to live. It accounts for everyone who lives to be very old and those who die in childbirth. Life expectancy was very low in the Dark Ages because so many died at birth; there were countless untreatable diseases in addition to very little medicine, no healthcare, accidents, infections, malnutrition and more. And of course, no one swam laps, ran triathlons or worked out at the local gym. Life expectancy has risen dramatically over the past couple hundred years but not because of a change in human genetics or the aging process. It has risen because of improved healthcare and better lifestyle.

Life span is defined as the age of the oldest living individual of a species. For humans, it's 122 years. That's how old Madame Jeanne Calment was when she died in France in August 1987. Without genetic intervention, it's unlikely life span will increase as dramatically as life expectancy has. Human beings are designed to live only so long. But very few of us even approach that which we are designed for. Centenarians are the exceptions.

Let's get back to genetics for a moment, because science fiction is about to collide with reality. An increasing number of scientists believe there may not be an upper limit to human lifespan and that

modifying or even reversing the aging process is only a matter of time. “Researchers are closer than ever before to unlocking the door to life extension,” says Dan Perry, Executive Director of the Alliance for Aging Research organization in Washington, D.C. “With genetic intervention, expect to see many more people -- half the population -- with life expectancy to 100.”

And that’s the conservative view. The wildly outrageous view is now being presented by an increasing number of doctors and researchers. Dr. Terry Grossman, author of *Transcend: Nine Steps to Living Well Forever*, believes that in less than two decades, for each year we live, medical science will add more than a year to our life expectancy.

That’s approaching immortality or what British researcher Aubrey de Grey calls *Longevity Escape Velocity*. De Grey says that aging is a disease and that gene therapies will soon “cure” it. He seriously believes that the first human to live to be 1,000 may already be alive.

Simply stated, de Grey’s plan involves periodic repairs using stem cells, gene therapy and other technologies that already exist. This longevity “tune-up” will be good enough to add 10 years to our lifespan. During that 10-year period, emerging medical technologies will increase so rapidly that we’ll soon be able to get a new “tune-up” that will last another 30 years. And during *that* period, science will once again advance enough by the next “scheduled service” that death can be put off indefinitely.

While this makes for great conversation at the dinner table, not everyone believes this is either possible or desirable. While potential lifespan is a fascinating subject, life expectancy -- the age to which most of us can expect to live -- is far more meaningful. So where do we look in our efforts to discover the prescription for a long life? We look to the living laboratory all around us. We look to centenarians, the *Rock Stars of Aging*.

## Chapter FIVE

### Why Should I Care About Centenarians?

*“All the studies show that only about 25 percent of the length of life we enjoy is related to genes. In other words, 75 percent of it is up to us or the environment we live in.” -- Dr. Robert Butler*

To write this book, this prescription for a long and fulfilling life, we ignored most of the experts and looked to the centenarians themselves, to their words and especially to their examples. There are three major reasons you should care a great deal about centenarians and how they live their lives.

#### **1: Centenarians Didn't Win the Genetic Lottery**

Living to 100 is more of a lifestyle choice than a genetic blessing. The National Institute on Aging says that longevity is 70 percent determined by lifestyle and only 30 percent by genes. Other studies are even more pro-lifestyle, with many now saying 10 percent of longevity is dependent on your genes and up to 90 percent on your lifestyle.

#### **2: Centenarians Make Life Worth Living**

According to multiple studies of centenarians, more than 90 percent were physically and mentally healthy well into their 90s. Many centenarians are still living at home, driving, golfing, traveling, dancing, painting, telling jokes, watching videos on the Internet and listening to music on an iPod.

Most centenarians don't suffer the chronic illnesses that are typically associated with age -- such as Alzheimer's disease, cardiovascular trouble or diabetes -- until shortly before dying. Gerontologists call

this “compressed morbidity.” Basically, it means avoiding disease until the very end and then dying quickly, instead of reaching your 80s and beginning a slow, progressive, impaired and declining lifestyle for 10 or 15 years.

*Compress my morbidity, please.*

### **3: Centenarians Live a Lifestyle That We Can Model**

If centenarians were simply genetic freaks of nature, we could look on in amazement and with envy, then go about our days not aspiring to be more like them. But the facts don't lie -- they prove that if we make lifestyle changes, we can be more like these *Rock Stars of Aging*.

For some this knowledge will be a burden. It's far easier to sit on the couch and pretend that your condition is the result of reasons outside of your control. Just as the certain knowledge that you can lose weight by exercising and eating better fails to motivate many obese people to change their lives, the knowledge that you can dramatically increase the length and quality of your life will fail to motivate many who are frail, tired, unhappy and unhealthy.

For others, this knowledge will represent life-changing opportunity because centenarians are living laboratories, providing not only glimpses into the future but the roadmaps on how to get there. We found many common denominators among the very old, and nearly all of them are lifestyle choices that anyone can make at any age.

## Chapter SIX

### How Centenarians Differ

*“Life is like riding a bicycle. You don't fall off unless you stop pedaling.” -- Claude Pepper, politician (September 8, 1900 – May 30, 1989)*

Before we reveal how centenarians are alike, let's look at how they are different, because this really is the best possible news.

#### **Centenarians differ in every way imaginable.**

They vary widely in years of education (no years to post-graduate degrees), socioeconomic status (very poor to very rich), religion, ethnicity and diet (strictly vegetarian to extremely rich in saturated fats).

Why is this good news? Because these differences prove that there is an *opportunity* for just about anyone, living anywhere, to dramatically improve the length and quality of his or her life. These differences are not reasons to negate or disregard the importance of identifying and adopting the many lifestyle similarities that lead to longevity. Put together, these traits, shared by almost all centenarians, are a valid roadmap to vital aging.

Of course, there are always exceptions to every rule and in this case there are exceptions to every lifestyle similarity shared by the vast majority of centenarians. Unfortunately, it's usually the wildest exceptions that get the most press. The media would much rather report on the one centenarian who believes five pounds of sausage and a six-pack of beer every day is the secret to longevity than to report on the 1,000 centenarians who believe pairing a plant-based diet and regular exercise is the key. So don't be fooled by what you occasionally read online or in line at the grocery store; be encouraged that it's not too late for you to make lifestyle changes that can have a major impact on the quality of your life. When it comes to longevity, it's not luck, it's lifestyle!

## Chapter SEVEN

### The 50 Ways to Live to 100

*“One should never count the years--one should instead count one's interests. I have kept young trying never to lose my childhood sense of wonderment.” -- Helen Keller, author and activist (June 27, 1880 – June 1, 1968)*

Our conversations with centenarians are in the context of an interview for our radio show or TV program. We do not speak to someone simply because he or she is 100. That is no longer unusual enough to be of interest to a large audience. We speak to centenarians who are still working, competing in sports, volunteering, traveling the world, taking classes, pursuing their art, etc. Strictly from a media perspective, non-active centenarians hold little interest to us. They lack the passion and often the ability to carry on an interesting conversation. They provide little in the way of inspiration or motivation. They are very old. **So what?**

Now, if they are very old *and* thoroughly enjoying their lives -- that gets our attention. If they still have a passion for life and the ability to enjoy activities that we enjoy they become great guests for our programs, great inspiration for our viewers and listeners and great subjects for our “study.”

We are not doing academic research and don't ask all centenarians the same questions. Our questions are designed to tap into their passion so that they'll speak about their individual and personal stories -- we're looking for that which makes them unique. However, as we speak to centenarians about their individual lifestyles, we continue to hear many of the same things, often told in different ways. To better understand these themes to longevity, I've grouped the 50 ways into the eight categories: state of mind; health; fitness and nutrition; mental stimulation; family matters; social connection; spirituality, work and play; and finance.

## STATE OF MIND

### 1: Centenarians Have a Great Attitude

*“Our attitudes control our lives. Attitudes are a secret power working twenty-four hours a day, for good or bad. It is of paramount importance that we know how to harness and control this great force.”*  
-- Irving Berlin, composer (May 11, 1888 - September 22, 1989)

Forget the stereotype of the crotchety old man or lady. The first common trait shared by every centenarian we've ever spoken with is immediately apparent. They're easygoing and they're happy. Centenarians have positive, sunny dispositions. They know how to chill.

Not all have always been that way. Occasionally, a daughter or granddaughter will say, “You should have seen her 30 years ago. She was anything but mellow!” But mellow is what nearly every centenarian eventually becomes.

Doctors have proven that stress leads to disease and a good attitude leads to a healthy life. Happy people have higher levels of endorphins and stronger immune systems.

#### **Stress=sick. Happy=healthy.**

But here's the real mind-blower. The way we live our lives can actually affect us at a genetic level. Dr. Michael Bauerschmidt is an expert on the human genome and says, “How you approach life, your attitude towards life, can manifest as how your genes express themselves.” In other words, you may have a family history of cardiac disease, cancer, diabetes or Alzheimer's and how you live your life will determine if, when and how those diseases develop. Almost all researchers now agree that a healthy lifestyle and the right attitude can overcome bad genes.

Psychology trumps physiology almost every time. The people that have lived the longest have (or have developed) the best attitudes.

## STATE OF MIND

**2: Centenarians Have Sense of Purpose -- an Ikigai**

*“When you discover your purpose, you will feel its demand. It will fill you with enthusiasm and a burning desire to get to work.” -- W. Clement Stone, author and philanthropist (May 4, 1902 - September 3, 2002)*

Get your ikigai on. The Japanese believe that everyone has an ikigai -- a reason for being; something that makes life worth living. Discovering your ikigai can take a lifetime of searching. Some never find it but it's not really the finding that's most important. Embracing the search is a key to longevity.

It's common to hear about someone passing away not long after retiring or after his or her spouse passes. In many cases, it's because the job or the relationship provided purpose.

A centenarian's purpose doesn't have to be profound as long as it inspires them to action and they derive satisfaction from pursuing it. It's that action and satisfaction that keeps them going.

We have had centenarians tell us that they don't know why they are still alive, but most believe that there is a reason and that it will eventually be revealed. Waiting for the revelation becomes a purpose for living.

## STATE OF MIND

**3: Centenarians Avoid Anger and Drama**

*“Holding on to anger is like grasping a hot coal with the intent of throwing it at someone else; you are the one who gets burned.” --  
Buddha*

I don't think the Bolder Media Group will ever produce a Big Brother type reality show in which centenarians are thrown together into a single house. By reality show standards it would be a bomb because there would be very little conflict or drama. Centenarians have gotten very good at avoiding both. From our experiences and observations, there is no rage in extreme old age. When asked what makes them angry, centenarians always have the exact same answer -- nothing.

The latest medical research confirms that anger isn't just a negative emotion, it's a disease generator that can lead to high blood pressure, heart disease and other life-threatening illnesses.

## STATE OF MIND

**4: Centenarians Are Enthusiastic and Optimistic**

*"None are so old as those who have outlived enthusiasm.  
-- Henry David Thoreau, author and poet (July 12, 1817 – May 6, 1862)*

Centenarians are the definitive glass half full people. Life to them is a joy, not a burden. They never imagine the worst that can happen. They look for the good in every situation.

Centenarians are game. If our producers can make contact with them (not always easy) they almost always agree to an interview. When asked what's the greatest thing about living to 100, many have told us, "getting so much attention."

Thomas Perls, director of the New England Centenarian Study, puts it this way: "If you actually look forward to getting older, your chances of doing so are much better than if you dread aging."

*"Life begins at 80 and gets better when you reach 90. And when you reach 100, oh boy!" -- Rosie Ross, musician (1906 – 2009)*

## STATE OF MIND

**5: Centenarians Live in the Present**

*“I don’t dream; I believe in reality. I live one day at a time. I find that’s the best way. Worrying one day is enough.” -- Onie Ponder, Florida’s longest living person (September 3, 1898 – December 31, 2010)*

Nearly every important philosopher in history has underscored the importance of being in the moment; expanding the now. Centenarians are pretty good at it; they are all about the here and now.

Living in the moment increases enjoyment. Centenarians don’t live in the past, which eliminates regret, and they don’t worry about the future, which reduces stress.

When Wilhelmina Hoorn turned 107, we asked if she worried about the future. “What is there to worry about? You can’t change the future, honey,” she answered.

Once you reach old age, it seems that as soon as you believe your life is behind you, it is. Memories are great comfort for the elderly but making new memories is an important key to longevity.

*“What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us” -- Ralph Waldo Emerson, author and lecturer (May 25, 1803 – April 27, 1882)*

## STATE OF MIND

**6: Centenarians Wake Up and Get Busy**

*“Painting’s not important. The important thing is keeping busy.” --  
Grandma Moses, artist (September 7, 1860 – December 13, 1961)*

Centenarians are eager. They like to get things done and they like to get them done on a regular schedule. Without exception, every centenarian we have interviewed says he or she can’t wait to get up each morning. In fact, many centenarians still make daily to-do lists. Sometimes, it seems that a to-do list alone will help keep you alive. When you have nothing left to do, you have nothing left to live for.

Centenarians don’t like to shake things up when it comes to their schedule. They are creatures of habit. Once up, they tend to follow the same routines every day with rare exceptions. Nearly all: get up, eat, exercise, read, work and go to bed according to a regular schedule.

*“How can I die? I’m booked.” -- George Burns, comedian (January 20, 1896 – March 9, 1996)*

## STATE OF MIND

**7: Centenarians Have a Great Sense of Humor**

*“Always keep your smile. That's how I explain my long life. I never wear mascara; I laugh until I cry too often. I think I will die laughing” -- Jeanne Calment, 122, the longest living human (February 21, 1875 – August 4, 1997)*

Instead of joking *about* centenarians, someone should compile a book of jokes *by* centenarians. They are funny and sometimes downright hilarious. Every centenarian we have interviewed has a quick wit and the ability to find humor in life's struggles. One 105-year-old in the New England Centenarian Study told researchers, "The best thing about being over 100 is you no longer have to worry about peer pressure because you have no peers." At a celebration for his 100th birthday, the late entertainer George Burns was asked by a reporter, "What does your doctor think of your smoking?" Burns replied, "I don't know. My doctor is dead." Every time his physical therapist says 'see you tomorrow,' 113-year-old Fred Hale answers: "Perhaps! I'm not making long-term plans!" Hale died peacefully in his sleep two weeks shy of his 114th birthday. By the way, he drove until he was 109 but gave it up because New York drivers were "too slow."

We've all heard the saying, "laughter is the best medicine." It turns out that there is a great deal of truth in that. A Norwegian doctor tracked 54,000 men and women for seven years and discovered that those who found life the funniest lived the longest.

Other studies have determined that laughter increases the survival chances of cancer patients, decreases arterial stiffness, strengthens the immune system, decreases stress, lowers blood sugar levels, increases pain tolerance, reduces depression and improves quality of life.

## STATE OF MIND

**8: Centenarians Are Kind**

*"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. If you treat others the way you would like to be treated, it has a lot to do with living because happiness and good health, I think, almost go hand in hand" -- Elsa Hoffman, 102*

With respect to Billy Joel, *"only the good die young"* is wrong. Only the really good live to 100 is more accurate.

Being self-centered might get you to 80 or 90, but it won't get you to 100. Centenarians are kind and compassionate. They worry more about others than they do themselves. When we ask centenarians by which principles they live their lives, the most common response is, "I believe in the Golden Rule."

Without getting too heavy here, this is a great statement about human nature. Wouldn't it be disappointing if only mean, evil, con artists lived to be very old? There is some karmic satisfaction in the knowledge that doing the right thing is a path to active longevity.

## STATE OF MIND

**9: Centenarians Are Independent**

*"I never give it a thought if I'm too old or not. If I want to do it I just do it. It's just doing what you want to do and going where you want to go." -- Virgil Coffman, 102, world's oldest new car buyer*

Although centenarians are extremely social and active in their communities, they are also fiercely independent and self-reliant. In the U.S., almost all of the 700-plus people recruited to the New England Centenarian Study (NECS) since it began in 1994 had lived independently until the age of 90. Seventy percent of centenarians live at home, either alone or with a spouse, and 40 percent of supercentenarians (110+) could still look after themselves.

We spoke with 102-year-old Virgil Coffman shortly after he walked into a Chevrolet dealer and plunked down \$38,000 in cash to buy a brand-new, bright yellow Camaro. Virgil specifically wanted the special *Transformers* edition with 426 horsepower, "just like the one in the movie." Why did he do it? Because he lives alone, loves cars, likes to take day trips and "the ladies love it." Virgil told us, "If I get another car, it'll probably be a Corvette." Cruisin' for chicks at 102. That's worth living for.

## STATE OF MIND

**10: Centenarians Handle All Personal Loss Well**

*“We cannot prevent...the birds of sorrow from flying over our heads...but we can refuse...to let them build nests...in our hair.” -- Ron Schreiber, poet, “The Birds of Sorrow”*

It's not just the loss of a spouse that nearly every centenarian has dealt with. The universal centenarian experience is one of continual loss -- the loss of friends, jobs, children, driver's licenses, sexuality, hearing, vision and more. It's one loss after another.

The sheer weight of continual loss is too great for many to deal with and overcome. Centenarians are the exceptions. They don't spend much time feeling sorry for themselves and they don't fall into states of depression -- both are the beginning of the end for the ultra-elderly. Centenarians adapt. They adjust. They let go, move forward and somehow their joy of life is able to trump their latest loss.

## STATE OF MIND

**11: Centenarians Are Fearless**

*“The fear of death follows from the fear of life. A man who lives fully is prepared to die at any time.” -- Mark Twain, author (November 30, 1835 – April 21, 1910)*

Reaching 100 is apparently a very liberating experience. We’ve asked many centenarians what they are most afraid of and the answer is almost always the same: “nothing.”

We’ve specifically asked many centenarians if they are afraid of not waking up in the morning because the odds that the end is near increase every day. Without exception, they say nearly the same thing. “I don’t want to go but I’m ready to go if it’s my time.”

As I’ll mention a little later, centenarians are innately curious and it appears that includes even curiosity about death because many centenarians have told us they are increasingly curious to know what’s next.

Perhaps since they have already lived long and meaningful lives, centenarians aren’t afraid of death, disease, poverty, the loss of loved ones, being robbed, war in the Middle East, a massive earthquake or an invasion of alien beings. Jeanne Calment, the oldest person to ever live put it simply, “I’m not afraid of anything.”

*“Death doesn't frighten me; now I can think peacefully of ending a long life.” -- Jeanne Calment, 122, the longest living human (February 21, 1875 – August 4, 1997)*

## STATE OF MIND

**12: Centenarians Live Their Own Lives**

*"I think all life is just be true to your own self. If you can't be true to your own self you can't be true to anybody. So live your own life your way and don't be deflected down the wrong path." -- Ruth Frith, 102-year-old athlete*

Centenarians don't tell stories of regret because, for the most part, they have always been in touch with what they need and able to figure out a way to live the life they want.

Since most centenarians are content with humble lives and their dreams have rarely been grandiose, they have pursued that which interests them.

When asked what they regret most about his or her life, no centenarian has ever told us about regretting a major decision involving career or relationships. They didn't work for decades in jobs they hated. They didn't live for decades with a spouse who abused them. They didn't stay friends with those who wanted to control them.

*"To be nobody but yourself in a world doing its best to make you everybody else means to fight the hardest battle any human can ever fight and never stop fighting." -- e. e. cummings, author (October 14, 1894 – September 3, 1962)*

## STATE OF MIND

**13: Centenarians Visualize Themselves as Young**

*“We lift ourselves by our thought. We climb upon our vision of ourselves. If you want to enlarge your life, you must first enlarge your thought of it and of yourself. Hold the ideal of yourself as you long to be, always everywhere.” -- Orison Swett Marden, writer (1850-1924)*

In many ways, we are what we perceive ourselves to be. Although most don't realize it, centenarians are masters of the art of visualization. Even at 100, most don't see themselves as old. They don't view aging as a linear experience. They see it as a state of mind. Of course, they know their ages but they don't visualize themselves as the weak, impotent, bent over elderly people that many in their 70s and 80s see themselves as.

The way we visualize ourselves aging has a direct impact on how we actually age. So every time you think about your future, make sure to see yourself as a vibrant, active, happy person who feels good and looks good. That's not always easy because the media, for the most part, views and portrays old age in a very unflattering light.

## STATE OF MIND

**14: Centenarians Have a Sense of Adventure and Wonder**

*"I look for life's little miracles. They are everywhere if only we take the time to notice." -- Mary Anne Cooper, 96-year-old swimmer*

Centenarians walk through life with a sense of wonder and amazement. Masters swimming champion Mary Anne Cooper, 96, told us, "I'm always looking for the little miracles. Not the big things; the little miracles. The nice happy little things that happen are the most wonderful part of life."

Centenarians are enthralled by the things most of us take for granted or don't even notice. On one visit with 109-year-old Ruth Hamilton, she stared at a white cloud in a blue sky for 15 minutes, talking non-stop about it. She commented on the fluffy texture of the cloud, how it was formed, how it was pushed across the sky by the wind, how it filtered the sunlight and wondered when it might fill with moisture and provide rain. She wondered aloud why the sky was blue and the cloud was white. Ruth was able to look out her single window and amuse herself and stimulate her mind endlessly.

*"You cannot be lonely if you like the person you're alone with."  
-- Wayne Dyer, self-help author*

## STATE OF MIND

**15: Centenarians Are Predominately Women**

*“There is in every true woman's heart, a spark of heavenly fire, which lies dormant in the broad daylight of prosperity, but which kindles up and beams and blazes in the dark hour of adversity.” -- Washington Irving, author (April 13, 1783 – November 28, 1859)*

OK, being a woman isn't really a state of mind, but it appears that a state of mind that is more common to women than men could be responsible for the huge longevity gender gap. The centenarian male/female (M/F) ratio reported by most studies ranges between 1:5 and 1:10. In other words, as many as 9 out of every 10 centenarians are women.

Since researchers have been unable to attribute this disparity to any single variable, it is believed that several factors are responsible including genetics, hormones and perhaps most importantly, lifestyle.

Although women can still expect to live longer than men, the disparity has lessened in the past couple of decades. Some researchers believe it's because more women are taking on the behaviors and stresses formerly considered the domain of males -- smoking, drinking and working outside the home.

## HEALTH, FITNESS AND NUTRITION

**16: Centenarians Exercise Regularly (But Not Too Hard)**

*"I always keep going. I don't stop. You know, like some of these ladies, they get old, and then they sit down, and then that's it. Well not me. No, not me." -- Frances Shevenaugh (July 16 1901 - June 25 2010)*

Not all centenarians are world champion masters athletes but very few are couch potatoes. Most live surprisingly active lifestyles and many lived vigorously active lifestyles in their 80s and 90s. When asked to list the secrets to their longevity, nearly every centenarian we have ever interviewed says, "I keep moving."

One of the most important benefits of regular exercise is brain health. While there is very little that can be done to treat dementia, exercise can help avoid it entirely or at the very least, delay it.

We once interviewed Bill Hargrove, the world's oldest active bowler, at the alley, in between games -- when he was 106! He told Growing Bolder that he still hit the lanes twice a week for league bowling, even with failing eyesight and hearing. He had multiple compelling reasons to stay at home but he didn't. He kept moving.

What do centenarians do for exercise? A little bit of everything.

- 41 percent of centenarians walk or hike at least once a week
- 31 percent garden
- 6 percent practice Tai Chi or yoga
- 5 percent play basketball, tennis, baseball or soccer

The good news is that you don't have to do much and you can do whatever you enjoy but you need to do it on a regular basis. As the actress Helen Hayes once said, *"If you rest, you rust."*

## HEALTH, FITNESS AND NUTRITION

**17: Centenarians Are Not Obese**

*“The only way you get that fat off is to eat less and exercise more.” – Jack LaLanne, fitness expert (September 26, 1914 – January 23, 2011)*

Have you ever seen an obese centenarian? We’ve never interviewed one. Don’t bother looking. They don’t exist. Centenarians are nearly always lean. Obesity may be the single most serious threat to increasing lifespan.

Occasionally, a moderate smoker or drinker will make it to 100. Sometimes an inactive couch potato will get there, but never an obese person. Extra weight is one of the archenemies of extra years. Obesity has been linked to diabetes, heart disease and some forms of cancer. Being obese in middle age roughly doubles mortality rates. (Obesity is defined as a body mass index above 30; to measure your BMI, multiply your weight in pounds by 703 and divide the result by the square of your height in inches.)

At 95 years old, Donald Pellman had just broken his seventh world age group record in track and field when he told us this: “The most important exercise of all is pushing yourself away from the table. I have no special diet, but I try to avoid eating too many calories. “

## HEALTH, FITNESS AND NUTRITION

**18: Centenarians Eat Balanced, Consistent Diets**

*“To lengthen your life, shorten your meals.” -- Proverb*

Eating right is aging right. While it's true that some centenarians have rather bizarre diets (116-year-old Maria Esther de Capovilla swore by donkey's milk and 114-year-old Mitoyo Kawate believed sweet custard cakes were responsible for her longevity), three out of four centenarians eat simple and nutritionally balanced meals every day. When 115-year-old Besse Cooper of Monroe, Georgia, was asked to explain her longevity she said, “I mind my own business and I don't eat junk food.”

Most centenarians tell us their diets consist mostly of fresh fruits and vegetables, beans, and nuts. They eat very little processed foods and fatty meats.

Longevity researchers and health advocates have long promoted the so-called Mediterranean Diet, heavy on fruits, vegetables and whole grains that also includes healthy fats and protein from sources like fish and seafood.

Seventh-day Adventists follow a vegetarian diet that has led to many in that religious community living into their 90s and longer and to Loma Linda, California -- a community that is predominately Seventh-day Adventists -- being named one of the Blue Zones, or longevity hot spots.

And what's the favorite daily drink of most centenarians? Water, by a landslide. Dr. Leila Denmark, a supercentenarian, maintains that she never had anything to drink except water from the time she was seven months old.

Not only do they eat balanced diets, most centenarians say they haven't changed their diets in decades, so consistency in diet also appears to be a longevity factor.

## HEALTH, FITNESS AND NUTRITION

### **19: Centenarians Don't Smoke**

*“A cigarette is the only consumer product which when used as directed kills its consumer.” -- Dr. Gro Harlem Brundtland, former Director General, World Health Organization*

Sorry smokers, there is little wiggle room here. We have never interviewed a centenarian that is a smoker. Some are former smokers but quit long ago.

CDC's National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion found that cigarette smoke contains over 4,800 chemicals, 69 of which are known to cause cancer.

According to the American Cancer Society, smoking shortens people's life spans by an average of 13 to 14.5 years. Plus, the chronic diseases caused by smoking seriously impact the quality of life of smokers while they're still alive.

The good news is that it's never too late to quit and make a real difference in the length and quality of your life. A Duke University study found that male smokers who quit by age 35 increased their life spans by 6.9 to 8.5 years, while women who quit boosted theirs by 6.1 to 7.7 years.

Centenarians have heeded the warnings. Seventy-seven percent have never smoked, and on average, those who did smoke quit 41 years ago.

## HEALTH, FITNESS AND NUTRITION

**20: Centenarians Avoid Heavy Alcohol Use**

*“Health -- what my friends are always drinking to before they fall down.” -- Phyllis Diller, actress and comedian*

There are those who swear by a daily glass of red wine, but, for the most part, centenarians avoid alcohol altogether. And there is no such thing as a centenarian who is a heavy drinker. Multiple research projects confirm that if you drink heavily, your survival rate is greatly reduced and your chances of getting cancer are increased.

One well-publicized study suggests that drinking is actually beneficial to longevity. In fact, the headline reported by many media outlets was *Drinkers Outlive Non-Drinkers -- Longevity Never Tasted So Good*. This is the problem with research studies and the way they are reported by the media and then consumed by the public. Most never read beyond the attention-getting headline.

Upon closer review, the study only focused on individuals 55 to 65 years in age who had some form of patient care in the three years leading up to the study. The research was done mostly on men and followed only 20 years of their lives, which put the individuals in the 75 to 85 range at closing. It ignored the impact of alcohol on death rates in younger and older populations and failed to adjust for countless factors. For instance, did drinking temporarily help these patients who lacked healthy coping mechanisms deal with the psychological stress of old age, while creating and masking physiological problems that ultimately contributed to their demise years later? We'll never know. What we do know from our interviews is that very few centenarians are drinkers.

## HEALTH, FITNESS AND NUTRITION

**21: Centenarians Sleep Soundly and Regularly**

*“That we are not much sicker and much madder than we are is due exclusively to that most blessed and blessing of all natural graces, sleep.” -- Aldous Huxley, writer (July 26, 1894 – November 22, 1963)*

While most Americans don't get enough sleep or don't sleep well, most centenarians have little trouble falling to sleep and getting an average of 7-8 hours every night.

Doctors agree that sleeping soundly and regularly is critical to cell growth and healing and that not getting enough sleep can be the beginning of the end.

New research indicates that poor sleep is not because of aging itself, but mostly because of illnesses or the medications used to treat them. Sonia Ancoli-Israel, a professor of psychiatry and a sleep researcher at the University of California, San Diego, says, “If you look at older adults who are very healthy, they rarely have sleep problems.”

## HEALTH, FITNESS AND NUTRITION

**22: Centenarians Visit the Doctor Regularly**

*“I’ve never had anything I had to go to the doctor for, except checkups. That should say something.” --Bernice Bates, 91, world’s oldest yoga instructor*

When it comes to health issues, it is always better to be preventive rather than reactive, and centenarians rarely miss regular checkups with their general practitioners.

Many centenarians say they never skip an appointment with the doctor because they don’t want to miss out on the continual advances in medical care. Even though they don’t obsess about every ache and pain, centenarians are always hopeful that new medical technologies or procedures might make their lives better or longer.

## HEALTH, FITNESS AND NUTRITION

**23: Centenarians Don't Take a Lot of Medicine**

*"Most over-the-counter and almost all prescribed drug treatments merely mask symptoms or control health problems or in some way alter the way organs or systems such as the circulatory system work. Drugs almost never deal with the reasons why these problems exist, while they frequently create new health problems as side effects of their activities." -- John R. Lee, M.D.*

Centenarians are not hypochondriacs. Ask most elderly people how they're doing and they'll answer with a long list of ailments. Ask a centenarian and you will likely get a description of how busy he or she is.

Trent Lane continued to live alone, fly a plane and break world records until shortly before his death at 101. When we asked Trent his secret, he answered, "Stay busy, keep active mentally and physically and stay away from all drugs."

While centenarians do get regular checkups, they don't come away with a pocketful of prescriptions. In fact, most centenarians take only a medication or two, plus supplements. At 110, Onie Ponder told us, "I take two pills once a day, and that's all I take in the way of medicine."

Helen Boardman, 107, takes less than that: "I haven't had anything. I take an aspirin occasionally for hip pain."

## HEALTH, FITNESS AND NUTRITION

**24: Centenarians Get Sunlight, but Not Too Much**

*"I think you might dispense with half your doctors if you would only consult Dr. Sun more." -- Henry Ward Beecher, minister (June 24, 1813 – March 8, 1887)*

You probably won't find too many centenarians at the beach in a Speedo or a bikini but you will see them outside in the sun -- and that's important.

While many elderly people rarely or ever leave their rooms or homes, centenarians get outside regularly to walk, swim, or garden, where they absorb sunlight in moderate amounts and reap the many benefits -- better absorption of calcium and phosphorus, the growth of bones and teeth, muscle strength, regulation of heartbeats, prevention of breast cancer, colon cancer, osteoarthritis, osteoporosis, improved thyroid function, normal blood clotting and more.

Just as too much sun can lead to cancer, too little sun can lead to multiple health issues. Vitamin D is critical to well-being and longevity and is one of our most common vitamin deficiencies. Doctors recommend getting 15 minutes of sun every day (or taking 1,000 IU of vitamin D.)

## HEALTH, FITNESS AND NUTRITION

**25: Centenarians Have Dogs**

*“He is your friend, your partner, your defender, your dog. You are his life, his love, his leader. He will be yours, faithful and true, to the last beat of his heart. You owe it to him to be worthy of such devotion.” -- Unknown*

Centenarians have an affinity for dogs. Everyone wants to feel needed and loved and nothing seems to make the really old feel more of both than a loyal and loving dog. It has been proven numerous times that having a dog around helps reduce stress, increase happiness, reduce bone loss, decrease blood pressure and lower cholesterol.

Also, the daily morning walk with your pooch is a great way to start the day, providing both mental stimulation and beneficial exercise.

## HEALTH, FITNESS AND NUTRITION

### **26: Centenarians Bought the Farm**

*"The farmer has to be an optimist or he wouldn't still be a farmer."*  
-- Will Rogers, cowboy and humorist (November 4, 1879 – August 15, 1935)

While many centenarians are now in assisted living communities, most of the centenarians we've interviewed grew up on a farm doing chores from dawn to dusk. When asked about her secret to a long life, 100-year-old quilter Effie Brown said, "I worked on the farm my whole life."

Is there a strong connection between longevity and farming or is it simply that 100 years ago most Americans grew up in rural areas? It's probably a little bit of both. Numerous studies do confirm our observation that rural living extends life compared with city dwelling.

When it comes to longevity, there are several areas in the world that are most conducive to reaching 100. These longevity hotspots are all considered rural in nature and are called Blue Zones because the demographer who first identified them on a world map did it with a blue marker. Blue Zones include Okinawa in Japan, a part of Sardinia in Italy, the Nicoya Peninsula in Costa Rica and Loma Linda in California, home to the Seventh-day Adventists.

## HEALTH, FITNESS AND NUTRITION

**27: Centenarians Stretch and Get Regular Massages**

*“I wake up in the morning, I do a little stretching exercises, pick up the horn and play.” -- Herb Alpert, 76-year-old musician*

This doesn't mean that centenarians have lifetime memberships to a spa. There are many different kinds of massage, including something as simple as a regular shower. Almost any type of massage has great health benefits. Regular massage is not only good for your muscles, countless studies have shown that it boosts immunity, relieves stress, reduces anxiety and depression and lowers your heart rate and blood pressure.

Flexibility is strength. Surprisingly, flexibility is something that can actually improve with age and help reduce the effects of age. Stretching even 20 minutes a day can make a huge impact. When we interviewed 96-year-old ballet dancer Fredric Franklin, he told us there is no secret to improving your fitness or flexibility: “It's just a matter of will power and I still have quite a lot of it.”

## MENTAL STIMULATION

**28: Centenarians Are Intellectually Curious**

*“Curiosity is one of the best qualities a person can have. Flowers, if you don’t water them, they wilt. And a person, if you don’t fill their mind, you’re a goner. I want to see who the next president’s going to be, and what’s going on in schools. Even when I wash dishes, I look at the bottom of the plate, and I see where it came from, and I think, ‘Oh, how wonderful. Where is that place?’” -- Ruth Hamilton, world’s oldest blogger (April 21, 1898 – January 18, 2008)*

Centenarians have nearly insatiable appetites for learning about everything. Almost every time we interview centenarians, they have as many questions for us as we do for them.

As their eyes or ears begin to fail them (and sooner or later they do) centenarians don’t give up their desire to learn. They don’t withdraw like most elderly people do. They don’t shut down. They fight to make whatever accommodations are necessary to continue stimulating their minds and feeding their appetites for knowledge.

*“People die when curiosity goes.” -- Graham Swift, author*

## MENTAL STIMULATION

### **29: Centenarians Are Dedicated Lifelong Learners**

*“There are people that just wait to get older. And they don’t do anything to make themselves better. And so they just sit, and pretty soon they wilt, like a flower. You have to work. You have to work your mind; your mind is an instrument. You gotta oil and grease it. You can’t let it wilt.” -- Ruth Hamilton, world’s oldest blogger (April 21, 1898 – January 18, 2008)*

The old adage “use it or lose it” seems to be especially true when it comes to your mind. Centenarians never stop learning. They are always looking for opportunities to learn something new.

Research confirms a positive correlation between the years spent in school and the number of years a person will live. The more education you have, the greater your chances of living to 100. But here’s the good news -- education doesn’t have to be formal, it doesn’t have to be linear, it doesn’t have to be traditional and it doesn’t have to be advanced.

You can go back to school after you have your kids or grandkids. You can enroll in classes while you are working. You can learn how to paint or how to fix appliances. You can study history or photography. Anything is possible, acceptable and beneficial.

*“Anyone who stops learning is old, whether at twenty or eighty. Anyone who keeps learning stays young. The greatest thing in life is to keep your mind young.” -- Henry Ford, industrialist (July 30, 1863 – April 7, 1947)*

## MENTAL STIMULATION

### **30: Centenarians Give Their Brains Regular Workouts**

*"Individuals who lead mentally stimulating lives, through education, occupation and leisure activities, have reduced risk of developing Alzheimer's symptoms. Studies suggest that they have 35-40% less risk of manifesting the disease" -- Dr. Yaakov Stern, Cognitive Neuroscience Division at the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Columbia University*

As we've already noted, exercising your brain is as important as exercising your body when it comes to longevity. Reading is one of the most popular pastimes of centenarians. They read daily if their eyesight still allows it. If not, they get mental stimulation from audio books, listening to the radio, solving puzzles or playing video games.

## MENTAL STIMULATION

### **31: Centenarians Are Interested in Popular Culture**

When asked who they would most like to have dinner with, 61 percent of centenarians in a UnitedHealthcare survey chose Betty White. Queen Elizabeth was second followed by Prince William, Barack Obama, Oprah Winfrey and Sarah Palin.

Centenarians don't live in their own worlds. They are engaged global citizens who like to keep up with major news events and popular culture. They watch reality TV, drink Starbucks and read daily newspapers. When we asked 109-year-old Ruth Hamilton how long she wanted to live, she said, "At least until the next election. I want to see who replaces George Bush."

Centenarians are familiar with new and popular brands. They know who Lady Gaga and Kim Kardashian are. They watch *Dancing With the Stars*.

- 68 percent watch daily news reports on TV
- 40 percent read a newspaper or listen to the radio
- 33 percent watch reality TV
- 27 percent watch MTV or music videos
- 72 percent say they occasionally eat at a fast food restaurant

## MENTAL STIMULATION

### **32: Centenarians Are Interested in New Technology**

*"I'm interested in everything. All the new things are wonderful. In fact, I have a new phone I'm using right now." -- Marianne Crowder at the age of 102*

From texting to watching videos online to playing video games, centenarians smash the stereotype that the ultra-elderly aren't interested in today's new tech toys. While many 80 and 90-year-olds are totally uninterested in the computer and the Internet, we have found that centenarians are intrigued, amazed and excited by it.

Those who cling to the belief that computers are tools exclusively for today's generation, haven't met an online centenarian. In fact, we have come to believe that computers and Internet technology will totally transform the lifestyle of the elderly in the next decade.

Video chatting will enable seniors of all ages to stay connected with friends and family all over the world. Computer programs, apps and adaptive technologies will give the elderly a voice and the ability to share their thoughts and feelings, to take virtual trips, read whatever they like and learn whatever they want. Laptops and iPads specifically designed for arthritic fingers and failing eyes and loaded with special software and games will prove to be an important and indispensable part of the lives of the very old.

Several recent studies, including one by Dr. Shelia Cotton of the University of Alabama, reveal that Internet use is associated with a 30 percent decrease in depression symptoms among older adults who use it regularly.

## FAMILY MATTERS

**33: Centenarians Don't Come From Broken Homes**

*“Separation and divorce can have adverse effects on the healthy and well-being of children and adults. Past research has shown that divorce is associated with higher rates of mortality, more health problems and more risky behaviors, such as increased alcohol use.” - Dr. Jeffrey Koplan, M.D., former Head, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*

An eight-decade study begun in 1921 by Stanford University psychologist Lewis Terman revealed that parental divorce in childhood was the strongest predictor of early death in adulthood.

The study revealed that the early death of a parent had no measurable effect on children's life spans or mortality risks, but the long-term health effects of broken families were often devastating.

On average, the grown children of divorced parents died almost five years earlier than children from intact families. The causes of death ranged from accidents and violence to cancer, heart attack and stroke.

*“Those who love deeply never grow old; they may die of old age, but they die young ” -- Ben Franklin, American statesman, writer and inventor (January 17, 1706 – April 17, 1790)*

## FAMILY MATTERS

**34: Centenarians Stay Married**

*“To get the full value of joy you must have someone to divide it with.”  
-- Mark Twain, author (November 30, 1835 – April 21, 1910)*

This one is interesting because almost every centenarian we have interviewed was married for a long time but hasn't been married for a long time. In other words, their spouses died many years ago after a long and mostly happy marriage. They enjoyed the benefits of a long successful marriage but didn't have the stress and burden of caring for an elderly life partner.

Numerous studies have indicated that married people live, on average, longer and happier lives than single people. It seems it's important to choose your life partner carefully and then stick together “until death do us part” if you want to live to a really old age.

## FAMILY MATTERS

**35: Centenarians Enjoy Sex**

*“Sex on television can't hurt you unless you fall off.” -- Author Unknown*

A long and active sex life is a pretty good predictor of longevity. To the surprise of many, some centenarians say they still enjoy sexual activity or did well into their 80s and 90s.

A study published the New England Journal of Medicine found that sex with a partner in the previous year was reported by:

- 73 percent of people ages 57 to 64
- 53 percent of those ages 64 to 75
- 26 percent of people 75 to 85

Most of the more than 3,000 respondents said they had sex two or three times a month or more.

Multiple studies indicate that regular sex boosts self-esteem and confidence, increases the production of human growth hormone (which is known to improve muscle tone), boosts the immune system, reduces stress and reduces cardiac disease.

Sex not only helps you feel younger, it actually makes you look younger. A long-term study of 3,500 people between the ages of 30 and 101 found that regular sex may shave between four and seven years off your physical appearance.

## FAMILY MATTERS

**36: Centenarians Mourn the Loss of Their Spouses and Move On**

*“Seven years ago, my wife passed away, and I didn’t know what to do. And I heard all these ukulele clubs coming into effect. So I said, I better get a damn ukulele again.” -- Bill Tapia, The King of the Uke (Ukele) and the world’s oldest professional musician (January 1, 1908 – December 2, 2011)*

As mentioned previously, most of the centenarians we have interviewed lost their spouses years and usually decades ago. While the death of a spouse or significant other is often the beginning of the end for some, it’s the beginning of something new for centenarians. They mourn the loss of their loved ones but their love of life enables them to move forward with enthusiasm.

## FAMILY MATTERS

**37: Centenarians Take Pride in Being Good Parents**

*"A zest for life is one of the most important examples a grandparent can pass on to their grandchildren." -- Unknown*

Even though it's not uncommon for their children to have already passed on, centenarians enjoy talking about their roles as parents and take great pride in having been good ones. When asked what they want to be remembered for nearly all say they want to be remembered most as a good parent -- more so than as a good spouse, friend or employee.

In a very real way, centenarians get to experience childhood four times -- their own, their children's, their grandchildren's, and their great-grandchildren's. That seems to help them stay young at heart.

## FAMILY MATTERS

**38: Centenarians Are Cared for By Their Families**

*“The love of a family is life’s greatest blessing.” -- Unknown*

While we have spoken with many centenarians who were in assisted living homes, most were still cared for by family members and some still lived alone. With only a few exceptions, those who were in assisted living homes had a close relative who lived nearby, visited regularly and made certain that they were receiving good care.

## FAMILY MATTERS

**39: Centenarian Women Have Children Later in Life**

*“A woman who naturally has a child after the age of 40 has a four times greater chance of living to 100 compared to women who do not.” -- Dr. Thomas Perls New England Centenarian Study*

The number of mothers giving birth after the age of 40 has doubled in the past decade, which may be a sign of more centenarians to come.

It turns out that many centenarian women have a history of bearing children after the age of 35 years and even 40 years. According to a New England Centenarian study, a woman who naturally has a child after the age of 40 has a four times greater chance of living to 100 compared to women who do not.

The reason is not entirely clear. Most likely it's simply an indication that the woman's reproductive system is aging slowly and that the rest of her body is as well. It could also mean that the woman was busy pursuing other passions in her 20s and 30s (a longevity factor) or wasn't afraid to take a risk or defy conventional thinking (also longevity factors).

## SOCIAL

**40: Centenarians Are Social**

*“There are always a couple of parties or luncheons to attend each week or community or charity event. I have lots of friends; we play bridge weekly to keep our minds sharp, and I played golf regularly until just a couple of years ago -- now I play only occasionally, when there is a benefit or something special at the club.” -- Elsa Hoffman, 102*

There are no centenarian hermits. A life of isolation is not a pathway to 100. Most of the centenarians we have interviewed not only thrive on the stimulation of social interaction, they require it. Most say they talk to or communicate with a friend or family member daily. And increasingly those connections are made on the Internet. Believe it or not, many centenarians are now on Facebook, where they share photos and watch videos.

## SOCIAL

**41: Centenarians Are Increasingly Interested in Social Networking**

*"I have a number of friends -- all my family, grandchildren, great-grandchildren. They send me messages about what they're doing, and to which parties they go." -- Lillian Lowe, 103, world's oldest Facebook member*

The 74-plus demographic is the fastest growing among social networks, according to the Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project. Social networking among Internet users ages 65 and older grew 100 percent between April 2009 and May 2010 (jumping from 13 percent to 26 percent). Facebook, Twitter, and Skype all show the most growth in the older adult demographic.

Social networking provides a source of instant connection for the elderly, who live increasingly isolated lives in assisted living facilities and away from their families. An upcoming study by Dr. Shelia Cotten, a sociologist and associate professor from the University of Alabama, Birmingham, reveals that Internet use was associated with a 30 percent decrease in depression symptoms among older adults who used it regularly.

"I like it very much, to see my grandchildren and speak to them, but it does waste a lot of time," says 103-year-old Lillian Lowe. "I have a lot of time sitting alone, when you are my age, and it is lovely to use."

The world's oldest regular Twitter user was 104-year-old Ivy Bean. Ivy had more than 57,000 followers when she died in her sleep in July 2010. The news of her death was first shared on Twitter by the manager of her care home in England.

## SOCIAL

**42: Centenarians Are Active in Their Communities**

*"Sometimes you can best take care of yourself by taking care of others." -- Kamada Nakasato, 102, Okinawa*

Centenarians enjoy feeling part of their communities and love to help others. Almost every centenarian we have interviewed either still does volunteer work or did until fairly recently. Their volunteer experiences are as varied as they are. Many help out at churches, historical societies, libraries and senior centers.

At 100, Irene Johnson still volunteers for Meals on Wheels, delivering hot meals to seniors 40 years her junior who are unable to leave home. "I try not to act like it," said Johnston, about being a centenarian. "I'd be in bed most of the time if I acted like it."

Why do they volunteer? Many centenarians have told us that it does more for them than those they serve. They enjoy feeling needed and appreciated. Research confirms that volunteering is good for brain health and the social interaction is good for physical well-being.

## SOCIAL

**43: Centenarians Associate With Like-Minded People**

*“Look for the positive in every situation. Don’t waste energy on things you can’t change and avoid bearing grudges.” -- Freyda Siega, 100*

You can’t choose your family or your genes, but you can choose your friends. While most of the centenarians we have interviewed have a fairly large social circle, they have little to no tolerance for negativity and typically associate only with others who share the same positive outlook and passion for life.

If you choose to hang out with negative, depressed people chances are you will gradually become more like them.

In addition to hanging out with like-minded people, centenarians hang out with younger people. I know -- that’s pretty much a given because everyone is younger when you’re a centenarian! But centenarians have been hanging out with younger people for decades. When you hang out with younger people, you see yourself as younger. That leads to feeling younger and living longer.

## SPIRITUALITY

**44: Centenarians Are Spiritual and Pray**

*“What’s the secret to life? Belief in God. And don’t you forget it.” --  
Harold Rotenberg 104-year-old artist*

We have never met a centenarian atheist and we have interviewed many centenarians who attribute their longevity exclusively to faith. Most centenarians attend church regularly and pray daily. Recent surveys, including one from Evercare, indicate that 62 percent of centenarians surveyed pray, meditate or engage in spiritual activity daily.

“I do a lot of praying,” 109-year-old Ruth Hamilton told us. “I don’t know where Heaven is but there’s something good about praying. Life is a wonderful thing if you know God. If you don’t have God, you got nothing.”

Faith provides relief from stress by relinquishing the pressures of the day to a higher power. It also provides social connection to a community of believers.

## WORK AND PLAY

**45: Centenarians Like to Work**

*“My secret to a long, healthy life is to always keep working. It keeps me busy and happy and gives me a reason to stay alive.” -- Johannes Heesters, Dutch actor (December 5, 1903 – December 24, 2011)*

This is a big one. Employment and census data reveals that only 3.5 percent of centenarians retired at 65. They continued to work because they enjoyed it and they found their work meaningful.

We interviewed 102-year-old Sally Gordon shortly after she retired from an 85-year career in the state legislature. She told us she enjoyed working but wanted to retire “while I was still young!”

Since we spend such a large part of our lives working, it’s important to find work that we’re passionate about and find meaningful. If you believe your work adds true value to the world, it will add value and satisfaction to your life. That, in turn, adds years to your life.

## WORK AND PLAY

**46: Centenarians Like to Play**

*“Anything on earth you want to do is play. Anything on earth you have to do is work. Play will never kill you, work will. I never worked a day in my life.” – Dr. Leila Denmark, the world’s oldest practicing pediatrician (now retired)*

Play is serious business. Play is learning, imagining, pretending, competing, discovering and socializing. Play is therapy. Most people become less playful as they grow older. Centenarians seem to retain the capacity for and love of play. In many ways, centenarians are 100-year-old kids. They have the ability to see almost everything as play.

*“Life must be lived as play.” -- Plato*

## WORK AND PLAY

**47: Centenarians Are Avid Travelers**

*“Twenty years from now, you will be more disappointed by the things you didn’t do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines, sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover.” -- Mark Twain, author and humorist (November 30, 1835 – April 21, 1910)*

Centenarians love adventure. Many still travel cross-country or even around the world to visit, compete or explore. Even if they are unable to travel as much as they used to, they have reaped the benefits of decades of exploration. Travel is great mental stimulation and seems to bring a perspective to life and an appreciation for others that has immense longevity benefits.

*“Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness, and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts. Broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one's lifetime.” -- Innocents Abroad*

## WORK AND PLAY

**48: Centenarians Have Hobbies and Creative Pursuits**

*“Most people say that as you get old, you have to give up things. I think you get old because you give up things.” -- Theodore Francis Green, politician (October 2, 1867 – May 19, 1966)*

More than one centenarian has told us they don't understand how anyone can ever be bored. Centenarians have passion for their hobbies. It doesn't much matter what the hobby is but having one you are passionate about seems critical to longevity.

Hobbies enhance your creativity, help you think more clearly and sharpen your focus, says Carol Kauffman, a professor at Harvard Medical School. “When you're really engaged in a hobby you love, you lose your sense of time and enter what's called a flow state, and that restores your mind and energy.”

Painting is not just Harold Garde's hobby. It's his passion. Garde is an accomplished fine artist who, at 88 years old, begins every day in the studio creating widely collected and highly coveted abstract works. “Creativity is a problem solving process that improves with age,” Garde told us. “What makes a painting work? The answers are always different and they never come from critics or collectors. The answers come from the paintings themselves. My paintings will speak to me if I stop long enough to listen.”

*“Life is a great big canvas, and you should throw all the paint on it you can.” -- Danny Kaye, actor*

## WORK AND PLAY

**49: Centenarians Enjoy Music**

*“If you keep looking for youth, you’re looking for longevity. Just take a dose of rock ‘n’ roll. It keeps you going just like caffeine in your coffee. Rock ‘n’ roll is good for your soul, for the well being, for the psyche, for your everything.” -- Hank Ballard, singer and songwriter*

They don’t all like the same kind of music but we’ve yet to meet a centenarian who didn’t enjoy listening to music on a daily basis. Like most of us, they seem to prefer the music of their youth.

And someone ought to do a research paper on the number of centenarian musicians that reach 100. In our experience, it’s a much higher percentage than non-musicians. We did several interviews with Bill Tapia, the world’s oldest professional musician. Tapia died a few weeks before his 104<sup>th</sup> birthday and was still booking concerts at the time. And he didn’t just play – he put on an amazing show. Tapia would often play the ukulele behind his head, a trick he first learned about 50 years before Jimi Hendrix.

Roger McGuinn, the legendary founder of the Byrds, is still going strong in his 70s and has no plans to ever slow down. Roger told us, “I aspire to be like Andres Segovia. He was in his nineties and booked into Carnegie Hall when he died. Wow, that's really cool. To be able to do it until you die, to die with your boots on.”

Research has proven many times over that music is powerful therapy that can improve your mood, boost creativity, enhance sporting performance and lead to longevity. And don’t think all centenarians listen to music on an old Victrola.

- 25 percent of centenarians have purchased a music CD
- 12 percent have listened to music on an iPod
- 4 percent download music

## FINANCE

**50: Centenarians Live Simply and Avoid Debt**

*“Buy everything with cash. For less than seven years, I had a mortgage. I paid everything outright and I’ve lived that way until today. Not owing any money gave me peace of mind. That is the secret to longevity right there.” -- Nicholas Pierro, 102*

Almost every centenarian we interview tells us the same thing, “We never had much.” In fact, they had very little and had to work hard for that.

Most centenarians are poor but they don’t know it. Sixty-seven percent of 100-year-olds have income below the poverty line but aren’t aware of it. They simply perceive themselves as better off than objective resources reveal. It’s been said that not wanting something is the same as having it without all the hassles. That is very much the centenarian lifestyle. They don’t feel poor because they don’t equate money with riches. They have everything they want.

And if they don’t have it, they don’t go into debt to get it. One of the secrets to successful aging seems to be staying relatively debt free and avoiding the stress of major financial issues. For the most part, centenarians are financially conservative and have lived within their means for most of their lives.

The trappings of wealth bring with them the burden of maintenance, storage, financing, etc. When it comes to longevity, simple, minimalist lifestyles are best.

## Chapter SIX

### The Take Away

*Trust the dreams, for in them is hidden the gate to eternity.*  
--Khalil Gibran, poet and writer (January 6, 1883 – April 10, 1931)

So what can we take away from the 50 ways? What is the message these *Rock Stars of Aging* are sharing with us by the way in which they live their lives? My sincere hope is that you take away the same feeling that we take away every time we have the pleasure of meeting and interviewing a centenarian. It's a feeling of hope, encouragement and optimism about the possibilities of age. It's a feeling of excitement about today *and* tomorrow.

Take away that very few who live to 100 have been sentenced to extra years of misery. Beyond a certain age, miserable people die very quickly. It's really that simple. The only way to get to 100 is with a smile on your face, joy in your heart and enthusiasm in your step.

Take away that centenarians are not super beings genetically destined to longevity. And they are not wealthy people who were able to purchase their extra years. They are simple, humble people of all races, religions and nationalities. They are you and me.

Take away the fact that everything you do today will influence the quality of life you lead in the future. The right lifestyle choices make it possible to reach 100 in good enough shape, mentally and physically, to actually enjoy it.

Take away the fact that those same lifestyle choices make it possible to control chronic conditions to the extent that even people with heart disease, diabetes and high blood pressure can live to 100.

Take away the knowledge that having more quality years to spend is great but not having enough money to spend can be disastrous. Today's aging baby boomers face unprecedented post-retirement risks. Actuaries are now calculating what they call "longevity risk," the

very real and rising possibility of outliving your money. They suggest increasing your savings and planning on working longer.

As for working longer, it now becomes even more important to keep mentally and physically active. For some, avoiding physical limitations into their 80s will be difficult, if not impossible. This underscores the importance of knowledge-based jobs in our later years. Knowledge-based jobs allow workers to shift more easily from one field to another. There is nothing wrong with jobs that involve physical labor, but as you age, it's more difficult to perform those jobs and therefore more difficult to sustain an income.

Take away the fact that working to improve your overall wellness is the greatest investment you can make -- not because it *might* help you reach 100 but because it *definitely* will help you enjoy the days required to get you there.

And if you don't make it to 100? At least you've enjoyed the ride. As proud as they are of reaching 100, the *Rock Stars of Aging* final take away is this -- the destination isn't as important as the journey. Few centenarians set a goal of reaching 100. They were simply enjoying life so much that one day, it happened.

So what are you waiting for? Start Growing Bolder.

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## Acknowledgements

History will record that *Rock Stars of Aging* is the first book published by Bolder Press. Like everything else we do at Bolder Media, we do it ourselves. In fact, we lead the league in DIY.

Let's start a radio show! OK. Let's build a website! Sure. Let's start a TV show. Done. Let's take the show national. Why not?

Do we make mistakes? Absolutely. Is it sometimes frustrating? And then some. Does it take longer? You bet. We do it ourselves for three reasons:

- 1: It's the best way to truly understand the process.
- 2: It allows us to do more with less, which is important for a small team with a big to-do list.
- 3: It's a step toward owning a franchise in the league and not just being a player (sorry for all of the sports analogies).  
Truth be told, we want to own the game.

The only way to DIY to the extent that we do it and with the quality that we do it is to have an incredible team of superstars. And that's exactly what Bolder Media is.

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## About the Author

### Marc Middleton

Marc Middleton is Founder and CEO of Bolder Broadcasting and Bolder Media Group. He's an award-winning anchor, reporter and producer, a featured blogger on the Huffington Post and speaks regularly on active lifestyle, positive aging, the power of storytelling, social media in healthcare and marketing to boomers.

Marc helped create and co-hosts *Growing Bolder*, a weekly national television program airing on more than 500 PBS stations. The show profiles ordinary people living extraordinary lives; men and women who are redefining the possibilities of life after 50 and inspiring audiences of all ages to believe that it's never too late to achieve their dreams. Marc also co-hosts the *Growing Bolder Radio Show*.

In his spare time, Marc is a world record-holding masters swimmer, is plotting a comeback in track & field and dreams of becoming a painter. He lives in the Orlando, Florida area with his wife, Jill, daughters, Kelsey and Quinn, and Naples, a yellow lab.



## Want More Growing Bolder?

You can watch the stories and listen to many of the interviews referred to in *Rock Stars of Aging* at <http://www.GrowingBolderRadio.com>.

Be sure to watch Growing Bolder TV and listen to Growing Bolder Radio. You can learn more about both shows including when they air in your town by visiting <http://www.GrowingBolderTV.com> and <http://www.GrowingBolderRadio.com>.

If you would like to order Growing Bolder TV Show DVDs, Team GB apparel, or any books from our Growing Bolder library visit our online store at <http://www.store.growingbolder.com>

