

By Glenn Plaskin



**HER SECRET:**

"Strawberry shortcake! One big piece every day."

# Hope, Health and Happiness

## Secrets of the Centenarians

When Helen Boardman was still a girlish 99, she fell in love again—with a younger man. "I robbed the cradle," says the trim centenarian, who married a man 20 years her junior for "companionship," she says slyly. "Bill was lonesome—I wasn't—but I enjoyed his company and we had the same interests. So we fell in love."

It didn't hurt that Bill Boardman and Helen had the same last name. "She kept getting my checks, and I got her bills," adds Bill, "so out of necessity, we got married!"

Helen is now 107 and Bill is 87. Is there still romance after eight years of marriage? "A little," says Helen, laughing, "when he's real nice to me, which is most of the time. He's a good guy."

"Helen doesn't seem twenty years older," notes Bill. "Last New Year's Eve, we stayed up until midnight dancing. I think she has maintained her youth quite well!"

centenarians in the United States today; they're the nation's fastest-growing age group. Although the current life expectancy for the average American is 77.2 years, by the year 2050 there will be an estimated one million people living to the age of 100. That's progress! In 1900 the average life span extended to 47 years old.

"The secret to becoming a centenarian is a combination of genetics, lifestyle choices, mental acuity and just plain luck," notes Thomas T. Perls, M.D., associate professor of medicine at the Boston University School of Medicine and the author, together with Margery Hutter Silver, Ed.D., of *Living to 100: Lessons in Living to Your Maximum Potential at Any Age* (Basic Books).

This landmark book is based on the ongoing New England Centenarian Study, begun in 1994, which reveals that old age can be filled with lucidity, mobility and good health. "Of the 1,500 centenarians in our study," says Dr.

### The Centenarian Jackpot

The remarkable Helen Boardman is not alone. There are more than 40,000

*Contributing editor Glenn Plaskin, who is based in New York, frequently writes articles on human interest subjects.*

“I feel young inside—like a teenager in an old folk's home!”

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