

How to Live To a Healthy 90

By Helen Silvis
Of The Skanner News

She was born in the year Warren G Harding was inaugurated, when horse-drawn traffic was still an important mode of transportation and Rudolph Valentino was breaking hearts in The Sheik. That was 1921. On April 18 this year, Mary Alice Parker reached 90 years old. She's healthy, sharp as a tack and still works one or two days a week taking care of a younger woman -- in her 80s -- whose health is poor.

"I help her with her bath and fix her dinner," Ms. Parker says. "But I don't do a lot of cleaning now."

Ms. Parker still lives independently in her home on Northeast 13th Ave., attends her church, Emmanuel Temple, every week and visits friends and family. Watch The Skanner News Video on our website.

Originally from Malone, Texas, Ms. Parker came to Portland in

1946 to join her brother, a shipyard and railroad worker. She stayed for just about 8 weeks before leaving to live in Bakersfield, Calif., where she worked in cafes preparing and serving meals. During that brief visit she says stayed briefly at Bagley Down on the Vancouver side of the Columbia and then in Vanport. While there she worked at the Army barracks. A lifelong teetotaler with a good sense of humor, she remembers going out just once to a jazz club.

"Two of the soldiers bought us drinks," she said. "But I don't drink so I gave it to my girlfriend and switched my drink for a coke. I think those soldiers were waiting for us to get affected by that drink -- but they didn't realize I wasn't drinking."

In 1953, pregnant with her daughter Dee Etta, Ms. Parker returned to Portland to stay. When her children were old enough to go to school at Boise Eliot and Humboldt, she mostly cleaned houses: "day work" she

says.

Ms. Parker has taken care of sick and elderly people in the community and has a reputation as a healer. "People say I have healing hands, but I say, I can't take the credit," she says. "It's God. He just works through me."

As well as having a strong faith, Ms. Parker is an upbeat person who looks forward rather than back. She doesn't let too many things worry her, she says. This doesn't mean her life has been without tragedy. One of her granddaughters was murdered in 1982. Ms. Parker's daughter, Dee Etta Parker, said that the fact that the perpetrators were quickly captured and sent to prison, helped a little. But the loss was very hard on her sister, who died in the last year or so.

What is her secret for living such a long, healthy life?

"Don't smoke," she says. "Don't drink.



Mary Alice Parker

And don't run the streets. And don't let men run over you. Stay away from a lot of men."

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