

## She's 109 and Counting

On Tuesday of this week, with my wife standing nearby, I made a date with another woman. It's for a year away, and it's a party to celebrate the woman's 110<sup>th</sup> birthday.

The location where this took place: Life Care Center of Sparta. Lola and I were there to celebrate the 109<sup>th</sup> birthday of Nyleptha Roberts, along with the birthday anniversaries of five other individuals in that center who are 100 years old or older.

And what a grand time it was. Kim Parrish, executive director, and her staff really know how to throw a party – complete with balloons, amazing cakes and a lineup of fruits, cheeses and other assorted goodies that had guests streaming by to satisfy their taste buds. They had Herd Sullivan, White County executive; Wallace Austin, president of the White County Chamber of Commerce; Dr. Abhay Kemkar, the facility's medical director; and Katherine Joy, Life Care's regional vice president; all there for special presentations to the honorees. Don Kelly, pastor of First Community Church of Sparta, and Tim Bumbalough, plant manager, added a spiritual touch with prayers on behalf of the residents.

When the ceremony was over, I told Mrs. Roberts that this was certainly a marvelous milestone. "But next year," I said, "Lola and I will be coming back for your 110<sup>th</sup> birthday party, and what a special occasion that will be."

"Well, if I'm still around," she grinned.

"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.

And that is Nyleptha Roberts' personality. She loves a party (especially if it's hers), she's feisty around the facility, she works as a volunteer in the center's library, encouraging people to read and to return their books on time, and she likes to crack jokes. Her favorite one is this:

"They asked me (while she was still at home) don't I get lonesome living by myself. I said, 'No, I live with four guys. 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.'"

Then she slaps her hands and laughs, "Now, wasn't that a good one?"

(more)

Actually, Monday, March 12, was her official birthday. Mrs. Roberts was a coal miner's daughter and then a coal miner's wife. How has she been able to live so long? She credits her faith in God and the Christian life she has lived. "I am thankful to the good Lord for letting me live this long."

Other residents who were honored in the Century Club festivities were Bessie Thomas, born on November 9, 1906; Edna Denton, born on November 24, 1906; Pruna Miller, born on November 23, 1902; Kittie Mooneyham, born on November 24, 1904; and James Scott, born on September 18, 1903.

After the birthday ceremony was over, Mrs. Roberts was taken to the library, where she works, for on-camera interviews with two video crews – one from Life Care and the other from the Fox television channel of Nashville. She was patient and obliging, but did offer this ultimatum: "Hurry up. I've got to get back to my party."

Now, she has a year to get ready for our date. It's in my daybook.

--Beecher Hunter