

# At 115, oldest living American stays lively and active

Jeralean Talley, who at 115 is believed to be the oldest person in the U.S., was honored with a service at New Jerusalem Missionary Baptist Church in Inkster, Mich., on Sunday, May 25, 2014. Detroit Free Press

Robin Erb, Detroit Free Press 3:02 p.m. EDT May 26, 2014



(Photo: Jarrad Henderson, Detroit Free Press)

INKSTER, Mich. —The secret to long life? The key to happiness?

At 115 years old — believed to be the oldest person in the U.S. (<http://www.freep.com/article/20140526/NEWS06/305260021/oldest-person-in-America-church-birthday-celebration>) — Jeralean Talley is wise enough to know that perhaps no one can know for sure.

Live. Love. Know God.

Trust His will.

It is a lifelong conversation with the Good Lord that brought her to this place, she said as church service got under way Sunday at New Jerusalem Missionary Baptist Church in Inkster, Mich. — a service, in part, to honor her.

"I asked Him, I said, 'You know my will and this is your will.' ... And so far my prayers have been answered and I'm satisfied," said the Inkster resident.

**STORY:** [Oldest living American turns 115 \(/story/news/nation/2014/05/23/oldest-living-american-turns-115/9470209/\)](/story/news/nation/2014/05/23/oldest-living-american-turns-115/9470209/)

**MORE:** [Oldest living American celebrates 114th birthday \(/story/news/2013/05/23/oldest-living-american-celebrates-114th-birthday/2354909/\)](/story/news/2013/05/23/oldest-living-american-celebrates-114th-birthday/2354909/)

Outside the church office where she sat, well-wishers signed cards and her daughter, 76-year-old Thelma Holloway, and family greeted loved ones, many who carried in flowers for her.

She stood.

Her family coaxed the supra-centenarian toward the hallway where a packed sanctuary awaited, Talley and bypassed a chair elevator at the bottom of the steps.



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"She was, 'I'm not waiting for that thing,' and she just went," said Christonna Campbell, a family friend. ([http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2014/06/10/114-year-old-woman-dies/](/story/news/nation/2014/06/10/114-year-old-woman-dies/))



Talley ran a farm with her husband, Alfred, in Inkster when it was a patchwork of fields and neighbors had cows and chickens and ducks, Robinson said, as a piece of birthday cake was slipped in front of him.

She had caught him from a group of boys trying to steal apples from the Talleys' trees.

"She started whooping my butt," Robinson said, laughing. "And then she pulled up my ear and dragged me across the muddy field to my mom, and my mom started whooping my butt, too," he said.

It wasn't an act of anger or selfishness, he said.

It was a life lesson, pure and simple.

In fact, the Talleys hired Robinson a few years later to take care of their cows, Penny and Bossy. They paid him \$3 a week — a whopping sum in those days, Robinson, an artist, recalled.

A few years ago, Robinson realized just how old his family friend was, and he stopped by to visit, to see if she was taking it easy — having come this far. To thank her.

"She was 108 back then. She was outside, she had her dark glasses and she was bent down pulling weeds out of her flower garden. They were beautiful — tulips, I think," he said.

"Maybe that's what kept her going. She loves doing that, and she kept on doing it," he said.

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