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JIM: Early to bed, early to rise, make someone healthy, wealthy and wise. Nobody understands the truth of that statement better than a centenarian. Joining Real Wealth this week is Steve Franklin, who is an author, educator, speaker, business man, and centenarian want-to-be who has interviewed hundreds of centenarians to tap into their wisdom and their secrets of longevity. For the past several years he has visited, videotaped, interviewed, dying, danced, and laughed a lot; cried a little, and even exercised with centenarians all across America to capture the secrets and share their secrets and love for a long and abundant life, so to share a little bit of what he’s learned I want to welcome Steve Franklin. Welcome Steve.

0:48

STEVE: Thank you Jim. Great to be here.

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JIM: I’ve been so looking forward to having you back. I enjoyed having you on the last time you were here and I have to share with you there’s one story that just stuck out to me. I may not even have it right anymore, but I know you’ve gone around the country talking to centenarians trying to find the secrets of their wisdom for being on this earth for over 100 years and one that I’ll never forget. I think you said she was the nation’s first female pediatrician, that you had interviewed her, she had retired at 102 or 103 and you interviewed her, she was like 107 or something like that. My first reaction was I mean she’s around sick kids all the time and I remember my grandparents anytime I’d have even the sniffles they didn’t want to be around me because they’d catch a cold if I even looked at them, and I guess after pausing and after having you talk about that story I figured her immune system had to be on steroids dealing with sick kids all the time. That was probably part of the reason why she was able to stay healthy for so long.

1:50

STEVE: Yeah that was Dr. Leila Denmark and you are close on the numbers. She was 103; she was a practicing pediatrician at 103 when she retired. She lived to be 114. I actually interviewed her twice; once when she was 110 and later when she was right at 114, so she was amazing.

2:03

JIM: That is just amazing. How many centenarians have you interviewed now?

2:08

STEVE: We videotaped and interviewed about 170 and when you add up the telephone interviews and then the surveys that we did, we’ve had over 500 centenarians that we’ve gotten data from and information, so it’s just a rich, rich, rich resource space of learning from and hearing from these magnificent people and their wisdom on money, working, and life. Those are the three categories that I was interested in. They lived through the Great Depression, so tell us what you learned about money and managing finances. They’ve worked, many of them like you say in their 90s and 100s, so tell us about work, give us some values about work and then just life in general; relationships, family, whatever. See \_\_\_\_\_ getting there. Those are the three categories we looked at, just a wealth of fun and anecdotal, not heavy detailed analytical research, but what I call just anecdotal research that I think is very helpful to all of us.

2:57

JIM: And you know one of the things you talk about is some of these folks are still working in their 90s. You talked about this doctor that worked into her 100s and I sometimes am struggling and I deal with a lot of these baby boomers and they want to retire at 55 or 60 and you look at retirement it really is a new phenomenon. Probably in the lifetime of these people you’re interviewing people didn’t even think about retiring 100 years ago. They worked until they couldn’t anymore and today you find people want to retire early, so what did you learn about money and finances? What are some of the interesting things that you learned as you talked to some of these centenarians?

3:34

STEVE: Again, because remember of course we had 2008 and we thought that was the worst recession since the Great Depression, but these people lived through the really Great Depression and you know, Jim, if you look at the numbers of what happened in the Great Depression versus what happened in 2008, 2008 was serious certainly but it was nowhere near the percentage of the devastation that the Great Depression had, so one of the first things of course was they just said, hey look stay out of debt, if you’re in debt get out of debt. Very few of them ever got into debt with anything except of course a mortgage. A number of them did have a mortgage but they never, never carried credit card debt. Most of them, over 80%, paid cash for cars. They just couldn’t stand the thought of owing money and if you think about that for a minute and you don’t have that stress of debt, now that didn’t mean that they were without money from time to time, a lot of them were without money from time to time, but they weren’t in debt. There’s a difference between broke and being in debt. I tell everybody if you think about that just psychologically, I think that’s one of the one reasons, the lack of stress, which most of them there are stress masters. They’ve just learned how to manage it, so that was a big one, stay out of debt, don’t get in debt, don’t get in a rear head. Debt is just a bad, bad, bad thing.

4:40

JIM: As you’re talking about that, I’ve seen the stats, the high divorce rate that we have. The number one reason for divorce that I’ve seen in several studies was financial, so if you’ve got the stress of the debt and then it leads to divorce, well you’ve got a double whammy of stress and I’m sure that has an impact on a person’s health.

4:58

STEVE: It’s huge; it’s huge. Let me tell you six quick, and these are rapid fire questions I would ask them. Did you ever go into debt to buy clothing or jewelry? No. Did you ever go into debt to buy a TV, radio, boom box, or stereo system? No. Did you ever go into debt to take a vacation or luxury trip? No. Did you ever go into debt to buy an automobile? Almost 100% said no. Did you ever go into debt to buy food or eat out at restaurants? All 100% said no. Did you ever go into debt to buy furniture for your home? No. Those are just things that we have just become common place to put things on credit, pay over time, pay that 18% interest or whatever it is. They just never even imagined doing that and didn’t do it.

5:31

JIM: That’s probably the key nugget right there because I look at it, you deserve a break today, you need it right now, and don’t worry about paying for it for three years. I mean we’ve been preconditioned and when you listen to those things that you just talked about, it’s almost like alien concepts today.

5:48

STEVE: Oh yeah, and you know one of the things that I ask them, Jim, was I said not necessarily what you did but if you had your life to live over again what advice would you give us about saving. I said what percentage of your gross income do you think a person should save. What percentage of your gross income and the most frequent, and the minimum by the way percentage that I ever got was 10%. I never got anything that was less than 10%, but we had almost a third of them say if I had to live my life over again, and some of them did this, I would save 20% to 30%. We had a handful of them that said you should save half of every penny you make and a couple of them did. I said you’re kidding and they said no, out of everything I made I saved half. Over and over, Jim, I heard from them and they said look, Steve, it’s not what you make it’s what you spend. It’s determining that lifestyle standard that you’re going to set that will depend on the amount that you have to live on or choose to live on, so they were big, big, big savers. As you know of course the national savings rate in America today is like about I think what 4% or 5% and we’re not even half way to the absolute minimum that every centenarian said we should be saving 10% gross income, not even half way there of what they suggested. Looking back over their life, looking back over a century of all the ups and downs you can imagine, they said minimum save 10% of your gross income.

6:58

JIM: You know the big thing that drove me to make this program to educate people was when we tipped into the negative savings rate just before the crash of 2007/2008, people were spending more than they were making and I look at when we had that correction it was almost the best thing that could have happened because now at least people aren’t spending more than they’re making and we actually have a positive savings rate, albeit we still need to do more, but boy we sure can learn a lot more from some of those folks. Let’s transition to work then. You’ve got those people. Did they all take early retirement age 50 because they saved all this money up or what happened?

7:33

STEVE: No way. One of my funny stories of Walter Bruning, the world’s oldest man at the time lived to be 114, and Walter was just great. I said Walter where did you work. He said I worked on the railroads, I worked 50 years on the railroads and they made me retire at 65. I was so angry because I loved my work, which is by the way one of the key points about work I’ll mention in a moment. He said by gosh I can’t work so I got a job here in Great Falls, Montana and I worked for various organizations and companies as an accountant and bookkeeping and whatever, but he said when I turned 99 I decided that I needed to quit doing two things. I said what’s that. He said I need to quit working at 99 but also I need to quit smoking. I said you smoked until you were 99 and he said yeah but I think quitting early has contributed to my longevity. Just about every one of them, Jim, if they had to retire or retired from their, let’s just call it income producing work, they all have gotten, just about all; not 100% but just about all, have gotten involved in some kind of productive work, of course a lot of volunteer work. Others worked for pay. Walmart greeters to working for non-profit organizations to you name it. I had a couple of guys that were tutoring students in junior colleges at 101, lawyers at 102 and 103, so this idea that you can’t be productive and have a meaningful job if you will, or career beyond 65 or 70 is crazy. In fact, you know you’ve heard me say before I am so against a mandatory retirement. I think that’s just stupid for most companies, but I understand they want to make room for the younger generation in some cases so I guess I can buy that. You know you find another place for them. I mean the experience there is just unbelievable. One of the things is work as long as you can. They would all say find something you love to do, give it all you’ve got and then work as long as you can.

9:18

JIM: I think that’s a key because being in retirement planning myself I’m always telling clients don’t retire from your job; you need to figure out what you’re retiring to and if you don’t have something to do and something that gets you to get up each morning, I see a lot of people suffering from depression and other problems because they don’t have a reason to get up every morning, which you just alluded to there. I think it is a big secret whether you’re working for pay or volunteering or something that can help drive you. I think all of us need to have purpose in life and when you lose that purpose everything else can kind of falls apart with it.

9:53

STEVE: Absolutely. One of my friends says take the word retire and just replace the “T” with an “H” and rehire. You’ve got to retire so you can decide that whatever you’re doing and then rehire is something else.

10:05

JIM: You bet. Hey we’re going to take a short break and when we come back let’s talk about some of the other wisdom that you heard about work and then talk a little bit about the secrets that were shared with you about living to 100 plus, so please stay tuned.

10:17 BREAK

10:47

JIM: Welcome back as we continue to visit with Steve Franklin, who has literally interviewed 100s of centenarians and has compiled a lot of wisdom from all these centenarians. Steve, you’ve got a website that people can go to to maybe see some of the videos of the interviews and some other resources. What is that website?

11:06

STEVE: Yes, thanks Jim. It’s just the number 100wisdom.com. Please go there and take a look. We’ve got a lot of clipits. We’re going to add a lot more this coming year, just a lot of neat stuff. You hear me talk here, which I love talking about it as you can tell but it’s a whole lot more fun to watch the centenarians themselves and to see the little clipits we’ve got of various questions we’ve asked them and some of them telling a little bit about their stories. Please go to 100wisdom.com and a lot of fun stuff there.

11:32

JIM: Yeah and we’ll make sure to have a link to your book as well so you can go to the website here under resources and we’ll be able to find Steve’s book and that book is “Celebrate 100: Centenarians Secret to Success and Business and Life”. When was that book first released Steve?

11:48

STEVE: It came out in 2014. In fact, last year it was the number six Amazon business book in the country and the number nine in history and biography books, so I was kind of proud of that. That is just awesome. I did a lot of TV stuff early last year and so that really pumped it up, along with radio programs like yours that really helped the book do really well.

12:06

JIM: That’s fantastic because it’s been too long. The last time we had you on you were just starting to put together the book. I know you did this as a passion project and I think I remember you sharing that a lot of people said that you should put a book together on this and you were just getting started with that process, so congratulations.

12:24

STEVE: Oh thanks. I really didn’t plan on doing it but I did and now I’m glad I’ve got it because I’ve got a lot of the, let’s just call it the cliff notes version of all the stuff that we learned in the book. It was a fun book to put together. You talked about a few more things about work. Just rather than – let me just read you some actual quotes. I think the audience will enjoy this. Here is Anita Streeter. She said working is good for your soul as well as your wallet. It’s good to stay busy. He’s Bill Moore, 100, apply yourselves and do an honest job that is of good quality. Unless you take pride in your work you cannot enjoy it. Money is not the most important element in work. Elyse Collier said be on time. Do not miss work unless you have to. Do an honest day’s work for your employer. Another quote from Floyd Ellison, choose the type of work you are capable of that is consistent with your physical abilities, talents, and mental abilities. Choose the kind of work that you think you would enjoy, indoor versus outdoor with people or with machines, do the best you can and work hard, give your employer their money’s worth, Virginia Schuler, and on and on and on, just these people said find something you love to do, pour your heart into it and you’ll never work a day in your life.

13:24

JIM: That’s just awesome. I mean it really is. I mean the money is the side effect really and money makes the world go round, but man if you can enjoy what you’re doing, every day is a holiday.

13:34

STEVE: You know one of the questions I asked, Jim, I asked them; I said if you had your life to live over again, would you have done a different kind of work. I think it was like 83% said no, I loved what I did, I would do the exact same thing again. We had 17% that said yeah I maybe would have tried something different, done something different, but over 80% said no I actually love what I did. I found something that I love to do and I did it and most of them did it for a long time.

13:56

JIM: Well if you think about it if someone is doing something they just can’t stand to do, I mean that’s a stressor again, so here are these people that lived a long time, they eliminated the stress by not overspending, by doing something they enjoyed to do each day and keeping purposeful in their lives. I mean it seems pretty simple and common sense, but many of us don’t really take that to heart and sometimes we allow ourselves to go the wrong path.

14:21

STEVE: That’s right; that’s right. A major, major I think contributor to stress is work you don’t enjoy.

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JIM: Let’s talk about some of the secrets that they shared for living to 100 plus.

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STEVE: Those were fun. Of course the first question I always asked was did you ever think you’d live to be 100 and most of them said, all but I think three out of all 500 plus people, said they didn’t think they’d live to be 100. The second question would be what’s the greatest thing about being 100 and I share some of those in the book and they were all over the board as you can imagine, but the third question I would always ask was what’s your secret to being 100, and of course a lot of them would initially say well I don’t really know and I would say well just give it a shot, what do you think, and I had no conceived category of answers if you will, Jim. I just wide open, open-ended question, but as we got all the answers, both in the interviews, the videotaped interviews, the phone interviews, and then the actual surveys, as we got all the answers to that question we kind of categorized them into the top six categories, and by far the number one category was attitude. We called it attitude, just the way they looked at life and I may have told you on the program when we were together last time I said one lady said, Steve, there are two kinds of people in life. She said that there are people that wake up in the morning and say good morning God and there’s people that wake up in the morning and say good God it’s morning. The same words, it’s just how you approach it and so attitude was a really big one. They just had a positive attitude about life, a gratitude for life, they had no entitlement mentality. They had just learned to skirt both the big and small problems. I told them they were masters of the serenity prayer. A couple of quotes I think stress will kill you. Elsie Ridge, have peace of mind, lived to be 106, Elsa Hoffman, if worrying isn’t helping the situation it means you can’t do anything about it; forget about it because worry only brings lines to your face. They just had a great, healthy attitude about life. I called it the good morning God rather than good God morning attitude about life. The majority of the answers fell into that category of just attitude, which I say look it helps if you have good genes but if you have good genes and a bad attitude you’re probably not going to live that long. If you have good genes and a great attitude you got a good shot at it and a lot of these people, Jim, as you may recall people say they’ve got to have good genes. At least half of the centenarians I interviewed, they would way outlive any of their siblings, any of their parents, a lot of cases one of the sad things is they outlive their children. This idea that you got to have long genes in your family to live is not so. I just don’t buy that. I can’t prove it, but I just don’t believe it. The second category was healthy eating, now listen to this. Healthy eating, not dieting, eating, and if you think about it they were organic before organic was cool. I mean their first 50 years of eating was with non-processed foods. There weren’t any processed foods their first 50 or 60 years of life, so man they got the foundation built pretty, pretty strong. The two questions I asked everybody, have you ever been on a controlled diet, no. Have you ever been on a controlled exercise program, no. What do you eat, whatever I want. And they all did it in moderation. They just didn’t binge on anything and they just had a good healthy balance. None of them were big on exercise other than walking. Number one exercise of centenarians is walking. They just walked everywhere; they just walked everywhere.

17:32

JIM: I think of my grandfather and he died a couple weeks shy of his 99th birthday and he did a little bit of exercise, mostly walking and he always was cognizant of being active and one thing that I always got a kick out of, my grandparents here they were both around 90 years old when the cholesterol thing came out and here they loved their cheeses, they loved their dairy products and all that and they stopped eating the stuff and I said to them, I said grandma and grandpa what are you worried about and they’re like well it’s bad for our cholesterol and I said you’re already 10 years past your life expectancy, enjoy life a little bit you know. I think that might have taken some years off their life when they got stressed about their cholesterol because up until that time they didn’t know any better.

18:12

STEVE: You know wouldn’t that be an interested study. It may very well be true. My mom is 93, her daddy lived to be 93 and he ate bacon every day of his life, he ate butter and bread every day of his life. Again, you say well he just had good genes, well maybe so but he didn’t worry and they never thought about it or heard about cholesterol, but you’re right. I think you know if you’re 95 or 96 why would you want to even worry about it. The third category on secrets that they would come up with was faith in God or a higher power was very prevalent among the majority of our centenarians, mostly Judeo-Christian backgrounds, but a lot of them had a very, very strong faith. I interviewed a wonderful priest out of the monastery out here in communist Georgia and he said Ora et Labora, pray and work until death do me part. He loved it. And then fourth you know was the exercise and activity, but again no big control what we would call binge exercise. Like I say, most of them they just love to just walk, be active, no big major hard killing it exercise programs, so just the basics. I tell everybody this is not difficult stuff to do, but they just did it. The fifth secret is I call it clean living; stay out of trouble that’s all, clean living, no alcohol, no tobacco, plenty of sex, that was Essie’s smile at 101. I said there’s probably another whole book possibility with those thoughts you know. Pauline Copeland said hard work, clean living, no drinking or smoking or late hours and faith in my heavenly father, I suppose a good heritage, clean living, no smoking, a little drinking and eating plenty of chocolate, so we had both sides of the spectrum there. A lit bit of drink, a little bit of chocolate, a little bit of water, a little bit of whatever, but again I just think a healthy balance. I mean these people, we talked about work/life balance today, these people had it. They’ve had it for decades.

19:48

JIM: I’m going to wrap up. This has been awesome. I read somewhere that your goal is to be 120 and healthy and that you’re about half way there and…

19:57

STEVE: A little over. I just turned 68 a couple weeks ago.

19:58

JIM: Oh my gosh. Let me just ask you this. From all the research you did, what was the one thing that you would say had the biggest impact on how you live your life? Was there one thing or are there a lot of areas that you might have made adjustments in?

20:09

STEVE: Yeah, attitude; attitude. Wake up each day, grateful to God for the day, don’t blame anybody else for your problems, don’t have an entitlement mindset, be grateful, take advantage of every second, every breath that you breathe, be one of those good morning God people rather than good God morning people. All the other stuff is important, but I really believe that’s the number one for me, and so I really try to practice that.

20:31

JIM: Well Steve this has been great. I really appreciate you joining us again and I look forward to maybe getting you back on again in the near future.

20:37

STEVE: Jim, a great honor. Thank you so much. Live long; live strong.

20:41

JIM: Awesome. Thank you. Thanks for joining us this week and tune in again next week as we explore another phase of the Real Wealth process, and remember if anything you heard in today’s show you’d like to get more information about, contact your Real Wealth advisor. Also, if you feel that any of this information would be helpful to a friend of family member, just click the forward to a friend button.