

100 Years of Living

By Cathy Dausman



Although he no longer drives, 100-year-old David Skilling still has a valid California driver's license.

Photo Cathy Dausman

David Skilling does not look like a centenarian. Yet the proof is on his driver's license, which is still valid. "I gave up driving at 98," he says, and gave his son his car. Skilling loves the reaction he gets from those who see an old birthday banner still tacked to his living room wall. He thought that would be his last party, but his family gathered again on Fourth of July weekend and included a 100th birthday celebration for him at their annual picnic.

The guest list included 40 family members and 20 local friends. "I never knew anybody close to 100," he admits, but he attributes his longevity to a philosophy of "everything in moderation" plus good family genes.

Skilling's mother lived into her 80s; his sister died at 98. "My kids think I'll live forever," says Skilling, who retired at age 60. He has three

grown children, a son and two daughters, who are themselves in their 60s. He has six grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren, "so far."

A doctor once told Skilling he had the body of a 74-year-old man, long after he was 74. A burst appendix at age 17 left him with a blood clot in his leg, which doctors warned might travel to his head, but it hasn't happened in 83 years. He used to play tennis and bridge, and bowled on a league for 30 years. Now Skilling plays word games with neighbors and family.

Skilling was born in Eugene, Oregon. His family – five siblings and their mother – moved to Oakland when Skilling was a child. He graduated from the old University High School, served two stints in the Navy, graduated from UC Berkeley, and worked 32 years for Alameda County,

where his sister worked.

Getting a job with the county, Skilling says, was "a lucky break for me." He moved his family to Moraga 47 years ago, and lives in the same house today.

"I like my own company," he confides, adding that he gets hot lunches from Meals on Wheels. To entertain himself he reads or plays cards. Neighbors look in on him and his children call regularly. He tries to walk daily, and says he doesn't feel much different than he did at 90, although he admits that now "it is harder to bend, I can't move fast, and I can't play [on the floor] with my great-grandson."

Ultimately, though, Skilling is practical: "At my age, I don't look more than a month ahead," he says. "I'm fortunate that I can live by myself and enjoy it."

Lamorinda Slow Food Event at Moraga Herb Farm

By Sophie Braccini



Hollie Lucas-Alcalay picking herbs in her garden farm.

Photo Sophie Braccini

The multiple fragrances of the herbs that grow in Hollie Lucas-Alcalay's garden drift in the warm summer air; 10 different species of mints, five varieties of basil, lemon verbena, calendula, lavender, rosa rugosa, lavender balm, lemon balm, tulsi tea (tulsi krishna basil), to name a few, are beautifully lined up in 3,000 square feet of flat land, tight as a drum.

The Moraga mom has turned part of her garden into an herb farm and profitable business. Slow Food East Bay chose that safe haven for plants to hold its very first Lamorinda event July 20, when the garden will be open to people interested in learning more about growing, savoring, and cooking herbs.

Slow Food started in Italy in the

1980s as a response to the fast food invasion of an ancient culture. It has spread slowly (of course) to the rest of the planet and now counts chapters in some 100 countries. "The motto of our group is 'good, clean and fair,'" says Slow Food East Bay's Willow Blish. "We want to know what we are putting in our mouth, savor it and respect those who grew it for us."

Blish, who is a fitness instructor and nutritionist, considers food to be more than just fuel for the body, but an experience to be shared and an opportunity to support a whole community.

"Our chapter organizes events where we introduce people who grow the food, and how to savor it," she says. "Our spices and herbs series is about discovering new tastes and

using these substances from all over the world with whatever is in season."

Blish met Lucas-Alcalay at a similar event in Walnut Creek, and the two decided to bring Slow Food to Lamorinda.

"I was instantly interested in this young woman who is literally growing a business out of her garden," says Blish. The Moraga herb farmer will share her expertise with the group at the event – first with a tour of the gardens, discussing the best herbs to grow in the area, harvesting and storing techniques, and then cooking tips. She'll have participants taste a variety of teas and herbs in different forms, both fresh and cooked, to learn more about flavor differences and how to highlight them.

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