

Four factors influence longevity of Americans

By MARGUERITE BRADEN

Four factors affect the length of your life, says Vivian Blair, family life education specialist.

The factors are genetic make-up, physical exercise, diet and nutrition, and psychological and cultural influences.

Blair, who works for the Texas Agriculture Extension Service, said there is a great deal we don't understand about the aging process.

She said one reason for the growing population of elderly persons is medical science's attack on childhood diseases. People today are less likely to die in a natural disaster, from a plague, tuberculosis, small pox or yellow fever. They are more likely to die of heart disease, cancer, stroke, or degenerative illness.

Blair said genetic influence relates to long life. Offspring of long-lived parents live longer than those whose parents die young. The first offspring of a union will tend to live longer than those born later. Children of parents who contract heart disease

and some forms of cancer are more likely than others to contract these diseases themselves.

In some remote and isolated areas of the world, a high percentage of people enjoy extremely long life, but specialists cannot agree why.

Alexander Leaf, a Harvard physician said the genetic influence was not necessarily the presence of good genes, but the absence of bad ones.

Blair said physical exercise is important in producing longevity because exercise helps bring about a lower heart rate, increases the pumping capacity of the heart, lowers blood pressure and increases lung capacity.

The third factor in determining the length of life is diet and nutrition. Blair said the extremely long-lived people in remote areas consume between two-fifths and two-thirds of the average daily American caloric intake.

Blair said Americans should be eating foods rich in protein and low

in fats. Low-fat diets are associated with a high level of fitness and low incidence of heart disease.

"The fat-rich American diet is associated with both obesity and heart disease," Blair said.

Blair said that psychological and cultural influences are difficult to measure, but they are considered another factor in long life.

Our attitude towards aging is detrimental, Blair said. "Age does not represent illness or less mental ability."

In the remote areas where people live longer, the elderly people are productive contributors to the agricultural economy, Blair said. Old age is also honored because social status increases with age.

Part of the problem is that Americans don't accept the fact that they are growing old, Blair said. People who say they are "75 years young" might have a positive attitude about aging, but they are denying the fact that they are degenerating physically, she said.

Ag poets, writers rewarded

By PAUL BARTON

Poet and songwriter Naomi Shihab entertained a packed audience at the MSC Basement Coffeehouse Wednesday night at the Texas A&M University Poetry and Fiction Awards ceremony.

Shihab alternated reading her poems and singing songs of her own composition. Her works frequently expressed themes about the beauty of everyday things and people.

The Arts Committee then announced the winners of its fourth

annual poetry and fiction contest.

The poetry awards were given to Marc Gist, first; Diana Aldrich, second; David Flowers, third.

Walter Prehn won first place in the fiction contest; Eugenia Blair, second and Rick Frazier, third.

Some of their works have been published in Moebius, the Art Committee's literary magazine.

Winners in both divisions receive \$75 for first place, \$50 for second and \$25 for third.

Dr. Paul Christensen, a Texas A&M English professor, com-

mented that the literary picture at Texas A&M is rapidly acquiring stature.

"Ever since the University went coeducational, it has tended to encourage expression of literary experience," Christensen said. Christensen said women now dominate the literary scene at Texas A&M.

He added that the English department will offer a new course in creative writing next fall that will deal with the writing of book-length works.

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