The Secret to a Long Life? Lots of Friends, Healthy Living, and a Positive Outlook, Say Eleven Centenarians (between 100 and 104) at Joint Birthday Party at United Hebrew

Among these fabulous seniors, a former actor who worked alongside Michael Douglas and was raised on John Steinbeck’s farm!

_The key to a long life? “Stay positive. Get lots of sleep. Listen to your parents!”_

(New Rochelle, NY, April 25, 2018....) There may be more than one path to reach age 100, but eleven individuals who have passed that milestone have a few key things in common: they remain close to their families; they cultivate passions, hobbies, and interests; they have a strong social network; and they maintain their independence as much as possible.

These eleven centenarians, all residents at United Hebrew of New Rochelle, were guests of honor at a special birthday party where they shared their views on longevity.

“They key to living as long as I have is having a lot of friends and a wonderful family to lean on,” said Edith Solomon, 101, a resident of Willow Gardens Memory Care, located on United Hebrew of New Rochelle’s senior living campus. Ms. Solomon was joined by: Lucille Fullerton, age 101; Eddie Ikeda, age 102; Shirley Meyers, age 103; Mary Mignogna, age 102; Sylvia Rifkin, age 100; Mary Talarini, age 104; and Ethel Tribesman, age 101. (Three additional centenarians live on United Hebrew’s campus but were unable to attend: Annie Adler, age 102, Rhoda Cooper, age 103, and Samuel Levine, age 102.)

Centenarian studies show that more people are living to age 100 and beyond; contributing factors to their longevity include having an optimistic attitude, practicing good health habits, and having plenty of social connections.

“It’s no surprise that we have eleven centenarians here at United Hebrew,” said Rita Mabli, president and CEO of United Hebrew. “Our staff fosters friendships and healthy lifestyles through the care they provide and the wide array of social, cultural, and recreational activities.”

Nora O’Brien, executive director of Willow Towers Assisted Living and Willow Gardens Memory Care, applauded the accomplishments of the eleven individuals in her luncheon.
remarks. “Today, we celebrate you. We honor your grace, your spirit, and your strength; we revel in your passion, because you are still living life to the fullest.”

Crystal Collins presented special proclamations from County Executive George Latimer and said on his behalf, “Today, we wish you joy and happiness. You have seen much, and witnessed historical moments. We celebrate your accomplishments and welcome you to the Centenarian Club.”

**The Centenarians**

1. **Lucille Fullerton, 101**

   Born in Cohoes, NY, Lucille Fullerton grew up in New Rochelle, where she excelled in her studies—so much so, that she skipped three grades and graduated from New Rochelle High School (NRHS) at age fourteen. Her father was an advertising executive for Arrow Shirts, and her mother was a homemaker. She attended the College of New Rochelle, and went on to marry Jack Fullerton, a maintenance engineer, whom she met at NRHS. Lucille enjoyed her position as secretary for the school district’s Board of Education for many years. The couple had three children, Charron, Jack and LuAnne.

   Lucille’s interests are wide-ranging: she loves music, and enjoyed playing the piano and dancing throughout her life. She and her husband participated in two bridge clubs. She enjoyed going to visit her relatives in Cohoes and visiting the city of Saratoga. Now the grandmother of six (Scott, Kristin, Aline, Anne, John and Elizabeth), and the great-grandmother of six (Robert, Jonathan, Emma, Eva, Ali and Livia), Lucille enjoys visits with her family and the activities at United Hebrew’s nursing home.

2. **Eddie Ikeda, 102**

   Eddie Ikeda was born in San Francisco, CA, but grew up in Salinas on a farm owned by writer John Steinbeck (who later wrote about migrant farms in *Of Mice and Men*). Somewhat precocious, Eddie learned how to drive a tractor on Steinbeck’s farm at the tender young age of eleven. He was the oldest of six; Eddie had four younger brothers and one younger sister. He went on to attend Stanford University, and moved to Shanghai to begin his career.

   He was working in Shanghai when he heard a lovely singer on the radio. A mutual friend arranged for him to meet the singer, who eventually became his wife. After the end of WWII, the couple moved to the Upper West Side of New York City, then settled in Queens to raise their growing family. They had two sons and a daughter. For most of his career, Eddie sold imported housewares for Styson, Inc. Eddie was an avid stock market investor and belonged to an investors club, enjoyed golf and tennis, playing card games, and watching sports. Eddie and his wife enjoyed traveling throughout Europe and Asia.
At age 65, Eddie was in the audience of the David Letterman Show, which was filmed in New York City but purported to be on location in Tokyo. Show runners had recruited Japanese Americans to sit in the audience, and Eddie, being one of a few audience members who could actually speak Japanese, was assigned to ask a question in Japanese (while pretending he couldn’t speak English). When the translator fumbled his question, Eddie translated it perfectly for Letterman, who howled with laughter. A star was born. “Discovered” that night by a talent agent, Eddie went on to have a 25-year acting career, appearing in small parts alongside well-known actors including Michael Douglas, Harrison Ford, and Andy Garcia, in such films as “The Last Airbender,” “Sabrina,” and “Black Rain,” to name a few.

Eddie is most proud of his seven grandchildren and four great-grandchildren. He says a contributing factor to his long life was sleep. “Study hard. Learn a lot. And sleep! Sleep is the most important thing,” he said at the luncheon. “Get lots of it!”

3. Shirley Meyers, 103

Born in the Bronx on October 15, 1914, Shirley Meyers, [née Kleppler] grew up in New Rochelle with her parents, Rose and Al Klepper, and her two sisters, Muriel and Naomi. Of the “Three Klepper Girls,” Shirley was among the first to be confirmed at Temple Israel of New Rochelle. Following her graduation in 1933 from New Rochelle High School, she attended art school. After meeting Howard Meyers of White Plains, she eloped with him in 1934 and shortly thereafter, the couple started a wholesale men’s gift business, H.C. Meyers Company, which supplied major department stores and catalogues. After her husband’s death in 1986, Shirley moved to Boca Raton, FL, where she was an avid golfer, bridge enthusiast, and world traveler. She fulfilled her dreams of visiting far-flung destinations across the United States, Europe, and the Middle East. She moved back to New Rochelle to be near her family, and still enjoys following her beloved New York Giants, from whom she was thrilled to receive recognition last year for her status as a 50-year-ticket holder.

Her family is still growing and now includes four generations of New Rochelle High School graduates. Shirley remains active in the lives of her two children, seven grandchildren, and sixteen great-grandchildren, who are a tremendous source of pride and joy, and whose names and birthdays she remembers so well that other relatives frequently check with Shirley on which family birthday is coming up next. “Have the will to do things for yourself; be independent, and have a positive outlook,” says Shirley on living a long and healthy life. She still walks every day, gets her hair done weekly, plays poker, and participates in the full complement of social activities offered at United Hebrew’s Willow Towers Assisted Living.

4. Mary Mignogna, 102

Mary Mignogna was born on June 10, 1916 in Manhattan. Her parents, Anthony Rizzone
and Ornofrio Taromina, emigrated from Italy, married, and had two children – Mary and Joseph. They moved to the Bronx where Mary met her husband Peter Mignogna. Together they had two children Michael and Christina.

Mary is passionate about traveling, and throughout her life visited as many states across America as she could. She says she was fortunate to visit several European countries as well. One of her favorite memories is her trip to Sicily, when she visited the not only the town but also the house in which her mother was raised. To her surprise, relatives still lived in that very house and were overwhelmed to meet her, she says. They spent several days getting to know each other and telling stories of her mother’s childhood. Today, Mary revels in her five great grandchildren (all boys) and looks forward to their visits at United Hebrew’s nursing home, and sharing special occasions together.

5. Sylvia Rifkin, 100

Sylvia Rifkin was born on January 17, 1918, on the Lower East Side of New York City in her home, a tenement apartment on East 11th Street. Sylvia was the youngest of seven children and sadly lost her father when she was just nine years old. Her family moved to Brooklyn and lived above a grocery store that the family ran. Her family, who immigrated from a Polish ghetto in the late 1880s, struggled.

Sylvia studied business and commercial studies at New Utrecht High School in Brooklyn, NY. She went straight to work first as a court stenographer and then as an executive secretary in Manhattan—for a time, she served as secretary to Jack Warner at Warner Brothers Studios. She married Louis Rifkin, a pharmacist, in 1941. Sylvia had two sons, Jeff and Alan, and now has three grandchildren; Lucas, a physician, Joy, an environment scientist, Lara who has a fellowship in clinical psychology at Temple University. Sylvia’s husband Louis died in 1995 at the age of 80. Sylvia, on her own for nearly 25 years, enjoys activities at Willow Towers including dancing, exercising, listening to music, concerts, and special events.

6. Edith Solomon, 101

Edith Zeligson was born in Pittsburgh, PA, in 1917 and grew up in McKees Rocks, a suburb of the Steel City. Her father, Abraham Zeligson was a tailor who also owned a small general store. Her mother, Esther Zeligson, worked in the store and was a homemaker. Edith worked hard in school and went on to attend Duquesne University.

On one of her spring break trips from college with friends, she traveled to Miami Beach and stayed at the National Hotel, where Jack Solomon was working as a lifeguard. They began a romance, and eventually married and settled in the Pelham Parkway area of The Bronx. She became a teacher and went on to serve as an elementary school principal. Her children describe her as a “magnificent mother,” and say she set a
“wonderful example” on what it means to be there for someone when needed. Edith has always been very social, and still loves Broadway musicals, concerts, and just about any form of entertainment.

Edith says having a strong network of friends and family helped her reach her current age. Her advice for younger people looking to live a long life? “Listen to your parents. Then teach your children!”

7. Mary Tallarini, 104

Reducing stress whenever possible, maintaining a strong social network, and following a healthy lifestyle are some of the keys to Mary Tallarini’s long life, according to her daughter, Sandra Annunziata. “She spent her entire life in New Rochelle, growing up in a large, tight-knit Italian family as one of nine children,” said Sandra. “She was always involved in her community, from our school’s PTA when we were growing up, to her group of friends in her senior housing complex on Maple Avenue, where she lived on her own until she was ninety-nine and a half.”

Born to Luigi and Filomena Panico on February 4, 1914, Mary had four brothers and four sisters. In 1943, she married Anthony Tallarini, with whom she had three children. She cooked for her husband’s luncheonette, contributed to Sunday dinners at her parent’s house, and helped care for her parents, as they grew older. After her husband retired in his 70s, Mary continued her community involvement, and knitted hats, gloves, and scarves for those in need. After her husband’s death, she moved to a senior community near the Hugh Doyle Senior Center in New Rochelle, where for fifteen years, she walked nearly every day to have lunch, cook, and play cards and bingo with friends. Mary is the proud grandmother of six, great-grandmother of two, and Aunt to twenty-three nieces and nephews. “She had good genes, she ate healthfully, and never drank or smoked,” said Sandra. “She became much more social as an elderly adult, and that helped her maintain her independence for so long.” Among the family celebrating her centenarian status are her three children, six grand-children, two great-grandchildren, and twenty-three nieces and nephews.

8. Ethel Traberman, 101

Ethel Traberman was born in Jersey City, NJ. She was the third of four children (Morris, Golda, and Paul were her siblings) born to her father, a glazier, and her mother, a homemaker.

While attending a friend’s party when she was 18, Ethel met her future husband, Harry Traberman. He was 31, and her parents had reservations. But they quickly grew to love Harry, and the couple married. Harry was working for his Uncle in a cigar distribution business, but Ethel had her eye on a toy business called Cheap Sam’s. The couple purchased the building and the business, which they ran successfully in Jersey City for
many years with her brother Paul and his wife, Goldie.

Edith, a savvy businesswoman, managed the family’s personal finances and the business operations. She enjoyed cooking and hosted the entire family for Sunday dinners, and extended family for holiday meals. She and Harry loved to travel, play bridge, and be involved with their community. Edith served as a member, events planner, and treasurer for Hadassah, a Jewish women’s organization. The couple had one daughter, Dale Traberman. After they retired, Harry and Edith moved to Hallandale, FL, where they lived for over forty years. Edith, now a resident of Willow Towers Assisted Living, has two granddaughters, Robyn and Randy, and four great-grandchildren: Dale, Harris, Leo and Sam.