

Health & Fitness

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Fighting back with positivity Olivia Hooker, Ph.D., 102

At 102 years old, Olivia Hooker remembers nearly everything from her life — names of old friends, important dates from her upbringing, the personal histories of her parents and grandparents.

The White Plains, NY, resident and

retired psychology professor remembers the date she entered the US Coast Guard in February 1945 — the first African-American woman to do so — and the days she graduated from Ohio State University, got her master's at Columbia University, and received her Ph.D. from the University of Rochester. She can recall her retirement from Fordham University when she was 87.

But what Hooker remembers most vividly was the day the Ku Klux Klan came to her Tulsa, Okla., house in 1921, when she was just 6 years old. The mob trashed the breakfast her mother had prepared for Hooker and her four siblings, took a hatchet to her family's piano and destroyed their phonograph and records.

"People say, 'How do you remember all that?' But that kind of experience is in your mind for the rest of your life," she says.

The Tulsa race riots are believed to be the worst incident of racial violence in American history, resulting in the deaths of an estimated 300 African-Americans. The massacre still angers Hooker, but the advice of her parents has helped her keep her head high since.

"Our parents taught us: 'Don't waste your time hating,'" she says. "Try to think of something good to make it less likely that this could happen again."

She says she's not sure why she's lived as long as she has, although she does credit not drinking and not smoking with her good health.

Hooker is quick to smile as she looks across her living-room wall, which serves as a gallery of photos of her with former presidents Barack Obama and Bill Clinton, proclamations from several cities and awards for volunteerism.

"Yes," she says. "I do have a lot of joy in my life."



GOLDEN OLDIES

With Facebook updates and nightly gin and tonics, here's how three locals are making it past 100

By LAUREN STEUSSY

ONE hundred never looked so good. In his new photography book, "Aging Gracefully" (Chronicle Books, out now), Karsten Thormaehlen shares portraits of more than 52 centenarians from around the world. Although their backgrounds couldn't be more different, all have one thing in common: They've lived 100 years or more and are proud of it. "For almost every centenarian," Thormaehlen says, "long life is a precious gift and not a burden."

Here, three New Yorkers featured in the book tell us how they reached 100 gracefully.

TURN THE PAGE FOR MORE CENTENARIANS

FROM THE COVER

COMING OF AGE



The first 100 are the hardest Edward Palkot, 103

Edward Palkot is busy checking his e-mail: At 103 years old, he's accumulated a lot of pals who he has to keep up with. He may even log onto Facebook, too, to chat with a few of his 105 friends.

"I send messages to friends back and forth on Facebook," says the Garden City, NY, resident, who was born in 1913 and has a Twitter account. "I like it. I got some nice pictures on it."

Staying social is the key to Palkot's longevity, whether it's spending time with his four children, six grandchildren and nine great-grandchildren, or with his cribbage pals at the Garden City Retired Men's Club. Most days, he's caught up in conversation with his "young lady," Alice, who is 92. Alice (above), whom he's been dating for about 15 years, is his second love. He lost his wife Anne in

1998 to ALS. Her death was devastating, he says, but optimism kept him going.

"You have to dismiss the bad things in life that bother you," he says. "Emphasize the good."

After graduating from Carnegie Mellon University, the Pittsburgh-born Palkot came to New York City to try and make it in theater — a love that began when he played George Washington in a school play in front of an audience that included five Civil War veterans.

He went on to become vice president of human resources for Marine Midland Bank in Manhattan, from which he retired at age 65. Since then, he's been golfing, fishing and watching his family grow. He stays healthy by eating "whatever I want," typically a rotation of onion sandwiches, pierogi and cabbage salads.

"The first hundred years are the hardest. After that, you just roll along," Palkot says. "If you worry and fret, you wear yourself down."

A voice that won't be silenced Marie Runyon, 101



When 100 came around, Marie Runyon was just as surprised as anyone — time flies when you're tirelessly fighting for the little guy, she says.

"But I was glad, too. I thought, maybe I can do more if I'm 100 years old," says the sprightly Harlem resident, who still enjoys a gin and tonic every night before bed.

Now, about to turn 102, Runyon has remained happy

and healthy by staying busy with her life's work. She served in the New York State Assembly in 1975 and '76, and advocated for low-income tenants in Harlem with her organization, the Harlem Restoration Project. She fought to keep her own apartment and others in her building from being demolished by Columbia University — an effort that pitted her against the university for more than four decades but resulted in a victory for her in 2002. The university even designated the building "Marie Runyon Court."

Runyon, who grew up in North Carolina, studied psychology at Berea College in Kentucky. She worked as a psychologist before moving to New York City in 1947. There, she married and had a daughter, Louise, although she and her husband later divorced.

In the years following, she worked with the American Civil Liberties Union and the National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy. She's most proud of founding the Harlem Restoration Project in 1977, which employs ex-convicts and helps provide quality housing to low-income Harlem residents. She left the organization in 1998 but still considers it one of her greatest achievements.

In 2006, when she was 91, she became the oldest member of the Granny Peace Brigade, which protested the war in Iraq and other progressive causes. Now, as she sits in her home office overlooking Morningside Park, buttons and protest posters surrounding her, she says the key to living a long and meaningful life is to be passionate.

"Go after people who need to be gone after," she says. "Don't worry about yelling. I never have, I never will." It also helps to have good genes.

"A lot of my family lived to be elderly," she says. "So I said, 'What the hell! I'll give this a try!'"



YOUR BEDTIME COULD BE MAKING YOU FAT

According to a Finnish study recently published in the journal *Obesity*, night owls are more likely to make unhealthy food choices than early risers. Both groups in the study consume about the same number of calories, but late risers eat more sugar during the day and more fat — particularly saturated fat — in the evening than their early-bird counterparts. The differences are exaggerated on the weekends, researchers found.