

# Living the good life



Photos by Bill Colvard | The News

Paul Cruise is given a high-five by his physician, Dr. Tamas Balogh, as they discuss diet and longevity. Judit Balogh (center) is amused to learn where her husband's sudden love of onions came from.

## Paul Cruise celebrates 100th birthday

By Bill Colvard  
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Living to be a hundred years old is not as unusual as it once was and becoming less so. A child born today has almost a one in three chance of reaching a triple digit age.

But for someone to begin a second century of life at this point in time in good physical health, in solid control of their mental faculties and still living independently doesn't happen very often.

Paul Cruise of Mount Airy joined that elite club of healthy, active centenarians on Sunday, April 19. His church, Victory Baptist, honored him with a surprise party that was attended by 128 people. The following Saturday, an almost equal number of Paul Cruise's family and friends gathered at Pilot Knob Country Club to wish him well as he began his second century.

Cruise is a sprightly gentleman, moving with the ease and grace of a man several decades younger than his 100 years. He gets around without the aid of a walker or even a cane and though he will admit to a touch of arthritis in his foot, it doesn't slow him down much. When a special guest arrived at his birthday party, Cruise not only spotted and recognized him from across the large room, he excused himself, jumped up and more or less sprinted across the room to personally greet his guest.

Paul Cruise still lives in his own home, cooks and cleans for himself and still drives although he has given up night driving. His driver's license expires on his next birthday when he will be 101 and he sees no reason that he won't

be able to get it renewed for another five years.

After just a few minutes of conversation with him, it is clear that Cruise's mind is just as agile as his body. He has a sharp wit and recounts events of the previous week as easily as he can speak of his boyhood. People half his age would be happy to possess his mental agility. He keeps up with politics and has lived long enough to put current events in historical perspective. "Hoover was supposed to be the worst president we ever had and he got us out of debt. We've got one now that has got us back into debt."

Not surprisingly, Cruise is often asked his secret for living such a long, healthy, happy life and he is quick to share what has worked for him. "Work hard, love the Lord and eat onions every day," is his answer.

#### Work hard

Paul Cruise started his life on a family farm in Snake Creek, outside Hillsville, Virginia. He was the sixth of ten children and is the last one still alive. He grew up with his four sisters and five brothers on a family farm where they raised cattle, cabbages and potatoes to sell and had pigs and chickens for the family to eat although they sold the hams. Eggs from the chickens were traded for coffee at the Snake Creek Store. "George Worrell ran the store," recalled Cruise.

The farm work was done without much in the way of equipment. "We set cabbage out with a wooden peg to make a hole in the ground," Cruise explained. The family built, made or bartered for everything they had. "There weren't carpenters around. My dad and brothers built our



Paul Cruise is seated between his daughter Carolyn Paule and her husband Dayle Paule. Standing behind them are Carolyn and Dayle's family, from left, Dillon Paule, Ashley Paule, Michael Paule, Ian Paule and Robin Paule.

house."

Even playing was a lot of work for the children in Cruise's family. He explained that he and his siblings did not have store-bought toys. "We had to make our own." He and his brothers made themselves a wagon and cut down a gum tree to make the wheels. His sisters made a playhouse with bushes. "I had to clear the land for them," Cruise added.

The Cruise children were also adept at making their own fun. There was a time when the boys went down to Snake Creek which was well named, as Cruise remembers. "There were a lot of snakes in it." Cruise and his two oldest brothers gathered up a whole bunch of those snakes, some poisonous, some not, and brought them back home. Their mother was not amused.

Cruise can remember when most of the 20th century conveniences came into his life. His family had no electricity and used oil lamps for light but they had a crank telephone with a party line. Cruise remembers the first time he ever saw a car when an uncle bought one and brought it to Snake Creek. It was in 1924 and Cruise was 9 years old.

Cruise has lots of other memories of his

young life on the farm. His grandmother raised a little tobacco for herself and would smoke it in a clay pipe while sitting by the hearth after supper. He adds with a twinkle in his eye that she did not inhale.

Cruise attended the proverbial one-room school house from first through seventh grade. It was a two-mile walk from the Cruise house. Later, a bigger school was built in Hillsville but, at eight miles away, it was too far to walk.

In 1935 Cruise's daddy died and he moved to Mount Airy to live. Some of his sisters were working here as there were no jobs near their old home. His first job in Mount Airy was delivering groceries for the Willow Street Grocery. He made deliveries by bicycle and learned to drive so that he could make truck deliveries.

Cruise later went to work at Barber's Mill, which he explains was a forerunner of Renfro Corporation, where he was a fixer for 48 years. It was his job to keep the machines in the mill fixed and running. He retired in 1976 but a year later came back to help out his former employers. "People were stealing

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## 100th

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stealing everything," he says. Cruise agreed to stay until they got someone to replace him. He stayed for ten more years, finally retiring for good when he was well in his 70s.

### Love the Lord

Paul Cruise's wife, Lorena Cruise, died almost 15 years ago on the day after their 60th wedding anniversary. She had put up a long fight with Alzheimer's and Paul Cruise had long since taken over the household duties. "I became the chief cook and bottle washer," he says. He explains that he had watched his wife over the years, and his mama before her, as they cooked and took care of their homes and was therefore able to do what needed to be

done. "The Lord has been good to me. He has carried me through," says Paul Cruise of his faith. Cruise is a charter member of Victory Baptist Church on Riverside Drive in Mount Airy where he is a deacon and his late wife sang in the choir. Cruise helped to build the church in 1971 and has been there since the beginning. When his wife Lorena was alive, the two of them did a lot of visiting for the church and picked up children and gave them a ride to church.

It is often said at Victory Baptist that Paul and his wife got more people in church than anyone else. Three of the children that the Cruise's brought to church ultimately became pastors. Paul Cruise is proud of that fact and considers it one of the most important accomplishments of his life. Cruise says, "I like to work in church."

Joey Jessup, current



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**Joey Jessup, pastor of Victory Baptist Church in Mount Airy, gives a big hug to one of his most devout church members.**

pastor of Victory Baptist says of Cruise, "He's a fine gentleman. If he's not there, he's sick. He loves the Lord and loves his church. Paul is always there first."

Phyllis Tolbert, who goes to church with Cruise, remembers going

to all-night gospel singing that they used to have in Madison-Mayodan on Saturday night. "We'd sing all night and then come home and go to church on Sunday morning."

#### **Eat onions every day**

"Paul has been a vegetarian all his life," says his sister-in-law, Mary Jo White. Other family members disagree since he did eat a cheeseburger the day before. When it's all sorted out, Cruise is not a vegetarian by philosophy but by habit. He does eat meat. He just doesn't care for it and doesn't eat it often. Cruise says, "When I was coming up, we raised our own pigs and cattle but they were mostly for sale." Most of the food on the table when Cruise was growing up had been grown in the family garden and that's what he likes to this day, plates of cabbage or potatoes and green beans.

Cruise's daughter, Carolyn Paule, recalls when she was young and her mother made dinners with meat, her father would cut up the meat

and move it around the plate while eating the vegetables and pretending to eat the meat so as not to hurt his wife's feelings.

Cruise also has strong feelings about milk. As a boy, his family had cows and he grew up drinking milk. He only drinks whole milk and does not care for low-fat or skim milk. As he puts it, "water should come out of a spigot. Not out of a cow."

Dr. Tamas Balogh has been Cruise's doctor for about 15 years. They met when Cruise was in the hospital with a respiratory problem. Dr. Balogh realized at a followup visit in his office that "the hospital doctors put him on everything under the sun and then discharged him on those meds."

The doctor asked Cruise, "Do you have bad lungs? Do you smoke? Do you have asthma?" Since the answer to all of those questions was no and Cruise had in fact just had a cold, the doctor stopped all of the medicines that Cruise did not need, four or five

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**— Mary Jo White,**  
Paul Cruise's sister-in-law

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in all. He now says, "my main contribution to Paul's health is stopping the unnecessary medicines." Dr. Balogh then adds, "he's my easiest patient."

It is Dr. Balogh's custom to ask all of his patients who are older and in good health, "what do you eat?" Paul Cruise told him that he ate a lot of vegetables, beans, potatoes, cabbage, very little meat and onions every day. Cruise even keeps a jar of peeled and ready to eat onions in his refrigerator which he snacks on whenever he gets hungry through the day.

Judit Balogh, Dr. Balogh's wife, then asked, "Is that what's up with the onions?" "He suddenly took up eating onions," she said of her husband.

Later as he began to eat his lunch, Dr. Balogh proudly showed Cruise his plate of green beans, baked beans and roasted potato wedges and said, "Look Paul, just like you. Beans and taters."

Even genetics are on Paul Cruise's side. He had an aunt who lived to be 104 so he is probably not going anywhere anytime soon. Sister-in-law Mary Jo White says of his enduring youthfulness, "he just makes me mad. He doesn't even have any wrinkles on his face."

Nancy Hayes sums her brother-in-law up best, "He's one in a million."

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# Paul Cruise celebrates his 100th birthday

Paul Cruise of Mount Airy celebrated his 100th birthday on April 19 at Victory Baptist Church followed by a birthday party at Pilot Knob Country Club in Pilot Mountain on April 25 for family and friends.



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After Paul Cruise strolled over to the cake table and waited for his guests to join him, he bent over and quickly blew out his birthday candles in a single breath.



Paul Cruise is still close to his late wife Lorena Cruise's younger sisters; Nancy Hayes, left and Mary Jo White, right. The late Mrs. Cruise's brother, Paul Jones, who lives in Florida, was not able to attend.



Paul Cruise is seated center with great-grandchildren Cameron Cruise and Caleb Cruise to the left and right of him with Colby Cruise standing slightly behind. Grandson Jonathan Cruise and his wife Alaina Cruise stand behind them. Jonathan Cruise is the son of Paul Cruise's only son, Paul Allen Cruise, who was killed in a train accident in Greensboro in 1987.



Paul Cruise is seen here with his grandson Matthew Cruise's family. Seated, from left, are Abby Smitherman, Paul Cruise and Drake Cruise. Standing from left are Cierra Smitherman, Tara Cruise and Matthew Cruise. Matthew Cruise is the son of Paul Cruise's only son, Paul Allen Cruise, who was killed in a train accident in Greensboro in 1987.