

The Secrets of Long Life and Anti-Aging: The Passing of Emma Morano at 117 Years Old... How did She do it?

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The novelist Anthony Powell spoke of old age as penalisation for a crime one had not committed. Obviously, not being biblically inclined in that sense, the antics of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden were discounted.

Through the histories on the subject of aging, mythologies have accumulated as eager moss crossing moist rock. These have assumed something of a pop status, with prime ministers showering the long-aged character with certificates and awards, deeming old age a matter of state-wide celebration. Simple facts of nature and biology, this goes to show, can be moralised and sanctified.

The suggestion from the late Emma Morano, who recently passed at a venerable 117 years, being, supposedly, the only confirmed and recorded centurion remaining from 1899, was one of humble egg consumption. The diet was simple, though eventually, losing one's teeth helped to move one away from more complex solids.

Morano's death caused the usual springs to come into play: diet was discussed; forms of lifestyle were considered; anti-aging mechanisms were poured over and devoured. The modern class of wizardry – nutritionists – were eager to make their views felt. The life-style blogosphere lit up with starry-eyed wonder.

With each year of her birthday for a good stretch, Morano would be asked the same questions by harrying journalists and researchers who had converted her into an object of research and good copy. These would be relayed with bovine loyalty to consumers eager to clean out their fridges and cupboards for the next novel diet.

Even with that regularity, the number of eggs consumed in this lack lustre diet would either change, or be misreported (sometimes three, sometimes two). Last year, *The Independent* noted, after Morano had been declared by the Guinness World Records as the oldest person in the world, that her diet comprised "two eggs a day, and that's it. And cookies. But I do not eat much because I have no teeth."

When consulted about matters of his patient's diet, Dr. Carlo Bava explained that Morano stayed away from meat after being told it was carcinogenic. But nor did Morano exactly excel in the vegetables and fruit department, consuming little of neither.

"When I met her, she ate three eggs per day, two raw in the morning and an omelette at noon, and chicken at dinner." [1]

Raging over the carcinogenic properties of meat remains the staple of food research. Invective is as frequent as scientific rigour. Red meat tends to fare highly in this nutritional demonology, most notably if the targeting organisation is the World Health Organisation.[2] Processed food tends to get a pummeling, with the meat variants placed under the group 1 carcinogen category.

The slotting of various processed foods into the same onerously dangerous category as tobacco raised eyebrows, prompting Sarah Zhang to consider going through WHO categories as “a little dangerous to your mental health” not to mention plain confusing.[3]

To each his or her own dedicated and delicious poison. For the venerable Alabaman Sussanah Mushatt Jones, keeping away from cigarettes and drinks in good puritanical fashion, coupled with daily bacon rations, did the trick. (So much for that canard on bacon being bad for you, despite the suggestion that eating two slices a day could increase your relative risk of colorectal cancer by 18 percent.)

Jones further insisted that, for all the munchies, “love and positive energy” were vital.[4] Like an aged horse race, media outlets were noting how Morano had just inched out Jones by a whisker to take the record.

The cult of old age and longevity remains a fascination for societies who tend not to see death as necessarily inevitable. On the website of “Tomorrowwoman”, a piece from March 2015 ventures into the usual clickbait territory: “Meet Some Of the Oldest Women In The World – You Won’t Believe Their Secret to Living Longer!”[5]

Morano heads that list with monarchical appeal, and the post by a certain Danielle takes aim at the opposition about having that desperate, biological need for a “hot date” or male company. The secret for Morano, then 115 years, was consuming those three eggs on a daily basis “and avoiding men!... According to Morano, living a husband/boyfriend-free life is the secret to living longer.”

Such posts tend to be short on detail, but *Time Magazine* was happy to reveal that Morano had been married, but kicked out her husband after the death of her infant son in 1938.[6] *La Stampa* noted a marriage of considerable turmoil, while the *New York Times* detailed a proud figure who “didn’t want to be dominated by anyone.”[7]

The no-men thesis was also advanced regarding the good health of Jessie Gallan, who also passed the century mark and felt that men are “more trouble than they’re worth”.[8] That scheme of macho and masculine avoidance was also coupled with a diet of porridge, again a matter of routine and diligence.

Naturally, the body of work in such a field suggests more individuality than cookie-cutter predictability. Married couples do also suggest that death can be defied for some time, though this, as with everything else, is a point of conjecture. How little, then, is life susceptible to actual categorisation and the packaging of modern health directives.

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Notes

[1]

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/worlds-oldest-person-secrets-to-a-long-life-italy-emma-more-no-a7390441.html>

[2]

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2015/10/26/hot-dogs-bacon-and-other-processed-meat-s-cause-cancer-world-health-organization-declares/>

[3] <https://www.wired.com/2015/10/who-does-bacon-cause-cancer-sort-of-but-not-really/>

[4]

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/worlds-oldest-person-sussanah-mushatt-jones-dies-age-116-a7027441.html>

[5] <http://www.tomorrowwoman.com/wellness/living-longer/>

[6] <http://time.com/4584886/emma-morano-117-birthday-worlds-oldest-person/>

[7]

<http://www.lastampa.it/2011/11/29/italia/cronache/i-miei-anni-di-storia-d-italia-purnE6hXLpLBAUv5TPxsiN/pagina.html>

[8]

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2912299/Scotland-s-oldest-woman-Jessie-Gallan-reveals-longevity-secrets-including-eating-porridge-avoiding-men.html>

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