



### Older Americans Month

In 1963, President John F. Kennedy designated May as Older American's Month. The theme for this year's observance is [Aging Unbound](#). This issue of Multicultural Moments highlights older Americans and others around the world who have achieved longevity and accomplished major tasks later in life.

**Seniors by the Numbers.** The expression "As old as Methuselah" is a biblical reference to a man said to have lived longer than any other human, approaching 1,000 years old. Here are some numbers about the older populations in the U.S. and globally throughout history.

- The [Guinness's World Record](#) acknowledges the oldest living person as Jean Louise Calment of France at 122 years old. Born in 1875, Calment experienced adventure in her later years. She took up fencing at age 85, appeared in a movie at age 114, and smoked until age 117. Other stories of people living longer are questionable, such as claims that Li Cheng-Yuen of China lived to be 256 years old and Ignacy Lewski of Poland was rumored to live 682 years! You can see these and other examples in the World Data 3D video [Comparison: OLDEST People in the World History](#).
- According to the Population Reference Bureau, the number of Americans 65 and older is predicted to increase from 52 million in 2018 to 95 million in 2060. Such a significant shift in the population of older Americans has health, social, and employment implications. To learn more, visit [Fact Sheet: Aging in the United States | PRB](#). In addition, you can explore the [U.S. Census Bureau's interactive visualization](#) tool to see data about older Americans by state. Data include topics such as labor participation rates, retirement income, living situations, and other common demographic data.
- The [Gateway to Global Aging Data](#) maintains a database of studies, survey data, and other information on aging around the globe. In addition, the platform offers tools to support research on aging-related topics, including a set of shareable [infographics](#).

**Achieving Success after 65.** The seniors featured in this section exemplify the expression, "It's never too late." They all accomplished great tasks in education, business, literature, art, and athletics at an age when many people aim to retire.

- **Education.** The article, [Senior Accomplishments that Will Inspire You,](#) highlights the accomplishments of several senior citizens, including Nola Ochs and Leo Plass. Ochs earned a bachelor's degree from Fort Hays State University in 2007 at 95. Plass, who dropped out of college during the great depression, later enrolled at Eastern Oregon University to complete his degree just shy of 100 years old.
- **Business.** Founder of one of America's largest fast-food chains, Kentucky Fried Chicken, [Colonel Harland Sanders](#) didn't establish the chain of restaurants until he was 65 years old after a series of other occupations, including military service, ferry boat owner, justice of the peace, and delivering babies.
- **Literature.** [Laura Ingalls Wilder](#), the author of a series of books chronicling frontier life in America, first published her stories at the age of 65 at the encouragement of her daughter. Her

stories were later adapted into a television series, "[Little House on the Prairie](#)" which ran for nine seasons.

- **Athletics.** In 2011, [Fauja Singh](#) became the oldest person to run a marathon after completing a 42-kilometer race in Toronto at the age of 100. He started running in his 80s to combat grief. In 2018, the 85-year-old [Hiromu Inada](#) completed the annual Ironman World Championship in Hawaii, becoming the oldest person to ever accomplish the feat. The competition required a 2.4-mile swim, a 112-mile bike ride, and a marathon run (26.2 miles), which he completed in under 17 hours.
- **Art.** Artist [Alma Thomas](#) became the first African American woman to have a solo exhibit at the Whitney Museum in New York in 1972 at the age of 81, and after retiring from a decades-long career as an art teacher in Washington, D.C., You can view samples of her work at [Alma Thomas: Everything Is Beautiful | The Phillips Collection](#). Like Thomas, the folk artist known as Grandma Moses became popular for her paintings later in life; however, unlike Thomas, Moses didn't start painting until she was in her 70s. You can learn more about her and view her work, which represents her experiences in rural America, via Smithsonian American Art Museum's page, [Grandma Moses](#).

**Celebrating Centenarians.** According to the [World Economic Forum](#), there are half a million centenarians around the world. This section highlights the wisdom and characteristics of extraordinary people who reached 100 years of age.

- **Lessons from Blue Zones.** Dan Buettner's TED Talk, "[How to Live to be 100+](#)" explains characteristics and habits of people living in communities with larger than average numbers of 100+-year-olds. People living in regions of Sardinia (home to the oldest living male population) and Okinawa (home to the oldest living female population) are not only living longer but also remaining active in society. In Okinawa, having a life-long social network (Moai), a purpose for waking up in the morning (Ikigai), and reminders to stop eating when you are 80% full (Hara Hachi Bu) are three strategies linked to longevity. In America, the Adventist population living near Loma Linda, CA, experiences a life expectancy for men and women that exceeds that of the average American. You can watch the TED Talk to learn more about these communities and their habits.
- **Working at 100.** Meet Dr. Howard Tucker, the world's oldest practicing doctor. At age 100, he continues to teach residents at the St. Vincent Medical Center in Cleveland, OH, after almost 75 years working in neurology. Read his story in the *Today* article, "[World's Oldest Doctor Turns 100, Shares Health, Longevity Advice](#)." A 2022 NPR (National Public Radio) article features another working centenarian, Walter Orthmann. At 100 years old, Orthmann has had a marathon career with the same textile company in Brazil for 84 years. He joined the company as a shipping assistant at age 17 and continues to work there because it gives him " purpose, commitment, and routine." Read his story [here](#).
- **Centenarian Siblings.** If you want to live longer, it might help to have centenarian siblings. According to the 1998 study "[Siblings of Centenarians Live Longer](#)," researchers found that people with a centenarian sibling were four times more likely to reach their nineties than those in the same birth cohort who did not have a centenarian sibling. Perhaps this was the case with sisters Rubye Cox, Ruth Branum, and Rose Shloss, who were 110, 104, and 101 years old, respectively, in 2014. That year the siblings, who lived in different states, reunited for a celebration at the elder sister's retirement community after not seeing each other for a decade. The three sisters have since passed away, but in the 2014 *People* article, "[Three Sisters Over 100](#)

[Years Old Share Their Secrets to a Long Life](#), " they shared their formula for longevity – faith to cope with stress, healthy eating, and staying active.

*May we avoid blaming or bias based on our circumstance and continue to be grateful for the gifts of the global community.*

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