

Today's weather picture by: XinYang Chen, 8, Vancouver, Roosevelt Elementary



SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 18, 2005

Secrets of 90



DAVE BARRY

I'm toast in battle of kitchen

Recently, The Washington Post printed an article explaining how the appliance manufacturers plan to drive consumers insane.

Of course, they don't SAY they want to drive us insane. What they SAY they want to do is have us live in homes where "all appliances are on the Internet, sharing information" and appliances will be "smarter than most of their owners." For example, the article states, you would have a home where the dishwasher "can be turned on from the office" and the refrigerator "knows when it's out of milk" and the bathroom scale "transmits your weight to the gym."

I frankly wonder whether the appliance manufacturers, with all due respect, have been smoking crack. I mean, did they ever stop to ask themselves WHY a consumer, after loading a dishwasher, would go to the office to start it? Would there be some kind of career benefit?

YOUR BOSS: What are you doing?

YOU (tapping computer keyboard): I'm starting my dishwasher!

YOUR BOSS: That's the kind of productivity we need around here!

YOU: Now I'm flushing the upstairs toilet!

Listen, appliance manufacturers: We don't NEED a dishwasher that can communicate with from afar. If you want to improve our dishwashers, give us one that senses when people leave dirty dishes on the kitchen counter, and shouts at them: "PUT THOSE DISHES IN THE DISHWASHER RIGHT NOW OR I'LL LEAK ALL OVER YOUR SHOES!"

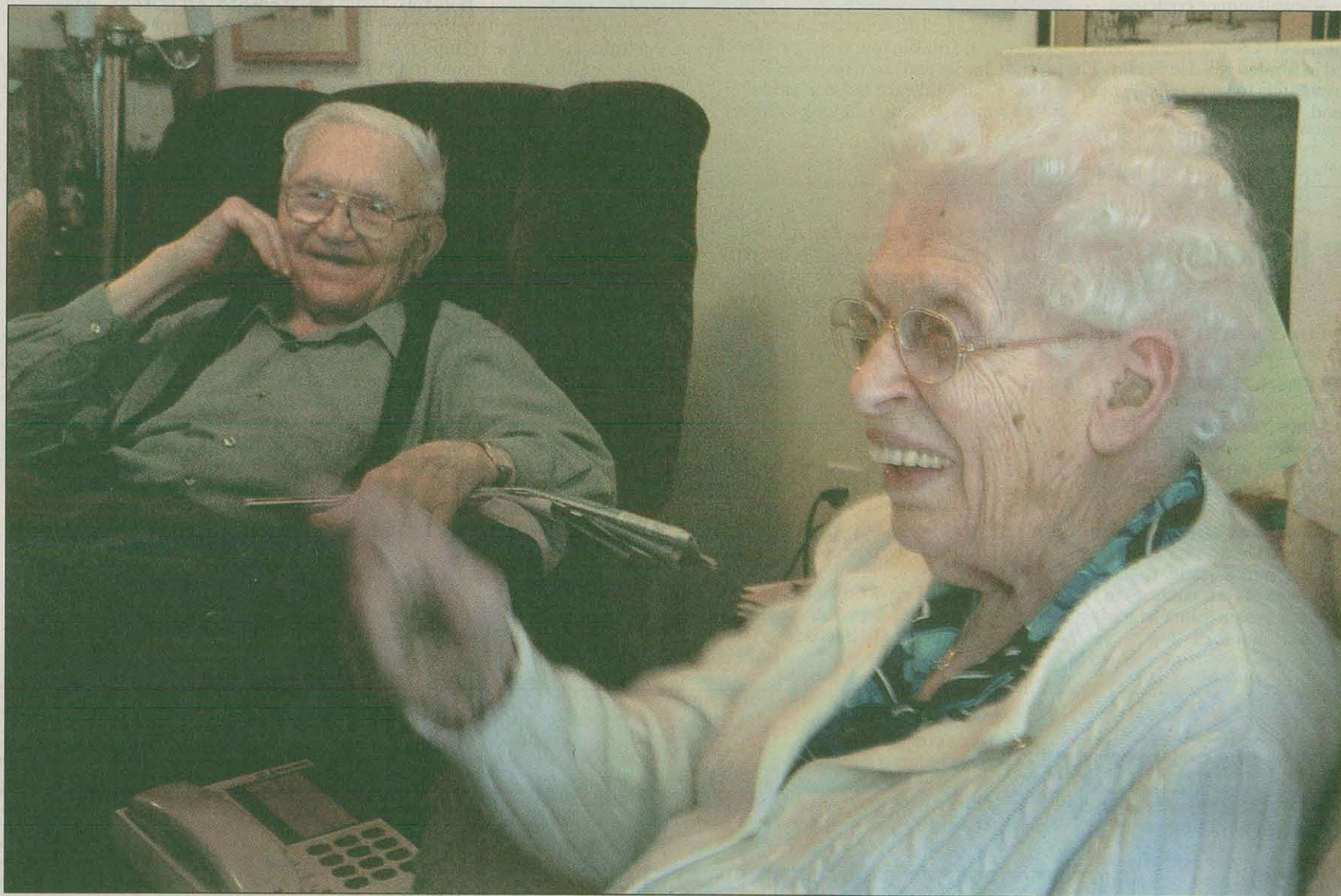
Likewise, we don't need a refrigerator that knows when it's out of milk. We already have a foolproof system for determining if we're out of milk: We ask our wife. What we could use is a refrigerator that refuses to let us open its door when it senses that we are about to consume our fourth Jell-O Pudding Snack in two hours.

As for a scale that transmits our weight to the gym: Are they NUTS? We don't want our weight transmitted to our own EYEBALLS! What if the gym decided to transmit our weight to all these other appliances on the Internet? What if, God forbid, our refrigerator found out what our weight was? We'd never get the door open again!

But here is what really concerns me about these new "smart" appliances: Even if we like the features, we won't be able to use them. We can't use the appliance features we have NOW. I have a feature-packed telephone with 43 buttons, at least 20 of which I am afraid to touch. This phone probably can communicate with the dead, but I don't know how to operate it, just as I don't know how to operate my TV, which has features out

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Photos by DAVE OLSON/The Columbian

When it comes to longevity in life and marriage, Raymond and Bertha Olsen are Clark County's authoritative figures. Bertha will turn 100, and Raymond 97 later this month. The Olsens recently celebrated their 68th wedding anniversary.

A simple life, a golden bond

Bertha and Raymond Olsen's romance has outlasted even her wedding ring



With matching tennis balls on the back legs of their walkers, the Olsens travel in a line to the Mallard Landing dining room to eat lunch, just like they do every day, with nothing special planned, despite it being their 68th wedding anniversary.

By BRETT OPPEGAARD
Columbian staff writer

One ring. One witness. The ceremony took two minutes, and the marriage bond Bertha and Raymond Olsen forged that September day 68 years ago hasn't needed much polishing since.

Anniversaries have been as special to the Olsens as any other day. No dinners out. No trips to exotic places. Not even a card? "Oh, gracious," Bertha says. "No."

Dairy farmers for most of their lives, the Olsens say the cows never care what day of the year it is, so why should they?

Later this month, Bertha will turn 100 and Raymond 97. They both are witty and have a lot to say, so in searching Clark County for the secrets to long life and happiness — which included

"We never let a problem get the best of us. We might not like the answer, but if you solve the problem, that takes care of a lot of things."

Bertha Olsen

interviews with 40 local folks, all at least 90 — we start here.

A photo hanging in their Battle Ground apartment shows the sod house in Montana in which Raymond was born. He explains that he and his family of farmers lived in this mound of dirt and grass for the first seven years of his life, burning cow pies for heat.

In the neighboring state of South Dakota about that time, Bertha also was being reared on a farm. She eventually became a country school teacher, but her pay kept dwindling during the Depression, dropping from \$100 to \$60 a month. She wanted something better.

Turns out so did Raymond, and the two serendipitously headed for the West Coast in the early 1930s, both settling near extended family in Eugene, Ore., where they had heard the weather was milder and the

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Want to know more secrets to long life and happiness? See pages D6-D7.



your Guide:



Stone carver prospers in ancient art of creating gargoyles /D3



Travel: Maine's Monhegan Island detached from time and trouble /D4

Coming Monday:

Get all the details on the 57th annual Emmy Awards /D1

Secrets of 90

By BRETT OPPEGAARD
Columbian staff writer

When I first became interested in genealogy a few years ago, I sat down with many of the older people in my family and interviewed them about their lives. I wanted to etch dates and places and facts into a perma-

nent record, so future generations would remember these people who were so special to me. Concentrating on such precise details, though, in hindsight left me with huge holes in that history. After a set of my grandparents were gone, after my great-aunt died at 99, I looked back at what I had written about them and realized how

small a piece I had saved. That inspired me to do this project, asking more thought-provoking questions of the people in our community who had at least 90 years of experience. I wanted them to share their secrets of happiness and longevity. But I also just wanted to hear what they had to say, if prodded into an open-ended dialogue

about life. Nearly 70 people who fit the criteria called or e-mailed, and in the end, 40 of those folks went through a full interview. The conversations were insightful, varied, funny, sad, thoughtful, surprising, engaging and symbolized a direct thread to our shared humanity, which led to this culling of the responses.



What was your first job, and how much did it pay?
As a 13-year-old, **Agnes Gelino** (born Jan. 6, 1912, in Rhame, N.D.) worked as a housekeeper and cook on a large wheat and cattle farm in North Dakota. She was paid \$5 every Sunday, and in return she worked eight to 10 hours a day, six days a week, taking a half-day off on Sundays after breakfast was served and cleaned up.

What's something about you that makes people marvel?

"I still sing in the church choir (Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church in Vancouver) and even sing solos every once in a while. ... I have been singing in choirs for 78 years. Started as a bass. Now, I'm a tenor." — **Alfred L. Mendenhall**, 91, Vancouver (born Feb. 8, 1914, in Pueblo, Colo.).

"I can still read the newspaper, not just the headlines, without glasses." — **Charles Don Schamel**, 96, Vancouver (born Aug. 28, 1909, in Lohrville, Iowa).

"I eat what I like. I can eat just about anything: ice cream, roast beef, cake, pizza, liver, peanut butter, chocolate, candy bars, hamburgers and fries. Just not an awful lot of it, and I've weighed 132 pounds for all of these years." — **Marie Schmunck**, 91, Vancouver (born May 5, 1914, in Sugar City, Colo.).

What's the most precious gift you've received?

"Back in the Depression days, in the (late) 1920s, my grandmother gave me an overcoat. I can still remember that, a long overcoat, plain brown. Nice and warm." — **Warren Bauman**, 91, Vancouver (born Aug. 12, 1914, in Kamloops, B.C.).

"It's a picture (from 1907). When I was going to Clark College, majoring in history, my mother told me I (needed to learn about my own history first), so she gave me a picture of her and Dad. (He was a student at (a Finnish college), and she was a dishwasher there. The picture showed the entire student body and staff, and those were the teachers who would be sent to Siberia by the czar government. That was what happened to the outspoken people (in Finland in World War I) and very seldom did anybody come back." — **Helmi Kortés-Erkilä**, 91, Vancouver (born Dec. 13, 1913, in Woodland).

"My first and only doll that I ever got. I was about 3. I remember that doll and how excited I was. We were very poor, and it was the only toy I ever got at that age. It was a tall (doll), with a leathery body. Her face was beautiful, with sleeping eyes and real light-brown hair. I was out of money 10 or 12 years ago, though, so I sold it for \$100. I felt I had no place for it. No place to keep it nice." — **Agnes Gelino**, 93, Vancouver (born Jan. 6, 1912, in Rhame, N.D.).

"A DVD/VCR combination player that my daughter and grandson gave to me for Christmas two years ago. I rent movies from Netflix. They come through the mail. It's very handy. ... I like chick flicks. Things that are entertaining. Nothing too serious." — **Martion Garvey**, 93, Vancouver (born May 26, 1912, in Brownsdale, Minn.).

What has been America's greatest contribution to humanity during your life?

"Social Security. I remember the time when everybody had to take care of the old folks. (My parents) were on Social Security. But my grandmother had to be supported by whoever could (help). My cousin had to take care of her all of the time. When Social Security (was created), I thought that was a wonderful way to help older people." — **Agnes Gelino**, 93, Vancouver (born Jan. 6, 1912, in Rhame, N.D.).

"Entering World War II. Or trying, in my opinion, to settle the world's differences and the wars going on in Europe. Our intervention generally decided the outcome." — **William Farr**, 92, Vancouver (born Sept. 12, 1912, in Burton, Wash.).

"The right for women to vote. ... I think the way (America has) permitted women to advance is one of the best things that could have happened to America." — **Gertrude Hall**, 94, Vancouver (born Aug. 15, 1911, in South Bend, Wash.).

"The beginning of television. We had one of the first television sets, so there was always a crowd of kids (around the box) during the day. It changed our evening's entertainment for the better." — **Warren Bauman**, 91, Vancouver (born Aug. 12, 1914, in Kamloops, B.C., Canada).

"I think the computer is the greatest innovation that has happened. I love mine." — **John Deurwaarder**, 90, Vancouver (born May 1, 1915, in Platte, S.D.).

What makes a day fulfilling?

"If I've written something, if I've been able to think up something that I feel is an original idea and managed to write it down." — **Harris Dusenbery**, 91, Vancouver (born Feb. 26, 1914, in Roundup, Mont.).

"When I get a call from either one or both of my daughters or any of my grandchildren. They are all so busy. It really makes my day when they can come and sit down and have a cup of coffee with me and chatter. People don't have time to talk anymore. They really don't!" — **Helmi Kortés-Erkilä**, 91, Vancouver (born Dec. 13, 1913, in Woodland).

"I'm always glad when I wake up in the morning, and the sun is shining, so I can do my gardening. ... And then I can watch the Mariners in the evening." — **Warren Bauman**, 91, Vancouver (born Aug. 12, 1914, in Kamloops, B.C., Canada).

"Being able to live by myself. Watch the television programs I want to watch. Sit out on my porch. Look at my flowers and watch the traffic go by on my busy street. I like to read a good book. Do a crossword puzzle. But mostly, just being able to live by myself." — **Martion Garvey**, 93, Vancouver (born May 26, 1912, in Brownsdale, Minn.).



If you could go back in time and talk to yourself at 20, what would you say?
"Wake up and face reality. A woman's prayers, scolding, screaming silent treatment, whatever, will never change a man, if he doesn't want to change. Look for a man with the same values as you have — culturally, politically, ethically — so your life will be pleasant." — **Helmi Kortés-Erkilä**, 91, Vancouver (born Dec. 13, 1913, in Woodland).

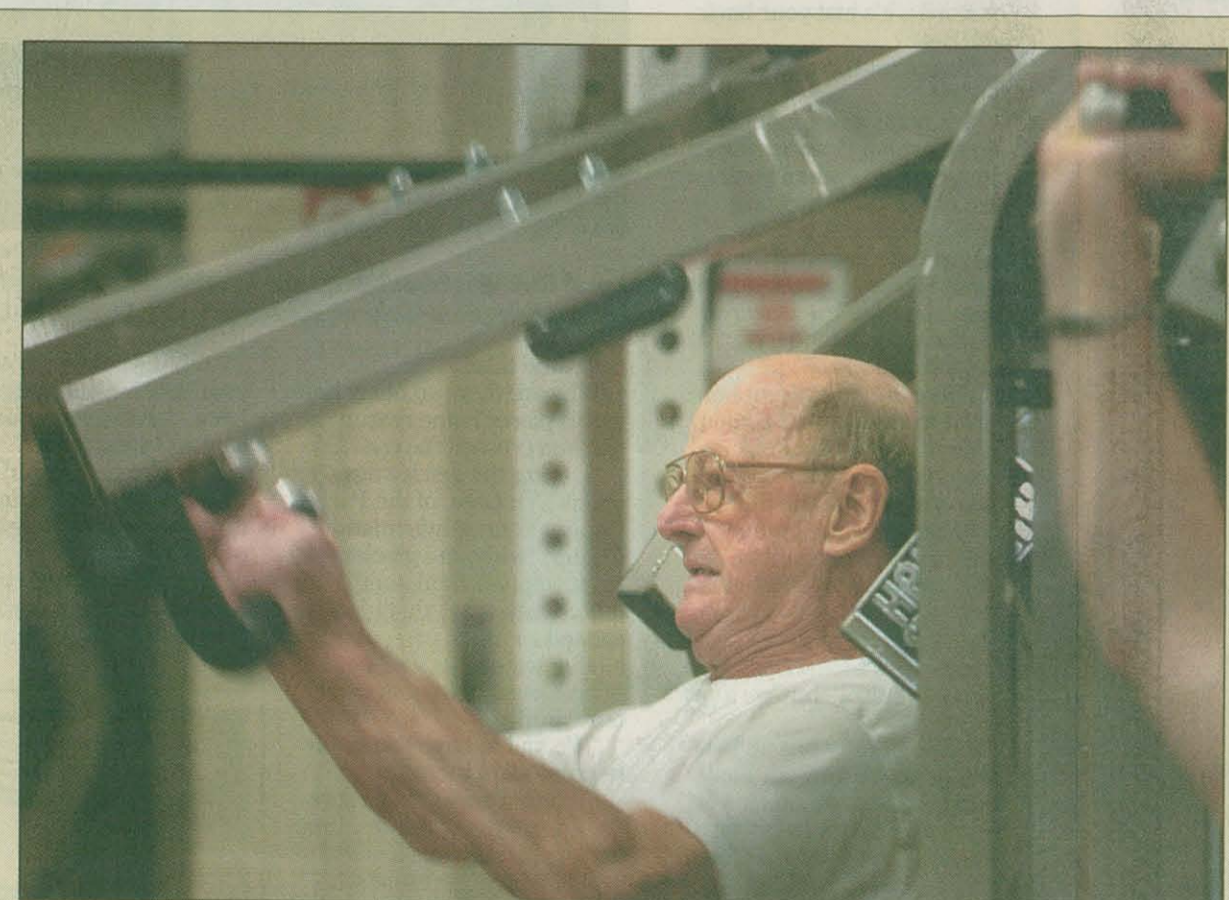
What's your biggest regret?

"That I didn't have more children. I would have liked to have had about four altogether. We went through a period, after (World War II), when there was a depression and everything, and we thought we couldn't afford more than two." — **Velma Dunn**, 98, Vancouver (born Feb. 12, 1907 in Loraine, Ill.).

"My first wife passed away from cancer. I regret that we didn't retire sooner, so she could have enjoyed those years. She did fine for about a year after we retired, then the cancer spread all over her system." — **Hallec Robb**, 90, Vancouver (born March 7, 1915 in Portland).

"That I didn't ask my parents more about their lives. That I didn't ask them more about what life was like." — **Nettie Ross**, 90, Battle Ground (born Jan. 16, 1915 in Ridgefield).

"I sold my house about 10 years ago. All of my life, I wanted a big house. I worked hard to get that big house. And when my husband died, I couldn't take care of a lot of things that I had to have done. So I moved into a mobile home, and that's where I am now." — **Marie Schmunck**, 91, Vancouver (born May 5, 1914 in Sugar City, Colo.).



If you had to narrow it to just one tangible thing, what's been the secret to happiness in your life?
"I've never been in the hospital. Never been sick. I feel extremely lucky. It takes luck to live this long. ... I also take two shots of whiskey, mixed with water, every night. That hasn't hurt me any!" — **Hallec Robb**, 90, Vancouver (born March 7, 1915 in Portland). Robb works out, including lifting weights, three days a week at a local athletic club and also plays a round of golf once a week.

What do people younger than 50 not understand about life?

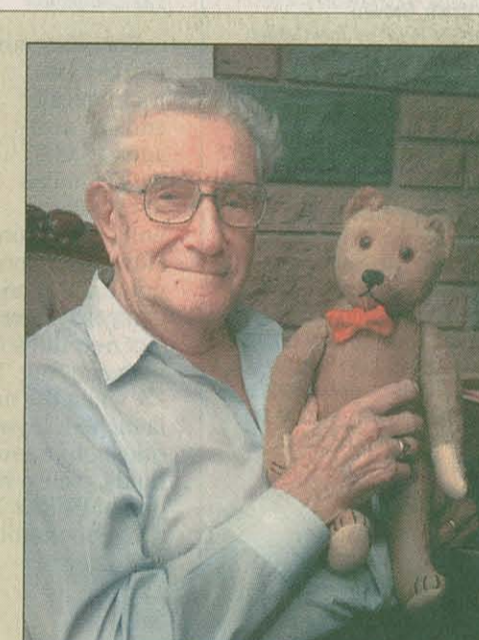
"I think people now are too greedy in general. They are not happy with what they have. They want more. Those people who lived through the Great Depression know what it means to be thankful to have a piece of bread. People today aren't thankful. They want more. They want more. They want more." — **Phillip Pritel**, 94, Vancouver (born Oct. 10, 1910, on the open prairie in North Dakota).

If you were forced to get rid of everything you owned, except for one thing, what would you keep?

"A picture of my son (Jim Graham). It's a portrait of him when he graduated from high school. He was in an accident in college, and he died at a young age (22). He was married, had a son that was a year and a half and a baby girl, 2 months old, when he died. He was absolutely wonderful. He was brilliant. He was handsome. He was everything." — **June Cannon**, 93, Vancouver (born June 1, 1912, in Liscomb, Iowa).



What's something about you that makes people marvel?
Twice a week around lunch time, **Ruth Turnwall** of Hazel Dell (born Aug. 22, 1914, in Thief River Falls, Minn.) plays piano to entertain residents of the Veteran Administration's nursing home in Vancouver. The 91-year-old, who also plays for a Bible study class at the home one night a week, says even though she's not a veteran, she supports military service in honor of her brother.



What's the most precious gift you've received?
"When I was 7, I received a teddy bear from my parents. Its head moved when I moved its tail. It's a light cinnamon, almost yellow color. Has some kind of buttons for its eyes. I've kept it ever since. ... It's been repaired a number of times, but it's still here." — **Winnie Walters**, 90, Vancouver (born Oct. 10, 1914, in Covelo, Calif.).

Photos by Dave Olson of The Columbian



If you had to narrow it to just one tangible thing, what's been the secret to happiness in your life?
"Believing that things were not really important. What's really important is the relationships I've had with people." **Harris Dusenbery**, 91, Vancouver (born Feb. 26, 1914, in Roundup, Mont.).



What makes a day fulfilling?
"Knowing that I have accomplished something. It might be making bread or a cake to give to my children or grandchildren. It might be cleaning my house." — **Pearl Rider**, 92, Vancouver, left (born Feb. 23, 1913 in Leonard, Okla.).

What's your biggest regret?
"Not finishing high school. I guess I just wanted to get away from the farm. I quit halfway through the 10th grade. I just wanted to get married." — **Mildred Martindale**, 94, Vancouver, right (born April 1, 1911 in Sapulpa, Okla.).

If you had to narrow it to just one tangible thing, what's been the secret to happiness in your life?

"Doing things for other people. Happiness is, in a way, what you can do for someone else." — **June Cannon**, 93, Vancouver (born June 1, 1912, in Liscomb, Iowa).

"The satisfaction that I have been able to do the things that I wanted to do. Writing music. Writing books. Meeting people. Enjoying nature. I'm very fond of nature and find great healing in it. And I discovered that God had a purpose for me in life, that I was not just a statistic." — **Ruth Turnwall**, 91, Vancouver (born Aug. 22, 1914, in Thief River Falls, Minn.).

"Moving to Vancouver. ... I like the trees. I like the green. I've made a lot of friends. I have my yard, where I can plant flowers and enjoy them. I just like everything about this part of the country." — **Winnie Walters**, 90, Vancouver, (born Oct. 10, 1914, in Covelo, Calif.).

"Knowing the difference between things I can change and things I can't." — **Alfred L. Mendenhall**, 91, Vancouver, (born Feb. 8, 1914, in Pueblo, Colo.).

"Not necessarily gobs and oodles of money. But just enough. At least enough to keep food on the table and bills paid." — **Walter Koller**, 93, Ridgefield (Sept. 14, 1912, in Stanton, Neb.).

"Being honest in everything I do and everything I say." — **Ed Becker**, 92, Vancouver, (born May 5, 1913, in Portland).

"I had dreams that I wanted to reach in my early years. I had plans and hopes, and I felt I worked toward those or talked to the right people, if I wanted to do it bad enough, if I knew it was important, I could do it. ... I did what I wanted to do." — **Gertrude Lavanen**, 92, Battle Ground (Aug. 6, 1913, in Quincy, Ore.).

"The flowers. ... All of the different colors. Beautiful smells. That's one of the things that I really adore. My family all have lives of their own now, away from me. The flowers are right here." — **Agnes Gelino**, 93, Vancouver, (born Jan. 6, 1912 in Rhame, N.D.).

What was your first job, and how much did it pay?

William Farr (born Sept. 12, 1912 in Burton, Wash.) made 10 cents per shift — which usually lasted three or four hours — turning the drying bricks at Vancouver's Hidden Brickyard. He was 10 years old at the time, and a dime covered the cost of getting into a movie theater.

For \$1 a day, plus room and board, **Harris Dusenbery** (born Feb. 26, 1914 in Roundup, Mont.) drove horse-drawn equipment on a cattle ranch in Eastern Oregon.

As a street car operator for the company (Portland Railway Light & Power) that eventually became Tri-Met, **Ed Becker** (born May 5, 1913 in Portland) earned 65 cents an hour. The Vancouver resident spent 43 years with the organization, before he retired in 1978.

Waitressing in Tulsa, Okla., during the Depression, meant getting almost no tips, and the pay was \$1 a day, says **Pearl Rider**, 92, of Vancouver, (born Feb. 23, 1913 in Leonard, Okla.).

When she was a young woman, **Minnie Harkleroad** (born Feb. 2, 1914 near Goodrich, N.D.) took care of an elderly woman, making \$3.50 a week.

Cracking eggs and separating the white and yolk from shells earned Vancouver's **Helmi Kortés-Erkilä** (born Dec. 13, 1913 in Woodland) 17 cents an hour in the early 1930s.

Agnes Butherus, 90, Vancouver (born July 28, 1915 in Bridgeport, Neb.) taught country school in Nebraska for \$40 a month, earning an extra \$10 a month by taking care of the janitorial duties, too.

Winnie Walters of Vancouver (born Oct. 10, 1914 in Covelo, Calif.) stacked hay for \$2 a day.

Alta May Leach (born May 24, 1914 in Lake Chelan, Wash.) was paid 25 cents an hour to take feathers off of chickens and turkeys in a slaughterhouse.

What makes your best friend special?

"About three years ago, I got very sick. I had an illness, and nobody knew what it was. I had this girlfriend (who I worked with) for 53 years, and we are still great friends. I called her, and she came to live with me. She stayed here and took care of me. ... That was really a great gift!" — **Marie Schmunck**, 91, Vancouver (born May 5, 1914, in Sugar City, Colo.).

"Her attitude. My friend always had a smile. ... She wasn't going along griping and complaining about this or that, cursing a husband or kids or something. So many (people) are always complaining about this or that." — **Agnes Gelino**, 93, Vancouver, (born Jan. 6, 1912, in Rhame, N.D.).

"The ability to talk to and to understand each other and listen to each other's views, without getting upset if it was different than what he thought." — **William Farr**, 92, Vancouver, (born Sept. 12, 1912, in Burton, Wash.).

"She was kind and considerate. And, oh, very thoughtful. She wasn't critical and (seemed to always) live for today. Yesterday's gone. Tomorrow's not here. Let's live for today!" — **Nettie Ross**, 90, Battle Ground, (born Jan. 16, 1915, in Ridgefield).

Bond:

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opportunities greater. A couple of years passed before they met one night at a movie attended by a mutual friend. Raymond recalls, "The minute I saw (Bertha), I thought she'd make a good wife."

Even though they only lived 10 miles apart, they worked too hard and were too poor to see each other more than once a week. After one of their dates, Raymond asked Bertha if she wanted to come live with him. In those days, that meant marriage. They borrowed a car, asked an aunt to come along as a witness and headed for South Dakota to introduce Raymond to Bertha's family. Along the way, they stopped at the Clark County Court house, filled out the required paperwork and officially were married, seven months after they met.

"Do you take her? Do you take him? That was it," Bertha says. Raymond gave Bertha a small gold ring with a trio of tiny diamonds in it, but she lost the stones over the years while balling hay. The ring eventually became so thin that she stopped wearing it. Then, she lost it. Raymond never wore anything on his finger to symbolize the marriage. Didn't see the point in it.

At first, Raymond built a two-room house, maybe 300 square feet in size, on a rented chicken farm. It was smaller than the apartment in which they live now. During those first couple years of marriage, they had two babies living with them in that tiny house as well as Raymond's 16-year-old brother and 14-year-old sister.

The Olsens bought their first farm together in the early 1940s, paying \$2,500 for 120 acres near Fargher Lake. Two years later, they moved to a nearby 80-acre spot that cost them \$5,000, where they lived for the next 51 years, until they moved into Battle Ground, eventually settling in Mallard Landing Assisted Living.

Raymond's most romantic act over the years, Bertha says, was to dig up a wild climbing rose that he found in a hay field. He planted it next to their greenhouse, where it grew over like a drupe covered with thousands of pink blooms each summer. "I thought it was pretty," Raymond says. "And I thought she would like it."

His most devoted act, Bertha adds, was giving up the Lutheran faith to follow her interest in Presbyterianism. "That meant a lot to me," Bertha says. "It's hard to put into words. But it was very important."

They didn't start playing cards together until they moved into the Battle Ground retirement home three years ago. But that's become an evening ritual for them. They play for about 90 minutes every night, Bertha says, "so we don't go to bed too early." At least once a week, they invite over friends for favorites such as pinocchle, cribbage and King's Corner.

Even though they now sleep in single beds for health reasons, they spend most of their waking hours together. Going to doctor's appointments. Grange meetings. Memorial services. Holiday gatherings. And sharing a table in the Mallard Landing dining room for three meals a day.

They don't claim to know or do anything special to account for their longevity in life and marriage. But, Bertha says, "Maybe we are good at working out our differences without making a big problem out of them. ... We never let a problem get the best of us. We might not like the answer, but if you solve the problem, that takes care of a lot of things."

Did you know?

■ The number of people 90 and older in America is growing rapidly, according to a comparison of census data from 1990 to 2000. At the end of that decade-long span, there were 44.6 percent more 90- to 94-year-olds (343,000 total) and 34.7 percent more folks 95 and older (87,000). The oldest still are only a small part of the overall population, which topped 281 million in 2000.