

KEEP SMILING,
TEND A GARDEN, OBEY YOUR PARENTS,
WORK HARD, FOLLOW A PURPOSE, FAITH IN GOD,
NO TV, TEACH OTHERS, EXERCISE, EAT WELL,
A POSITIVE OUTLOOK, BE KIND TO OTHERS

HOW TO LIVE A LONG AND HAPPY LIFE

Remember when you were so young that you didn't even consider that one day (if you were lucky) you'd get old? Old age was way, way down the road. I remember thinking that way. But today I'm a 34-year-old wife and mother, and hey, I think I would like to stick around to watch the lives of my children and grandchildren unfold. This month I found myself keenly interested in whatever secrets those in their 80s, 90s and beyond might hold.

More than 200 of you sent letters filled with wonderful stories and photos of inspiring older folks who work harder and seem happier than many of us who are younger. There's no magic pill or secret handshake that guarantees a long and happy life. But there does seem to be a connection of body, mind and spirit. Good genes don't hurt either.

Each letter tells a story of a special person who inspires you to live a good life. There are specific instructions (eat more oatmeal, no pizza after 9 p.m.), but the three big-ticket suggestions are general enough to adapt into your own life. Resoundingly, you say that a strong religious faith is vital to carry you through life's upheavals. You suggest surrounding yourself with the company of friends and family, and to keep a busy social calendar. And, of course, you must eat right and stay active.

As you read these submissions, take time to study the pictures of these good-looking senior citizens from across North Carolina. Take a lesson from them and begin—if you haven't already—laying the groundwork for your own long and happy life.

— Kim Whorton Tripp
Contributing Editor

See more advice on our Web site at www.carolinacountry.com. Next month, we'll publish your stories of "How I Got My Name." (Deadline was Nov. 15.) See the themes and rules of our "Nothing Could Be Finer" series on page 18.

UNKINK YOURSELF

Three days a week I exercise with an extraordinary group of men and women, including one dear lady named Dottie. She hasn't told me her age, but I know she is pushing 80, and she does push-ups. She does a full lay-out man's push up. That's very impressive. Some may say she has good genes, but I know that Dottie makes choices every day to stay fit.

Laughingly, she describes the "unkinking stretches" she does to get her arthritic bones out of bed. She "de-kinks" a little more by walking, not driving to the clubhouse for our workout. On some days she also takes yoga in town at the Wellness Center. Of course she could stay home and have coffee and a doughnut, but she doesn't.

Not surprisingly, Dottie makes good food choices. Oatmeal is her breakfast of choice. She packs healthy snacks to take on driving trips and does wonderful things with crabs. Growing up short was completely out of her control, but staying trim is not.

I was lucky to have the best scrambled egg breakfast at her house. It was quite a feast.

Along with the fitness choices Dottie makes daily comes a generous spirit. She has known grief that could have made her sour, but instead she is upbeat. She's just great to be around. Ralph, her husband of nearly 60 years, thinks so too. She's the best crew he's ever had. You may just see them cruising the Pamlico aboard their new boat, "Kerri Leigh." If you were out there this past summer, you may have seen Dottie water-skiing.

Maureen LaVake
Washington
Tideland EMC



Dottie does push-ups.

WORRY ABOUT SOMETHING

Some times we think the goal in life is to be worry-free. My theory is the opposite. My grandfather, who is 91, lived his life worrying about his crops. I believe that having had something to worry about contributed to his longevity. Even when his legs were bowed and his fingers crooked from rheumatism, he climbed on his blue tractor and tilled the soil. Haywood, as I'll call him, watched his soybean crop from his favorite living room chair, and when he spotted a weed sticking its dastardly head above the canopy of legume bushes, he would march out to the middle of the field and pluck the unwanted plant with a sense of victory. Even now, bound in a wheelchair, he worries that his garden will not get hoed, the yards raked, the flowerbeds weeded. In some way, that has made him happy—and long in the tooth.

*Nanette Inman
Tar Heel
Four County EMC*

NO TELEVISION

My two neighbors, Romney and Voda Brim, are both 95 years old and have been married for 78 years. From what I have witnessed, longevity and happiness must have something to do with “no television.” The happy couple has never owned one. Their information and news come from the radio or newspaper.

Voda has a few health issues that hinder her from getting around much. Romney is a remarkable man. He does the cooking, the cleaning, mows his lawn sometimes as many as three times a week. He also tends the finest garden around. He will not let any of his nine children do very much for them. There have also been rumors that he will still climb a tree every now and then to better view any wildlife that might stroll by.

Beside the fact that they are very godly people, I believe some of their happiness and longevity has to do with not owning a TV, because sitting in front of the TV can make us lazy, inactive people. Keeping yourself busy is much healthier. If we just look around us, we can always find physical things to keep us busy.

*Judy McMillian
Mount Airy
Surry-Yadkin EMC*

INSPIRE PEOPLE

Aunt Alice celebrated her 102nd birthday in April. At age 97, she approached us with the idea that it might be time for her to give up her home and downsize. So she packed up, sold her home, and moved to Trinity Oaks in Salisbury, where she has an apartment and is living independently.

At her 100th birthday gala, one of her former students approached her and said, “You inspired me to become a teacher.” Alice taught for 38 years and inspired and touched many lives as she still does today.

She sets the standard as our family matriarch, living her faith every day. She's always cheerful and optimistic with something good to say about everybody. She doesn't tolerate negative thinking. She eats moderately, with a glass of red wine and a chocolate each day, and walks for exercise. Playing bridge is her passion followed by crossword puzzles and reading. She has a great sense of humor and laughs frequently. The Salisbury Post, Time and Prevention magazines keep her well-informed and fun to visit with. She is an inspiration to us all.

*The Collins Family
Mary Kay Korty
Huntersville
EnergyUnited*

KEEP ARTHUR AWAY

I was born in Belhaven in March of 1925. At age 15, I went to New York. I wanted to get married at 17, but I couldn't in New York. So we waited until we were 21 and got married. We went back to Belhaven and bought a farm and built a house on it. We had two kids, Shanon and Greg.

Every day I get up and go to work. Every night, I come home. I have one glass of wine, eight ounces. Blood pressure: 130 over 75. When I go to bed, I stretch my legs out as hard as I can to keep “Arthur” away. And I smile all the time.

*Lee Spencer
Belhaven
Tideland EMC*



Aunt Alice, an inspiration.

STAY TOGETHER

My parents, James and Thelma Houston, have been married for 58 years. James is 84 years old and Thelma is 79. I asked them “What is the secret to living a long and happy life?” These are the answers I got.

Never live alone. Always be surrounded by family and friends. Be loving, affectionate and never be afraid to say those words: “I love you.” Be sure to kiss and hug your spouse, family and friends. Laugh out loud, as humor is very powerful. Always have a positive attitude towards life and believe that you will live to be 100 years old.

If you are sick, try to beat it. Don't ever feel sorry for yourself. Have a reason to get up in the morning. Take care of your body like it is a temple. Don't abuse it with drugs, alcohol, stress, etc. Always eat well, exercise, relax, get a good night's sleep every night and be motivated.

I asked what is the most important secret, and they said to keep your faith in the Lord and have a positive mind, as the family that prays and eats together will stay together.

*Nancy Marlette
Newport
Carteret-Craven EC member*



Emma Milliken, winning your heart.

WORK HARD, LOOK GOOD, SMILE

This is a picture of my best friend's mother. She is 90 years young.

Hard work never got in her way. She was always up at 5 a.m. with the roosters and to bed early with the chickens. She always has the most beautiful collards and tomatoes in her yard. She could have won “yard of the month.”

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Miss Emma Milliken always ends her week going to church, and she could win the fashion show, and her smile could win your heart.

Doris Scott
Shallotte
Brunswick

KEEP MOVING

This is Freda Jaynes, born February 1903. She graduated from Western Carolina College and Haywood Institute and is the oldest living alumna of those schools.



Freda Jaynes

After teaching school for 35 years, she retired in 1968. She is a member of the Retired Teachers Association, serving as President of the Haywood Division for several years.

As a member of the Haywood County Agriculture Committee, you will see her every year checking in items for the exhibits at the Haywood County Fair. She has received over 100 ribbons, herself, for entries in the fair.

She was an avid seamstress and quilter until her eyesight failed. Her flowerbeds still receive her care. She mowed her lawn and drove her car at age 95, giving these up under protest when her sons insisted.

Every Friday for over 20 years she has volunteered at Haywood Christian Ministry in the pantry distributing food for the needy. You can visit her there any Friday and see her beautiful smile.

Freda is the oldest member of Long's Chapel United Methodist Church, having been a member for 82 years. She keeps in shape by doing 20 minutes of exercises before getting out of bed and 20 minutes of exercises after she gets up. She started these exercises 20 years ago when arthritis caused stiffness in her joints.

Her secret to life? She says, "God has blessed me. You have to keep moving and you should never just sit down and quit."

Lil Davis
Canton
Haywood EMC

NEVER GIVE UP

I am so proud of my husband, Jim. He is a "never give up" kind of guy. At age 60, after a heart attack, he counted it as a blessing, a wake-up call to go forward with his life.

At age 62 he retired to be a full-time father to our one-year-old son. At age 67 he began working as a substitute school teacher to supplement our income while I attended nursing school.

At age 73 he decided to fulfill a lifelong dream and began to build a new house for us. He worked on his own for two years to complete it. On his 75th birthday, I bought him a rocking chair for the new front porch, time to rest. Today, at age 76, he took on a new challenge. He began work as a rural mail associate.

He could sit in his rocking chair if he wanted to, but he is happier if he is learning new things. What a wonderful example he has been for our son, now 15 years old. I believe he will be blessed with many productive years to come. The rocking chair will wait.

Jeannette Gantt
Gastonia
Rutherford EMC



Jim Gantt testing the rocker.

Send us your best

Earn \$50

Here are the themes in our "Nothing Could Be Finer" series. Send us your stories and pictures. You don't have to be the best writer. Just tell it from your heart.

FEBRUARY 2004 "Home Improvement Horror Stories"

That remodeling job that went crazy. Send pictures.

Deadline: Dec. 15

MARCH 2004 "My Gardening Secrets"

What have you tried that really works?

Deadline: Jan. 15

APRIL 2004 "The Camping Trip I Will Never Forget"

Where was it and what happened? Send pictures.

Deadline: Feb. 15

MAY 2004 "What We Did When the Power Went Out"

Smart – and maybe not-so-smart – ways to cope during an outage.

Deadline: March 15

JUNE 2004 "Being a Teenager Today"

What are you going through? Or: How does it compare to when you were one?

Deadline: April 15

JULY 2004 "Our Money Pit"

What was the biggest waste of money you remember?

Deadline: May 15

AUGUST 2004 "Was I Wrong!"

Lessons you learned the hard way.

Deadline: June 15

SEPTEMBER 2004 "My Favorite Photo"

North Carolina people and places. Digital ones must be 300 dpi and printable size.

Deadline: July 15

OCTOBER 2004 "If I Were Governor of North Carolina"

What would you do?

Deadline: August 15

NOVEMBER 2004 "Mama's Cooking Was Always the Best"

Send a recipe, if you have one, and photos.

Deadline: Sept. 15

DECEMBER 2004 "Meeting Your Grandparents"

Something you never knew about a grandparent.

Deadline: Oct. 15

The Rules

1. Approximately 200 words or less. We retain reprint rights.
2. Only one entry per household per month.
3. Photos are welcome. Digital photos must be 300 dpi and actual size.
4. E-mail or typed, if possible. Otherwise, make it legible.
5. Include your name, electric co-op, mailing address and phone number.
6. If you want your entry returned, please include a self-addressed, stamped envelope. (We will not return others.)
7. We pay \$50 for each submission published.
8. We will post on our Web site more entries than we publish, but can't pay for those submissions. (Let us know if you don't agree to this.)
9. Send to Nothing Finer, Carolina Country, 3400 Sumner Blvd., Raleigh, NC 27616. Or by e-mail: carolina.country@ncemcs.com. Or through the Web: www.carolinacountry.com