

Profile: Dr. Walter M. Bortz, II

Age: 78 until 3/20/09--100 on 3/20/2030--everyone invited

Marital Status: Married to Ruth Anne Bortz, 55 years;
4 children, 9 grandchildren

Education: Episcopal Academy 1947;
Williams College B.A. cum laude 1951;
University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine M.D. 1955

Occupation: Physician

Former Job: Medicine was in my umbilical cord blood

Residence: Portola Valley, CA

“Aging is very much a self-fulfilling prophecy.”

What does it take to reach 100?

I wrote a major paper in the American Journal Public Health, “*The Determinants of Health*,” which names the four agencies that specify health and longevity.

Like a car they are: 1) design, 2) accidents, 3) maintenance, and 4) aging. They all can be quantified and plugged into a relevant, personal equation.

First, although heredity clearly matters, it turns out that its contribution to 100 healthy years is roughly 15%. Conclusion: It’s not the cards which you are dealt that matters but how you play the hand.

Second—accidents—those things that happen which come out of the blue and do not primarily involve behavior such as infections, wars, famine and malignancy. Importantly, it is the “accident” conditions which gave rise to the “medical industrial complex” which disserves us today.

Third—maintenance—this is where the action is. Like a car, maintenance implies the right amount of good fuel and how hard you run the engine, not too much “stress,” but hard enough. Most of us “idle too much.”

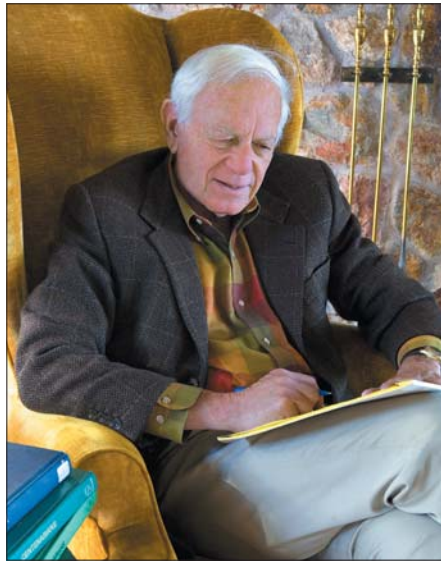
And fourth—aging. The truth is that aging has been held responsible for too much mischief. If we are lucky enough to choose good grandparents, avoid accidents, maintain ourselves with good food and physical activity, then 100 healthy years is our birthright.

And like the Serenity Prayer instructs: “change what you can, accept what you can’t, but know the difference.” The alpha and omega of life, the genes and aging, are immutable but the accidents and maintenance are our responsibility to assure.

What are the secrets?

In my book “*Dare to be 100*,” I provided 99 steps to 100, divided into D, diet, A attitude, R renewal, and E, exercise. When I was on the Today show with the book, Bryant Gumpel, commented, “I don’t have time to go over all these steps. Which is the most important?”

I answered step 19, Belief. If you commit to 100 healthy years, we now have enough knowledge to assure the prediction. Aging is very much a self-fulfilling prophecy.



Dr. Bortz working on his latest book

Challenges for older adults?

In my view, the central task is remaining “necessary.” Nature abhors waste and idleness. This implies continuing to be engaged in the many diverse tasks which life presents. As we age, are we to be a resource or a liability? The answer to this key question depends solely on the person. We never outlive this commandment.

What have you been up to?

Nearly eight decades of life’s constant tutoring has taught many lessons—the most important probably being the extent of the human potential which in

William James’s view far exceeds our achievement. The study of human aging opens answers that are not apparent from the usual snapshot sequence of pursuing the “hows” of life. Time yields to the “why” answers which brings much gratification.

Why is your new book called *Next Medicine*?

I’m a physician embedded in a rich family tradition of physicians and I am totally embarrassed by the state of my “noblest” profession.

It has fallen sternly from grace. My magnus opus book, rather than a lament, shows a redemptive pathway. The text cites three central strategies, 1) replace disease as medicine’s primary mission with health,

2) replace the profession with the person as the primary agent of well being, and 3) change financial incentives to being well instead of being sick.

You have run 38 marathons. Is it getting harder?

Amazingly, training and running my 38th consecutive annual marathon in New York on November 2 was much easier than my first in Boston in 1971. My recovery is easier. The training runs are more assured, and I know that I will not die at mile 20.

Who inspires you?

I am privileged to have been close to great people. Norman Cousins’ friendship was a treasure house of inspiration. John Gardner was simply the noblest person whom I have known. I am inspired by Barack’s potential. Yes. We can. Father Edward has been my constant compass point.

For more information about Dr. Bortz, visit www.walterbortz.com or email DrWBortz@aol.com.