

Monday, July 27, 1981

## Life

### Living to 100 can be done, but do you call that living?

It's tough enough taking one day at a time. Resolving to live past 100 may just be my undoing.

Dan Georgakas says an individual really can affect his own longevity. He's written a book, newly published by Simon and Schuster called "The Methuselah Factors: The Secrets of the World's Longest-Lived Peoples."

In order to uncover those secrets of long life, the author tramped all over the world, even meeting those Damon Yogurt people in Georgian Russia.

"There's nobody over there past the age of 120," he assured me. "But I met many who are in their 90s and 100s."

Georgakas met the oldest credible man in the USSR, a vigorous 110-year-old and the oldest woman in England, who'll blow 103 candles on her next birthday.

In this country, there are 6,000 people over the age of 100, mainly in small towns and country settings.

Most of us would opt for long life and the chance to bounce great, great, great-grandchildren on a creaky knee, but with conditions. We want our sight, our hearing, use of our limbs, relative freedom from pain and mental competence.

... but, tell me, is a few years worth giving up Kentucky Fried, tacco, pleasing plumpness and sedentary living?

GEORGAKAS says to live to be 100 one must reconstruct his lifestyle. This can be done over a gradual period of time, but done with deliberation can result in as much as 25 years of added life.

Resolves to contemplate include: a consistent exercise program, preferably walking for an hour each day; a diet of low caloric intake throughout life; avoidance of meats in favor of fresh fruits and vegetables; a low level of sugar and salt consumption; avoidance of modern day toxins, and a healthy emotional response to stress.

No surprises there, no miracles, no occult secrets in that list, but, tell me, is a few years worth giving up Kentucky Fried, tacco, pleasing plumpness and sedentary living?

I guess you take your choice.

Georgakas says you do have choices. You can make your own personal list, then tackle the items one at a time. If you live long enough to perfect each area, that should add years to your life, at least enough to try the next resolve.

Especially prudent would be giving up smoking, drinking any more than two glasses of wine a day and undertaking extreme exercise such as marathon races.

BORN IN Detroit, the author lived here and even taught in Detroit Public Schools. "I was writing even in junior high and high school and wrote for Detroit-based magazines — "Fifth Estate" and other publications."

Beginning around 1965, he began a career switch from full-time teacher and part-time writer to the reverse.

Today, he writes in a brownstone revival neighborhood in Brookline close to a library, takes advantage of the cultural riches of the city and avoids harmful aspects.

Practicing what he preaches, he says he's "43 going on 114."

Georgakas says he was a great science fiction fan as a youth. His readings about the lost kingdom in the Himalayas where people lived long made their mark on him.

Tramping the globe to research the habits of long-lived people and analyze their longevity secrets was a trip for Georgakas in more ways than one.

The resulting book is well documented, informative and provocative. Not your usual how-to tome, it's the kind of reading that is absorbing. It could make you get up and run around the block or put out your cigarette.

FOR US SUBURBANITES Georgakas considers stress a key longevity problem. To decrease the stress of time, the challenge is usually paring down activities, reordering priority, he says.

"This is more acute in the suburbs because you're generally involved in a car culture. In the traditional family, one spouse drives off to work while the other drives around doing errands."

A positive is that suburban folks can take advantage of the wide range of entertainment offered in

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Shirlee Iden

the city while avoiding some of the disadvantages of city living.

"Stimulation of the mind is a key longevity factor and in suburban areas one can enjoy the full range of the arts, popular entertainment, and sports."

Georgakas makes a strong point against smoking. "Persons living in the vicinity of industrial areas or in an area where there is generally pollution or especially advised not to smoke," he says.

"Smoking is a multiplier factor in terms of other toxins. If you do not smoke and live in an area with pollution, your chances of having a long disease-free life are much greater than if you live in the country but if you smoke, your chances are much higher."

PERSONS in industry should be meticulous about following instructions in the handling of toxic substances. Georgakas says those precautions often mean the difference between life and death.

For those who know suburban living was good for my longevity, Georgakas says out here we have more opportunity to hike, jog and even play racquet ball and tennis.

And don't forget the merits of dancing and, get this, strenuous housework. "One hour at a time of non-stop mopping, sweeping or scrubbing, are the equivalent of walking or jogging." (Please note that's a direct quote from Dan Georgakas, not my hint.)

I really like another thing he said about longevity. That is that people who like themselves and what they are doing at all stages of life tend to live longer.

I like what I do most of the time, but I'm really going to try to like scrubbing and mopping much more.

## Country living

### Finding the good life — a day's drive away

Until a few years ago I thought everything west of Telegraph Road was rural. Livonia was my idea of a hamlet where quiet-living folks did nothing most of the year and had a party on the rare occasions when something happened.

The only thing that saved the burg from being a completely hopeless residential wasteland was the presence of the Detroit Race Course. Even there, I regularly bemoaned having to drive from Detroit all the way to Sleepy Hollow to attend races.

My lifestyle changed. My views changed. I began to see the value of suburbia and a slower pace instead of all-night cabaret in Detroit's hipspots and lowspots. I moved. I married. Regular meals, community involvement, front-yard and back-yard, dog and family, these things have their settling effects.

Nevertheless, it was with some trepidation that I embarked on recent Friday to spend a weekend with shrittail relatives who live on a farm in Ontario. The old me-action, bright lights, wine, song and whatever — was seething.

"How are you going to pretend to anyone that you enjoy visiting a farm?" that creature of my mind kept insisting to the new, good me. The new, good me answered: "I'll be polite. I'll pretend that I am enjoying peace, quiet, boredom."

We bypassed the cosmopolitan Toronto, scene of many of my former Sybaritic excursions, and kept driving north 100 miles north past uninviting small towns and villages.

Past the turnoff to Barrie, we got off on a two-lane road and drove more miles to a dirt road which led two miles later to the farmhouse home of David and Judy Rapson.

THE RAPSONS are both teachers in the county school district. They have an 80-acre farm, which is farmed by someone who pays them a part of the net profits of the crop, an 18-year-old son, a 14-year-old daughter as well as four horses, a dog and three cats.

They have enlarged the 100-year-old farmhouse — originally a six-room house — to accommodate an expanded kitchen and dining area, a den and a downstairs bathroom. We ate dinner in the dining room and talked about Canada, the United States, relatives and life in the country.

After dinner we called the horses up from the meadow and fed them in the barn. The horses came

## Death

### Bury me on the lone prairie, or pickle me in formaldehyde

The Federal Trade Commission has recommended rules that would require funeral homes to provide price lists and make accurate cost quotes over the phone.

The rules are intended to make it difficult for funeral homes to sell expensive caskets to the bereaved when the loved one is going to be cremated.

The rules would also make it more difficult for funeral directors to enshrine the dear departed when it's unnecessary.

Maybe that doesn't make your socks roll up and down while steam shoots out your ears, but it would be important. After all, it took the FTC nearly a decade to come to these conclusions.

We may all be dead and buried by the time these proceedings are terminated.

And I don't think they went quite far enough. There ought to be something in there about having your vocal cords slashed with a dull, fish-skin-scraper blade.

It's spinning here if you publish full-color photographs of Elvis in his coffin.

A collector's item, by the way, is the Sept. 20, 1977, edition of The National Enquirer, which did just that on its cover. In color.

Anyway, the National Funeral Directors Association is reportedly unhappy with the FTC recommendations, and may choose to make a fight out of the required Congressional review of the rules. The rules could be vetoed if both the House and the Senate reject them within 90 days of publication.

AMERICAN FUNERALS are basically not class acts. Public display of the dead, the keystone of modern American funerals, is unknown in most of the civilized world.

The proposed FTC rules might make things a little less greasy, but not much.



Mike Scanlon

I mean, imagine yourself touching down on some remote airfield only to find half the populace gathered in a house fancier than anything most of them live in.

There's a hushed silence and the smell of flowers after they're spray-painted and anointed with added perfume. All the villagers are gathered around the body of one of their former fellow citizens.

The body, gaily painted, would probably prove thrillingly exotic to Hela Lugosi, who was buried in his Dracula suit, by the way, but to anybody else, it just looks like a dead guy with a lot of make-up.

The villagers keep this up for two or three days. Finally, everybody goes to the widow's house where they sit on folding chairs in the basement, drink Seven-and-Sevens and eat ham sandwiches.

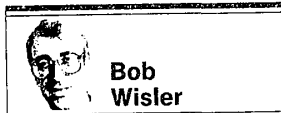
PEOPLE GET STRANGE about death. One of my friends has a mother who seriously wants to be left at the curb in a Hefty bag.

I myself am strange about death, or more exactly, about getting buried.

I'd like to have a backhoe dump my body in a sewer line excavation ditch. You can't just leave bodies lying around, though. So I'm willing to compromise on the coffin — get an old Kenmore refrigerator box and a staple gun and lock me in.

None of this is likely to actually occur, however. I have a strip of sticky paper on the back of my driver's license that says my body gets donated to medical science, and I expect to spend the better part of the 21st Century hanging around in a pool of formaldehyde on the Wayne State campus.

That's not unlike how I spent my college days, and I remember them with fondness.



Bob Wisler

prancing up in single file, each horse taking his or her customary spot. The horses go into their respective stalls in a certain order and it is considered a violation if one horse takes the wrong spot or enters the wrong stall. At times in the evening, the Rapsons said, the horses come up from the meadow and line up along the corral fence, whinnying across the thirty yards separating them from the dining area window, demanding to be fed.

We fed Squire, the collie dog, who accompanied us on all our walks and two cats being kept in the barn by daughter Kate. Across the front of the farmhouse is a fieldstone fence put in over one summer by son Steve and in back is a tree-house built over a slowly meandering creek.

At night we talked, about Canadian literature, Canadian customs, the Rapsons' children and how they enjoyed schools. We all went to bed and I wondered a moment about locked doors and possible intruders. And then I let my mind fit in with the surroundings and enjoyed the tremendous silence interrupted only slightly by the soft whinny of a horse or the small sound of insects in the field.

The next day we all had breakfast and then visited Sainte-Marie, a Jesuit missionary settlement founded in 1639, and the Marchmont Mill, which utilizes the water power of a stream to grind flour for farmers throughout the area.

We canned on Six Mile lake and then ate on picnic tables in the adjoining park and fed the wild ducks. Then it was back to the farm to call up the horses from the meadow, to feed them and the dog and the two cats. At night we talked.

The Rapsons told us how they do everything as a family. "There really isn't much to do around here, so the kids spend a lot of time with us. We all go down to Toronto a couple of times a year to see plays and the horsereshoe and shop and walk around, then we come back," she said.

THE SENIOR Rapsons sometimes attend parties, usually quiet affairs with people like themselves, quiet-living people who enjoy converting old farmhouses, raising animals and vegetables and avoiding the bustle of cities. If they feel like having a dinner or drink, they usually drive 20 or 30 miles away to one of the good restaurants in the area. There is no place around to stop regularly for a drink.

The family works together raising vegetables, working on the house and taking care of the animals. Although they say they watch television, I was not aware there was one in the house. In better than two days, I heard the phone ring only once and that was on the second day of our visit. It was surprising to hear the phone, disturbing the karma that seemed to be surrounding the farm.

On the farm there seems to be a sameness to the days and nights and yet out of the sameness comes a sense of awareness of the ground and how it works, of animals and their place in the world, of how the sun and moon and the stars move, of how the weather affects the crops and how the patterns of life are evident in nature.

The Rapson family is affected by that lifestyle, as they know they would be when they made a decision to look for an old farm and an old farmhouse to make into a home for their family. Living in a rural area affects their sense of purpose, their composure, their feeling of unity with the world and with their creator, they say.

The children have a strong sense of identity and well-being. They feel good about themselves, their mother and father and their future. The children consider themselves family members first, above everything else.

When it came time to leave, I was greatly aware of leaving a place far different than the one I was accustomed to. We drove back on the expressway to more and more traffic and horns honking and irate motorists yelling out the window to other irate motorists and a part of me, perhaps the new, good me, yearned to stay behind.

## overheard over coffee

• "Sheriff Lucas (the Wayne County Sheriff) is all right, he just got the characters confused when he read about Robin Hood and the sheriff of Nottingham. He thinks the sheriff's job is taking from the rich county and the rich car dealers to give to the poor deputies and townships which can't hire their own police."

• "Pity the poor grocery dealer who (allegedly) gave a state representative \$2,000 to get a state lottery outlet in one grocery store and a liquor license for another store. The grocer was turned down by the state lottery agency and the Liquor Control Commission. The moral is: If you're going to buy a politician's influence, make sure he's got some."