

Mrs. Roberts Turns 110

How many times in your life do you have the opportunity to attend a party honoring someone's 110th birthday? That was the case for Lola and me, along with other representatives from our corporate offices and Eastern Division. The event was Wednesday, March 12, at Life Care Center of Sparta, where feisty, fun-loving Nyleptha Roberts was the guest of honor. And what a celebration it was!

I had promised Mrs. Roberts a year ago that I would be back for this special occasion. "Well, if I'm still around," she told me then. "With your spunk and active lifestyle, I don't doubt it," I answered her. "Well, mark it down in your daybook, then," she responded, with a mischievous glint in her eyes.

I kept my pledge, and so did she.

Local and state officials gathered to salute Mrs. Roberts. Lavished with presents, she was also the recipient of letters – framed and matted – from the chairman and president of Life Care, and one from President George W. Bush. Tennessee Governor Phil Bredesen, unable to attend, sent her a copy of a proclamation honoring his state's oldest living citizen. Kim Parrish, executive director, and her staff created an environment worthy of such festivities, with an array of impressive food items and punch.

Radiant in an aqua dress and jacket, and her hair exquisitely done, Mrs. Roberts admitted upon questioning that she is often told she is beautiful, even by menfolk. Is she looking for a man? No, she quickly responded. Jesus Christ, she said, is the only man she needs in her life. A coal miner's daughter and then a coal miner's wife, Mrs. Roberts credits her faith in God and the Christian life she has lived for her longevity. But her characteristics may shed some additional light on the number of her years:

- **Her joy in living.** She sees each new day as an adventure to pursue.
- **Her love of people.** Interacting with men, women and children produces pleasure. She wants to be among the first to greet new residents and their families, and helps make them feel at home in the facility.
- **Her humor.** She enjoys a good story or joke, and delights in telling the one about living with four men. "I get up with Charley Horse. I spend the day with Will Power. I have lunch with Arthur Itis, and I go to bed with Ben Gay." When she tells it, she always slaps her hands and laughs, "Now, wasn't that a good one?"
- **Her insistence on keeping busy.** Although at an advanced age, she serves two to three times a week as the facility's librarian, making sure books are put away neatly on the shelves and that the residents return their books on time.

(More)

- **Her entrepreneurial spirit.** She makes and sells crafts in the facility (mostly fish soap).

Next year, Mrs. Roberts turns 111. I have March 12 noted in my daybook.

--Beecher Hunter