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Java Talk
(for January 10 to January 16, 2008)

Every Age Is The Best Age

A Diet of Books

Authors are often asked what they are reading. The endless diet books that seem especially popular during the first month of the year aren't appealing to me, and I am especially dubious of fad food books that purport to increase your longevity. I think we are sustained by ideas more than by food.

However, my collection of clippings about long-lived people is filled with details about their eating habits, rather than their reading ones. For example, although Giovanni Frau, 112, "attributed his longevity to homegrown food—the bread he ate was his bread; the wine, from his vineyard," etc., John McMorran, 113, "smoked cigars [actually, he quit cigars at 97], drank beer and ate greasy food," but also "religiously drank a cup of coffee before every meal" and "was never sick." Kamato Hongo, 116, "who was raised on a farm and counts drinking Japanese rice wine among her favourite things—along with black salt, pork, sashimi, and green tea," was "known throughout Japan for her habit of sleeping for two days and then staying awake for two days," but credited her longevity to "not moping around." Mama Mary Thompson, a "whisky-sipping woman," received a case of Juicy Fruit gum, "her favourite," from the Wrigley Company on her 119th birthday. She never had children, "didn't want to miss anything," and like many centenarians, believed "God let her live so long." I can only guess that these old folks, at least, read parts of *The Guinness Book of Records*.

Anyway, one of several books that I am currently reading is *The Crack in the Teacup: The Life of an Old Woman Steeped in Stories*, which is an autobiography written by the renowned storyteller, Joan Bodger, whose life story is richly seasoned with the books she read, even from childhood. Rather than eating too much, I am filling up on books.

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