

# Lizzie Wyant Wood

At 112, plucky supercentenarian is now Virginia's oldest resident.

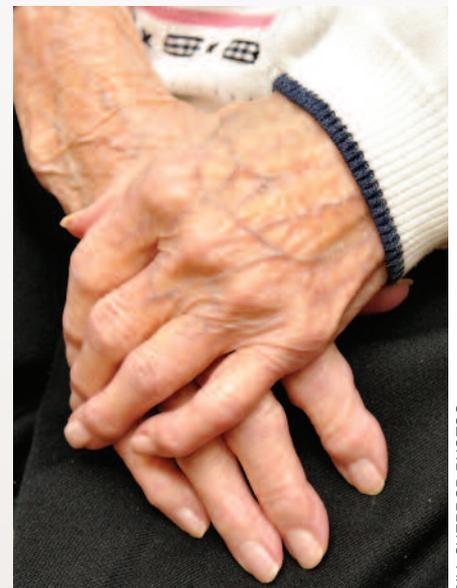
Not many families can boast of six living generations. Lizzie Wood, who has the distinction of being her family's amazing matriarch, makes that claim with a smile.

And in February, just before her 112th birthday, she received official notice that she is Virginia's oldest living person; seventh oldest person in the United States; and 43rd in the world.

Still residing at her home near Fishersville, Lizzie has a mind of her own and does things to suit herself. Tiny in stature with rosy apple cheeks and long white hair she plaits into a bun, Lizzie has led a long, interesting life and continues to be an independent lady, but is quick to add, "I know I wouldn't have lived this long if it weren't for my children helping me."

I first met Lizzie at her 100th birthday party in 2005 and interviewed her for an article in the *Backroads* newspaper. She had a beautiful complexion and I commented on her lack of wrinkles. "I outlived them," was her humorous reply. I was in awe of this vivacious little lady who, at that time, was still doing all her own household chores. When asked if she napped in the afternoon, Lizzie replied, "No, I don't have time for a nap!" Twelve years later, at 112 years of age, it gives me great pleasure to introduce this godly woman to the world.

Wit and Wisdom of the Ages

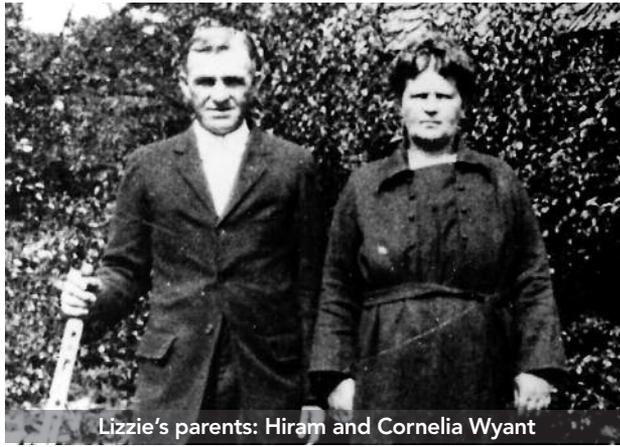


Top: Lizzie Wood at her home near Fishersville; Above: Lizzie's plaited hair; Right: Her hard-working hands.

BILL SHERROD PHOTOS



Lizzie at 17 years of age



Lizzie's parents: Hiram and Cornelia Wyant



The Wood family before Maynard was born



Lizzie and Rubin in later years

'Coming back from our honeymoon the fog was so thick on Afton Mountain we had to hold a lantern out the window of the Model T in order to see the road.'

Lizzie Gertrude Wyant was born on Feb. 20, 1905, the fourth child of 10 born to Hiram Chapman Wyant and his wife Cornelia Frances James Wyant. The Wyants lived in the little community of Sugar Hollow, located on the eastern slope of the Blue Ridge Mountains in Albemarle County.

Her siblings were Nettie, Lottie, Ollie, Lemuel, Myrtie, Edna, Hattie, Emory and Ellis. Myrtie died at two months of age and Lizzie recalls, "When Myrtie died, Papa put her casket on a tabletop lazy Susan so everyone could view her before burial. Papa lifted me so I could see her and I remember the dimes placed on her eyes to keep them shut were too big."

Lizzie said her parents were gentle people who loved their children. "Papa and Mama were strict but loving and we knew we had to listen. We don't know how to appreciate our parents until we become parents ourselves; it's only then we know what they sacrificed."

Hiram Wyant was one of those rare men who could do nearly anything with his hands. His blacksmithing skills were so favored that people came from Charlottesville to have their horses shod. Cornelia doted on her nine children, making all their clothes by hand as well as a multitude of quilts to keep the family warm during long winter months. She died at 54 from complications after surgery.

Lizzie and her siblings walked 2 miles to the school in Sugar Hollow; a one-room wooden building with classes from first through seventh grade. "My favorite teacher was a young woman by the name of Mertie Shelton," recalls Lizzie.

The Wyants were active Christians and attended the Brethren Church near their home. Lizzie became a Christian at 11 and was baptized in the Moorman River. She has remained in the Brethren faith her entire life and has always lived by the Golden Rule, treating others as she would like to be treated.

As a young girl Lizzie was pretty and popular, dating several young men before settling on her future husband, Rubin Lester Wood. Rubin was working in timber near Sugar Hollow and they met at church when the timber crew stayed for the weekend. The couple began courting and married on Nov. 29, 1923, when Lizzie was 17. The newlyweds took a weeklong trip to visit relatives and Lizzie recalled, "Coming back from our honeymoon the fog was so thick on Afton Mountain we had to hold a lantern out the window of the Model T in order to see the road."



Lizzie and her nine children, 2005

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE WOOD FAMILY

After a brief stay with Lizzie's parents, the couple moved to Waynesboro, where Rubin found employment at Basic Witz Furniture Factory and later at Crompton Textiles. He also farmed, sharecropping on the Hopeman, Wine, Dotson and Lambert farms. Their children started coming 10 months after marriage and the order of their births are Wallace, Lottie (now deceased), Thelma, Gracie, Hiram, Curtis, Betty, Boyd and Maynard. All were born at home, with Lizzie's sister serving as midwife.

A diminutive woman, Lizzie worked alongside her husband in addition to her many household duties, but always made room for fun. "One winter Rubin constructed a wooden bobsled that could carry five people but lacked steerage. We climbed aboard with three of our children, hoping to gather enough speed to coast down one snow-covered hill and halfway up another." Underestimating their combined weight, Lizzie said, "We careened down *several* hills, crashing into the outdoor privy before spilling out on the ground, unhurt and laughing."

When asked what the biggest change in life has been thus far, Lizzie replied, "Getting electricity and indoor plumbing impacted me the most. Even though it was just a 25-watt light bulb hanging down from a wire, electricity was the best thing I had ever seen."

Rubin passed away in 1967 and their youngest son, Maynard, bought his parents' home where he and his mother continue to live. All the children remain close with most living in surrounding areas except sons Wallace and Curtis, who live in Maryland and Washington state, respectively.

At this writing, in addition to her children, Lizzie has 18 grandchildren, 37 great-grandchildren, 21 great-great-grandchildren and two great-great-great-grandchildren. She is the last surviving sibling of the 10 Wyant children.

Although she has slowed down, Lizzie remains busy, rising early to eat a hot breakfast her son Maynard makes her every morning. She's looking forward to planting her half-runner beans in the garden this spring, adding, "The trick is not to drop them too close together. If you crowd them you won't get as many beans." Still helping with the canning, Lizzie confesses, "My hands don't have as much strength in them now, so I have to get the girls to screw the lids on tight." Until a few years ago Lizzie continued to do the family



Lizzie at her 100th birthday, 2005

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laundry even though her children didn't want her to, fearing she'd fall. With her typical independent spirit, Lizzie told me, "My children didn't want me carrying the wash basket to the basement so I would put the clothes in a trash bag and throw them down the steps!" Lizzie enjoys playing board games in the evenings with her children and most often wins. I asked her how she always managed to win and she offered, "I've been at it longer than they have!"

On a recent visit to her doctor, Lizzie confided that she often felt a little lonely and if she had about four or five little children to look after, she'd feel better. This from a woman who raised nine of her own!

Lizzie is busy enjoying her 112th year and her philosophy in life is simple but profound; "I tend to my own business and let others tend to theirs." When asked her opinion as to why God has let her live this long, she winks and says with a smile, "To keep my children from getting into trouble!" ■