

Natural Healing Express Weekly

Column Volume 90 Longevity, Part Six – Ruby Schumacher

This week I conducted a marvelous interview with Ruby Schumacher, a 103 year old resident of Lena. Yes, Ruby was born in March of 1910. Can you even wrap your head around all the spectacular events; both positive and negative, that this lovely woman has witnessed? It was certainly my pleasure to speak with her and then enjoy a few games of euchre – albeit she beat the pants off my team. (my teammate shall remain nameless to protect the semi-innocent- who may or may not have trumped my ace).

Susan: Ruby, please tell me a little bit about your early life:

Ruby: I was born to Agnes and Awalt Rockow in Winslow. I have three brothers, Eugene, Dale, Jerome and three sisters Arlene, Kathryn and Maxine. Maxine is 93 and lives in Boise, Idaho. All the rest are gone. We were farmers and we lived in Winslow, then Morgan, Minnesota and then back to Winslow. We were dairy farmers and I had to milk 7 cows by hand before school and then again after school. We had to make hay and stomp it down on the hayrack. The thrashers would come and we would watch for the steam engine. It wasn't like farming today with all those fancy machines.

Susan: What about your childhood do you think contributed to your longevity?

Ruby: Hard work for one thing. I graduated from 8th grade. They couldn't afford to send me any further and I went to work right away. They sent me to work with a neighbor lady who had diabetes. I had to help her and get her kids off to school. I worked for \$7 a week. I slept upstairs in the attic, of course we had no electricity and the house was small. After long while of working my rear end off, I told Dad I was coming home. It was brutal and not worth the money.

Susan: Tell me a little bit about some of the “firsts” that you have experienced.

Ruby: Well, I guess the first cars. The Oakland, the Model T and the Overland. My future in laws had the first car in the neighborhood – the Oakland. I guess it was close to 1920. (Yes, Ruby is correct, Henry Ford announced the Model T in 1908 – with the Oakland Motor Car – “A Sensible Six Sedan” being announced in 1907) That was something. They also had the first indoor bathroom which was simply a huge luxury at the time. But they farmed and had 7 boys; I think they tried to make a girl out of the middle one because someone had to help with the cooking and sewing. (Huge giggles)

Susan: What do you think was the most impressive or had the biggest effect on you at the time?

Ruby: Well, when we got married and moved to Winslow we got a house for \$7 a month. We lived next to Doc Shenberger and they bought a cow that needed milking. I think the biggest thrill of all was when we first got electricity followed shortly by a refrigerator. We took milk and got it cold in the refrigerator. That was something. And of course, indoor plumbing and a gas stove. Those were really big luxuries at the time.

Oh and one big effect on me was when World War I ended. We were in Minnesota at the time and all the church bells starting ringing. We didn't have phones, let alone cell phones so that was the way they let us know the war was over. My Dad was scheduled to go on the next draft and we were upset. I was so happy I started jumping on the couch with joy.

Susan: Can you tell me a about your marriage and your children?

Ruby: Well, I married Chester Schumacher. We met at school and all the neighborhood would gather at the Pecatonica River near Browntown and picnic there. We would play ball and run around all day. We got to know each by the river. We had basket socials at school where the girls put together baskets and sold them off to the highest bidder. Check bought mine, I guess that did it. We were married 57 years I believe and he's been gone almost 30 now. We got married when I was 17.

As for kids, I had 6 kids in 8 years. Whew (her eyes get big) 5 girls, Darlene, Geraldine, Joyce, Gloria, Beverly and 1 boy, Duane. It seemed like I always had one above the apron, one under the apron and one tugging at the apron. (Everyone in the room is now laughing hysterical and this bright eyed beautiful soul as she recounts those babies) But all in all, they were good kids.

I have 70 some grandkids, many great grand kids and 14 great, great grandkids. The grandkids are great. You see, all my kids are gone now and so are all the in-laws and their kids.

Now, I want to tell you something. Every one of those grandkids, great grand kids and great, great grandkids gets a personal birthday card from me with a \$1.00 in it. I average 7 birthday cards a month. I stick a buck in each and the ones I like more maybe two bucks. One of the kids said, "Oh, grandma, it's just a buck, you should stop sending them." Well, I told that one, "oh, really, now think this out, I have been sending them to you since you were born and you are now 55 years old. This all adds up." (Ruby gives us this smug look and we are all now almost rolling on the floor.)

Susan: Ruby, what makes your family life successful?

Ruby: Well, I have done a lot of cooking. I used to have 30 people a weekend coming to my house to eat. Remember we married in the Depression. I usually can over 300 quarts of stuff a year. We had chickens and had a huge, huge garden. When I was 13 years old I made my first batch of bread while my mamma was having a baby and she told me to bake the bread. I was mad at her for being pregnant, pretty much like she was mad at me when I first got pregnant, and it took her 3 days to have that kid, he was 12 pounds. So I learned to bake the bread and take care of myself and family pretty young. We did that all over wood fire, I never had a gas stove until well after I was married.

Susan: Tell me a little bit about your spirituality.

Ruby: Well, I am still trying to go to the same church from 75 years ago. It's the Grace Bible in Winslow and I think only 11 people go now. Heck, it's all old people and many are gone. It's hard for me to get there lately.

Susan: Ruby, what was the toughest period of your life?

Ruby: (with a huge grin): ALL OF IT. I just live day to day and never left one day bother me too much. If I had a freezer full of pies, cookies and everything and family around, I didn't much care. And, I left yesterday stay yesterday, can't live it again, no use worrying about it. I just cook, cook, cook and live for today.

Susan: What are you the most proud of?

Ruby: My family and cooking for my family. Especially cooking fried chicken for everyone because I do it the old fashioned way and it's hard to top. Sometimes I will put some noodles in it and those grandkids come around a lot. I like that, I have wonderful grandchildren.

Susan: Do you have anything in your life you would like to do over?

Ruby: Oh, I have learned a lot. There's probably a lot I would do over, but I don't think about it.

Susan: What do you like most about your life today?

Ruby: That I am my own boss. I do what I want to do.

Susan: What is your favorite activity?

Ruby: Well, just to have an activity is pretty good. I have done a lot of crochet and do some crossword puzzles. And cards—I love to play cards. All of my family would come out, I would cook and everyone would play cards. The men would play poker a lot. And, almost everyone smoked. Not me though, my momma would have hit me in the head. My husband even smoked in bed. He fell asleep a couple of times and then I laid down the law about smoking in bed. He quit that.

Susan: Yes, I know you are quite card player, how long have you been playing cards and what is your favorite card game?

Ruby: Well, I do love to play. I have been playing since I was 10 years old. I love playing pinnacle, but most of the good players are dead. So now I love euchre. I was driving to play games at the church just up until last year when I stopped.

Susan: Why did you stop?

Ruby: Well, I finally stopped driving. I had a 1993 Trans Am that I just loved. A sporty two door. I went everywhere. It started making a noise so I took it in and the mechanic said, "Ruby, this thing is rusted out to the engine and if you don't believe me, have one of your grandkids come look under it." So, I sent one of them down and sure enough, I was about to lose that engine out the bottom, so I sold it for junk.

Next thing you know, my daughter who had passed had a car so they gave that one to me. I drove that around for a while and the air conditioner went out. I took it to the mechanic and they said it was going to be a bunch of money to fix it and it probably wasn't worth it, so I sold that one for junk, too.

Then I figured a 102 year old woman probably shouldn't be out driving, so, with a clean slate, I called it a day. I sure miss it though.

And you know; now I go every Wednesday with a friend to play euchre at St John's so that hasn't changed. I have been playing there for three years and only won one game and by God, I had to split the pot. (more giggling)

Susan: What is your advice for people regarding a long, healthy and happy life?

Ruby: You mean what's my secret? Everyone asks me that. I eat my own cooking. I have meat and potatoes once a day. I eat a lot of potatoes myself, about 10lbs a month. I try to stay far away from doctors and I sleep with the window open every night, even in the winter. Maybe once in a great while I will have a bloody Mary. And I loved to go to dances. Nowadays our kind of dancing is gone. We would go to the Warren Bonery on the weekends. It would cost you a nickel to have the band play your song. My sister and I won first prize for the Charleston and we each got a new pair of shoes. That was really fun.

Susan: Anything else you would like to add?

Ruby: Just live a good and natural life. You know I have read my obituary already. It's nice. I hope when the Good Lord calls me he does it quickly. I do not want to go to assisted living. I want to live until I die. On my 103rd birthday, we had only relatives and there were 90 people in the corn shed. That's a lot of relatives. We even had a magician.

I say Eat, Drink and Be Merry. And don't worry; in the long run, everything will be what it will be. I am so thankful I live in Lena now, the people here are so nice and my doctor who checks on me is here, too. I tell him "the motor's good, the body's getting rusty and the tires are worn out."

Susan: And with that, we all erupted in laughter again. What a gem is this Miss Ruby Schumacher. If you see her out and about, greet her warmly and a wonderful smile and perhaps a story will follow, but don't bring your car title to a card game, she may want to drive again soon. Many blessings to you, Ruby.

Enjoy! Hope to see you soon and as always, please contact us via one of the following methods. Natural Healing Express: Phone 815 990 8732, email: skscham@aol.com 204 W Main St, Lena, IL 61048.

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