

Mother - return when finished

Worthington Man Offers Unique Formula For Meaningful Life - Love Other People

By Susan Wicker

WORTHINGTON — A half-pound of raw beefsteak a day keeps the doctor away.

At least that's been the secret to good health for Emerson Davis, the town caretaker.

The bearded, well-preserved Davis marked his 83rd birthday in February and wants to live for at least 50 more years.

A native of North Adams, he did extensive traveling before settling in Worthington. He attended Mark Hopkins School in his home town but was forced to leave when he was 14 so that he could help support his seven brothers and sisters. He didn't lose his keen interest and natural talent for art and designing.

Determined to further his education, Davis returned to school when he reached his 18th birthday. He embarked on a liberal arts education at Mount Hermon which he says was an extremely broadening experience as it brought him in contact with students from several different countries.

Travel Interest

His friendship with a teacher sparked interest in travel which predominated the next few years of his life. The teacher had a sister who taught at the Pratt Art Institute in New York and she was the authoress of an art book. Nourishing his deep interest in the art field, Davis met the authoress who, in turn, introduced him to a man who was a taxidermist at the Museum of Natural History. Davis and the taxidermist then made a dream become a reality when they headed for Africa.

Again, his love for art made him deviate from following his friend into the jungles in search of game. Davis departed for Europe in anticipation of viewing museums and European art.

He visited Italy and Switzerland and lectured at an art school in France.

Davis says he came to Worthington in "political exile." He was actually a "conscientious objector" which was a rarity at that time. He said he refused to shoot innocent people and sincerely believed that World War I involvement was wrong.

"I believe we were heading toward a mistake and I predicted the last 50 years of history," he says. "I told them to take me and shoot me at sunrise but I wouldn't go to that war."

And he did not go. As a type of psychological protest, the young "radical" began to let his usually long hair grow even longer. He said he always had beautiful hair which was the envy of girls.

Love For Teaching

"I had great love for the teaching of Christ," Davis says, "and had studied the master of painting. I was a naturalist." When the war started, it was psychological that he continued in protest to let his hair grow until it reached his back.

Davis purchased a farm in Worthington and began doing

landscaping work in the town. Shrubs and driveways of numerous houses began to take shape under the careful guidance of his talented hands. He landscaped a hill of terraces with a brook rippling between them. In 1931 he helped establish the Glengrove Wildlife Center.

During the bitter winters that sometimes left the little town virtually buried under heaps of snow, Davis' job was to clear driveways and get the roads shoveled so that mail could be delivered. At one time he was responsible for clearing 15 residences as well as making way for the town stage.

He also worked as caretaker for the former president of a large New York company who maintained a house in Worthington. He has coached basketball games for the town's youth and served as Scout Master.

Buffalo Bill

He worked side by side with Buffalo Bill and became good friends with Annie Oakley. The entertainers were performing in a circus in the area and Davis lent his hand to clearing ground for the horse rings. Also on his list of jobs throughout his life were raising sheep, cows and roosters.

"I've had my hand in just about everything," Davis says.

Many people say that he is one of the happiest persons they have ever met and Davis maintains there is a "secret" to his good nature.

"It's very simple," he says with a twinkle in his blue eyes.

"Love for other people is the secret to happiness. You have to give spiritually, physically and of your talents."

Life has been wonderful, he says, but it is being made too mechanical.

"It's losing its vibrance," he says, "and there is too much emphasis on money. The beauty of a Mayflower and the sweetness of its odor you can't buy. Compared to that, money is nothing."

In addition to the half-pound of raw beefsteak, Davis includes fruit and vegetables in his diet. When he was still a youth, he consumed "cases of grapes" since he was interested in

athletics and wanted to keep in shape.

Never Married

Although he never married, he is one of the few men around who has lived to tell of a half-dozen Leap Year proposals.

Also to his credit is the fact that he has decorated the town hall for more than 150 weddings. Many of the grandmothers in Worthington celebrated their weddings in an atmosphere gaily decorated by Davis. The walls were covered with decorations he made by hand and hung in anticipation of a gala affair for everyone who attended.

He also decorates the hall for other holidays and had large red hearts on the walls for Valentine's Day this year.

He is now responsible for maintenance of the town hall. He cleans the floor, checks on leaks in the roof, moves chairs in for movies and moves them out for basketball games and ballet lessons. Every Sunday he builds an altar in the hall for the Catholic services of the town.

Davis is an avid reader and keeps abreast of what is happening locally, nationally and internationally.

His favorite poet is Bryon Shelley and he is able to freely quote lines from his poems. The work which has made the most impressive on Davis is "Ode To the Clouds."

"The best science ever produced is in that poem," Davis contends. "The transition is nature from moisture in the atmosphere to storms and snow is an ecology lesson in itself." He also enjoys poetry of Longfellow and Whittier.

One of the greatest persons he remembers throughout his life is his mother. He recalls her as never saying a harsh word against anyone. Although she had a large family, much work to do and a husband whose health was not good, she catered to the children of the neighborhood. Davis remembers "open houses" when the house would be jammed from wall to wall with the Davis children and their friends and his mother was in the center of the activity.

Live On Hill

"My ambition in life was to live on a high hill in a big house with lots of children," Davis says. "And that's one thing I got."

The town hall in which he lives is high on a hill and children from Worthington are always attending functions in the building.

Davis says he is also a philosopher.

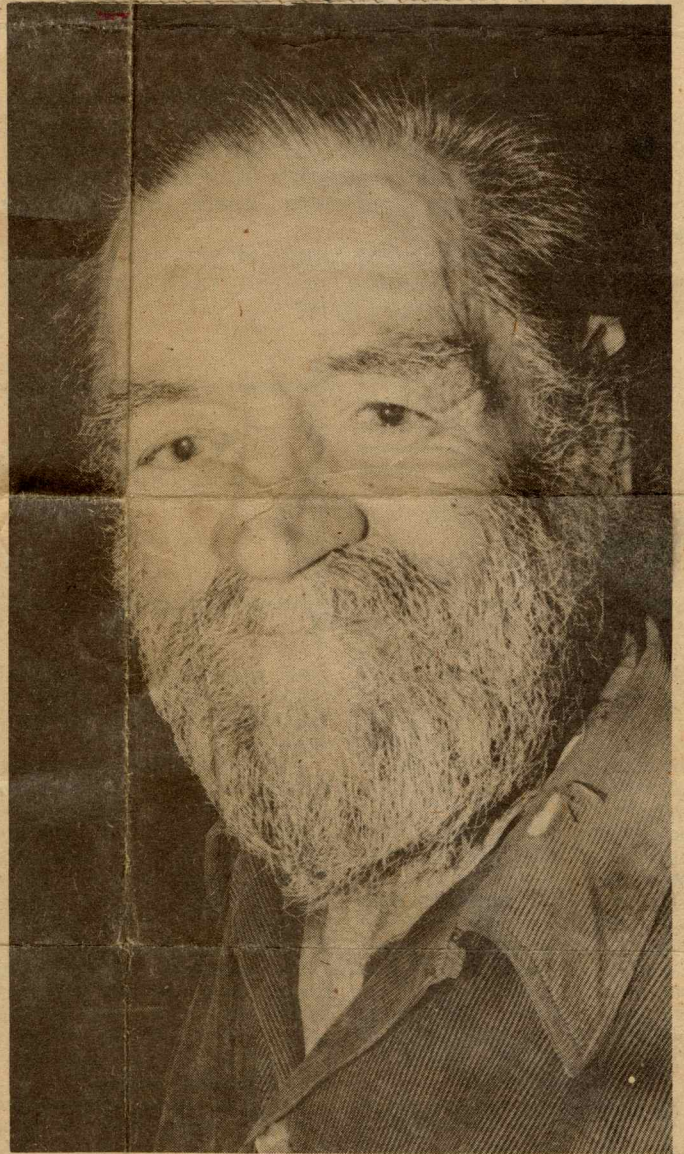
"A philosopher has got to be frugal," he says, and Davis is just that as well as being an advocate of rough living.

"The army has got nothing on me. I'm like one of Napoleon's soldiers," he says.

All of this leads to the fact that Davis' sleeping quarters are the office of the Board of Selectmen. His bed is the selectmen's table which is four feet wide. For sheets he uses white paper used to line tables for banquets and the mattress consists of eight layers of corrugated paper used for lining the front entrance floor in the wintertime.

Davis begins each morning with 45 minutes of exercises.

Emerson Davis is, beyond any doubt, Worthington's walking, talking legend.



EMERSON DAVIS, 83, of Worthington has lectured in France, spent time in Africa, received a half-dozen Leap Year proposals, traveled through Italy, lived in Switzerland, and eats a half-pound of raw beef steak daily to keep healthy.

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