

The Secret to Longevity

Several years ago, I noticed that nearly every symphony orchestra conductor seemed to have guzzled from the Fountain of Youth. Nearly without exception, they lived well into their 80s and 90s.

Lately, I found that the same held true for the men who direct movies. Such world-famous directors as George Cukor, Alfred Hitchcock, Charlie Chaplin, Howard Hawks, Robert Altman, Sam Fuller, Luis Bunuel, Richard Brooks, Sax Rohmer, David Butler, King Vidor, Henry Hathaway, Jean Renoir, David Lean, Michael Powell, Abe Polonsky, George Sidney, Akira Kurosawa and Laurence Olivier, all made it well into their 80s; and Mel Brooks, 84; Alain Resnais, 88; Bryan Forbes, 84; Stanley Donen, 86; and Carl Reiner, 88; are still with us.

Furthermore, Frank Capra and Elia Kazan each made it to 94, while Jules Dassin and Billy Wilder didn't cash in their chips until they hit 96. Finally, Leni Riefenstahl, Hitler's favorite director, unfortunately hung around to 101.

Another vocation that someone seeking longevity should consider is being a member of the House or Senate. Not all of them reach the century mark as Strom Thurmond did, but it's such a great life that none of them who can still breathe and have even the slightest chance of winning their next election, ever give a thought to retiring. Robert Byrd, who's 93 and hasn't said a coherent thing since asking for ketchup with his fries in the Senate dining room in 1974, is just getting his second wind.

Finally, if I were, God forbid, a high school counselor urging youngsters to seek a career promising longevity, I would have them consider becoming some country's dictator. While there are certain risks involved that can result in shorter life expectancies than normal, Hitler, 56, Mussolini, 62 and Tojo,

64, were clearly exceptions to the rule.

Idi Amin, in spite of an unhealthy diet that allegedly included human beings, made it to 78, Kim Il-Sung to 82 and Mao tse-tung to 83. In the meantime, Cuba's Castro brothers, Fidel and Raul, along with Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe, are unfortunately still alive and kicking at 84, 79 and 86, respectively.

The moral of all this is that if you have your heart set on making it to old age, whether you choose to be a conductor, a director, a senator or a dictator, the most important thing is that you spend your life bossing other people around.

Which, come to think of it, might also help to explain why wives generally outlive their husbands.