

A1 READING CHALLENGE · #29

The Oldest Person in the World

Jeanne Calment (122) & Kane Tanaka (119) — the secrets of the longest lives

How old is the oldest person you know? Maybe 80? Maybe 90? Now **imagine** living to 122 years old! That is how long Jeanne Calment lived. She was born in France in 1875 and died in 1997. She is the oldest person in **history**. Her story — and the story of other very old people — is **amazing**.

Jeanne Calment — 122 Years Old

Jeanne Louise Calment was born on 21 February 1875 in **Arles**, France. She was born before the Eiffel Tower was built! When she was a teenager, she **met** the famous painter Vincent van Gogh. He came to her father's shop.

Jeanne married her **husband** Fernand in 1896. They had a good life. Jeanne never had to work. She could **travel**, paint, and play the piano. She was always **active**. She started **fencing** when she was 85! She rode her **bicycle** every day until she was 100.

Jeanne loved **chocolate**. She ate about one kilogram every week. She also used a lot of **olive oil** — on her food and on her skin! She drank a little red wine. She even smoked two cigarettes a day — but she stopped at 117.

Jeanne lived alone until she was 110. Then she moved to a **nursing home**. Even there, she had a **routine**. She woke up at 6:45 every morning. She said a prayer. She did **exercises** in her chair. She ate fruit. She took a long nap. She talked to friends. She listened to music. She went to bed at 10 p.m.

When she was 120, a **journalist** asked: "What kind of future do you expect?" Jeanne answered: "A very short one." She was funny until the end!

Jeanne Calment died on 4 August 1997. She was 122 years and 164 days old. Nobody has lived longer — ever.

Kane Tanaka — 119 Years Old

Kane Tanaka was born on 2 January 1903 in Fukuoka, Japan. She was the **seventh** of nine children. She married Hideo Tanaka when she was 19. Together, they had four children.

Kane's life was not always easy. She lived through two World Wars. Her husband and her son went to the **army**. While they were away, Kane worked in a noodle shop.

When Kane was 103, doctors found **cancer** in her body. She had an **operation**. And she got better! She **beat** cancer at 103 years old.

Kane lived in a nursing home in her later years. She played **board games** — especially Othello. She solved maths puzzles. She talked to many people. And she ate the food she loved: chocolate, coffee, and Coca-Cola! Coca-Cola sent her a special **gift** for her 119th birthday.

Kane said the **secret** to a long life is simple: "Do the things that you like. Eat the things you like. Enjoy every day."

Kane Tanaka died on 19 April 2022. She was 119 years old.

What Can We Learn?

Jeanne and Kane were very different people. One was French, one was Japanese. One was **rich**, the other was not. But they had things in common:

- 1. They stayed active.** Jeanne rode her bike. Kane played games. They moved their bodies and brains every day.
- 2. They had a routine.** Both women had daily habits. Routine is good for your body.
- 3. They enjoyed life.** Jeanne ate chocolate and laughed. Kane drank Coca-Cola and played Othello. Happy people often live longer.
- 4. They had strong connections.** Both women talked to people every day.

Of course, **luck** is also important. Scientists say **genes** — information from your parents — play a big role. But a happy life, good food, exercise, and friends can all help.

Fun Fact: When Jeanne was 90, she sold her apartment to a 47-year-old lawyer. He agreed to pay her money every month until she died. He thought she would die soon. But Jeanne lived 32 more years! The lawyer died before her.

Fun Fact: Kane Tanaka wanted to be a torch bearer at the Tokyo Olympics in 2020. She was 117 years old! But the COVID pandemic stopped her plan.

Vocabulary

| Word | Meaning |
|----------------|--------------------------------|
| imagine | to make a picture in your mind |

| Word | Meaning |
|---------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| history | all the things that happened in the past |
| amazing | very surprising and wonderful |
| Arles | a small city in the south of France |
| met | past of meet; to see someone for the first time |
| husband | the man a woman is married to |
| travel | to go to different places |
| active | doing many things; not sitting doing nothing |
| fencing | a sport with long thin swords |
| bicycle | a vehicle with two wheels; you push pedals |
| chocolate | sweet brown food from cacao beans |
| olive oil | oil from olives; very healthy |
| nursing home | a place where old/sick people live with nurses |
| routine | things you do the same way every day |
| exercises | movements to keep your body strong |
| journalist | a person who writes news stories |
| seventh | number 7 in order |
| army | soldiers that fight for a country |
| cancer | a serious illness; bad cells grow in your body |
| operation | when a doctor cuts your body to fix it |
| beat | to win against; to fight and win |
| board games | games on a flat board, like chess |
| gift | something you give; a present |
| secret | something not many people know |
| rich | having a lot of money |
| connections | relationships with other people |
| luck | when good things happen by chance |
| genes | information from parents that controls how you grow |

Comprehension Quiz

1. How old was Jeanne Calment when she died?

- A) 119
- B) 120
- C) 122
- D) 125

2. What sport did Jeanne start at age 85?

- A) Swimming
- B) Tennis
- C) Fencing
- D) Running

3. What was Kane Tanaka's favourite drink?

- A) Green tea
- B) Orange juice
- C) Coca-Cola
- D) Milk

4. What did Kane say is the secret to a long life?

- A) Eat only healthy food
- B) Sleep 12 hours
- C) Do the things that you like
- D) Never eat chocolate

5. What did Jeanne and Kane have in common?

- A) Both from Japan
- B) Both stayed active and enjoyed life
- C) Both hated chocolate
- D) Both worked very hard

Answer Key

1. C 2. C 3. C 4. C 5. B