

Busy As a Bee

99 Year Old Carves Animals, Studies Spanish

By Derryl H. Molina, Esq.



I just met someone who is the epitome of staying active—Jack Thompson, 99. He stays active by taking Spanish lessons, reading books to broaden his knowledge, carving animals from scraps of wood to give away and delight the younger generations and driving his car.

I went to interview Jack at his Spanish class at the Saratoga Senior Center in Saratoga, CA. He had driven his car to class as he does every week. “I keep my car in good condition and try not to be a problem in traffic so I see no reason to stop driving.”

He used to drive trucks for the State of California. “I may have driven a half a million miles in my lifetime.”

Jack has a daily routine he follows religiously: walking for exercise, sleeping well and eating nutritiously. At his age, he worries about falling but walks carefully. He and his wife used to walk in the woods when he lived in Florida but when working for the State of

California and having to sit behind a desk, he needed a hobby—so he took up wood carving.

“I read a Mercury News story about a man named Marshall Frack in Willow Glen who had a studio that housed all the carvings he made.” Mrs. Frack commissioned Jack to carve a giraffe for one of their customers since the Fracks carved mostly people.

“I do mostly animals,” explains Jack. “I carve the world as I see it. Most people don’t do animals so much.” He gives away 90% of what he carves, exhibits at fairs and sells a few.

Jack brought some of his carvings for me to see. He had a bear he finished in 1996, a turtle dated 1994, a wild boar from 1999 and a puma in 2001. He also had a number of small carvings made in 2015—a dog, an elephant and an otter.

Jack served in the U.S. Army Corps because the Air Force didn’t exist before World War II, working as a CW (Continuous Wave) operator sending

Morse Code messages about airplane flights and their passengers. After the Pearl Harbor attack on December 7, 1941, which happened to be his birthday, Jack was sent to Australia to fight against the Japanese.

His most memorable experience was flying a B-17 in one of the first formations to be used during the Battle of Coral Sea. “A Japanese O plane came up and scared us to death. No shots were fired. Seems like the Japanese pilot was just showing off.” An “O” plane is a Mitsubishi A6M Zero-Sen Navy Type Zero.

After the war, he and his wife Hazel moved to Sacramento getting a job with the State of California as a radio/telephone technician where he remained until retiring in 1962.

Jack is a self-taught man. “I find joy in reading, especially technical manuals trying to figure out how radios and transmitters work. Things are so different today.” His Spanish teacher revealed that Jack is constantly bringing new Spanish books to class.

When asked why study Spanish, Jack says he learned the International Code as a young man which is essentially another language. He decided to take up Spanish to build on what he learned in high school and to fill in the hours since he wife passed away.

“I enjoy what I’m learning. I handle my life without aggression and like to make replicas of the world around me.”

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