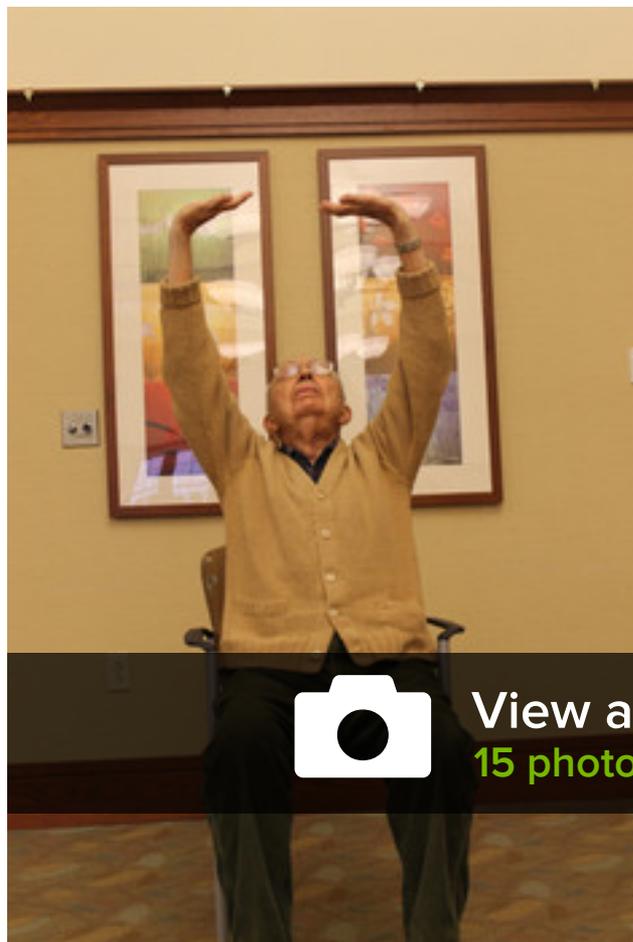


Happy 100th birthday, Rudi!

April 29, 2013

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I have taught [Tai Chi](#) (Taiji) to over 400 people of all demographic groups. Regardless of age, learning has proven to be more difficult than it looks. Rudi Heider of St. Louis is one of the few unique individuals that have the ability to conceptually understand any form quickly and execute the movements. I was amazed by his mental agility and physical coordination. I decided to chat with him on the eve of his 100th birthday to find out his secret of longevity and good health.



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Born to a railroad man and a weaver, Rudi grew up in Massachusetts in a lower middle-income household. His grandmother on his mother's side was a German immigrant. She baby-sat Rudi while his parents were working. Rudi has fond memories of her and still recites the Lutheran prayers she taught him.

Rudi's family never had much money. His mom encouraged him to study textiles for better job prospects. He enrolled at Northeastern University, which required him to alternately work for five weeks and study for five weeks. The University was 66 miles away. After five years of work and study, he graduated in 1936. The economy was still impacted by the Great Depression and in recession. Full-time jobs were hard to find so he typed at least 50 application letters to graduate schools around the nation. Luckily, he was accepted by [Purdue University](#), in Indiana, with a partial scholarship in chemical engineering. He joyfully told me that once he saved up enough money he got a second-hand bicycle and rode it around the campus for his busy study and work life.

After he got his PhD degree, his first job was with Monsanto at Dayton, Ohio and that was where he met his wife Loraine. He recalled that they both attended a young people's group in the church but they were older than most people. They were naturally attracted to each other. They married in 1942 and had a son the following year. Once they found out that she had the inherited disease of Retinitis Pigmentosa, they decided to have just one child. Later, Monsanto relocated Rudi and his family to its headquarters in St. Louis, Missouri. Rudi did well and was promoted to management. Years later, due to his wife's poor vision, Rudi decided not to take another opportunity in a different city. Rudi retired from Monsanto and started teaching chemistry at [Meramec St. Louis Community College](#) until his full retirement at age 70. He remembered affectionately that he and his wife spent five years traveling in

Mexico and sometimes they would stay five months at a single location. They learned Spanish together; he said that Loraine was so smart and picked it up in no time. He did all the shopping and cooking. “It was best time in our marriage,” cherished Rudi. Loraine did not become totally blind until she was 80. In the last year of her life, Loraine was too sick to be cared for at home. Afterwards, Rudi also moved to the [Friendship Village](#), a nice retirement home with great facilities for seniors ten years ago.

Both Rudi’s parents lived relatively long lives. His mother was 92 and his father died in his mid 80’s. When asked whether he exercised all his life, Rudi said that he never had an exercise routine before he moved to the senior home. But he kept active throughout his life. Now he takes two exercise classes each week. Besides Tai Chi/[Qigong](#), he takes a stretching class. Outside of classes, he exercises for one hour each day, doing a combination of Tai Chi, Qigong, walking and weight lifting. Rudi is well read and appreciates Eastern philosophies. He said that Tai Chi’s mind-body approach is appealing to him.

He lives a disciplined life, getting up at 5:30 a.m. and going to bed around 9:30 p.m. Rudi enjoys cooking and prepares his own breakfast and lunch. He is very health conscious. He makes his own cereal by cooking a pot of brown rice and adding frozen fruits, milk and cinnamon the next day. There are no additives and is economical. He subscribes to the American Journal of Public Health and reads labels of everything he eats – he jokingly said that as a chemist, he is cautious about what he puts in his body. He never smokes, avoids deserts except special occasions, and drinks lightly only at the social gatherings. He does not take any medicine unless it has been marketed for over five years. Currently, he is on a dietary committee at the Friendship Village and promotes a heart-healthy diet that is salt-free and spice-free.

Rudi’s life has not always been smooth. Aside from his wife’s condition, his only granddaughter died from a head-on collision. He thinks some of the seniors should give up driving when their response time has slowed. He gave up driving around age 95 when his eyesight weakened.

Rudi has one pen pal, whom he met on a fishing trip through a common friend over 20 years ago. They have been writing to each other ever since. They first wrote in Spanish via post office, now they write in English via email. He was a professor of nutrition at the Tufts University in Vermont, so you can imagine that they talk a lot about food and nutrition.

He had a big birthday party two years ago. When asked why celebrating his 98th birthday, Rudi said that he wasn’t sure if he would live up to 100. Judging from his current condition, he is still going strong and age is just a number.

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