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Conversations About Aging

Dr. Bill Taylor, 97

September 23, 2019

DIANE

When Dr. Bill Taylor was nearly 60, he tried windsurfing and was hooked. It led to lots of adventures and to love.

I'm Diane Atwood and you're listening to Conversations About Aging. I'm traveling the state of Maine interviewing people 60 and older about their perspectives on aging. At 97, Bill has a lot of insight.

We sat down at the kitchen table in one of his most favorite places -- his summer camp -- and among other things, he reminisced about his childhood, why he decided to become a doctor, and how windsurfing led to love. I think you're going to enjoy my conversation about aging with Dr. Bill Taylor, age 97.

Music

Diane: Welcome to Conversations About Aging. And

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I am in the most beautiful spot in the world at this moment.

Diane: I am overlooking Ossipee Lake in East Waterboro. Am I in East Waterboro?

Bill Taylor: That's correct. Well, actually Waterboro Center, but they're calling it East Waterboro for the post office, that's all.

Diane: So this cabin is pretty, pretty neat. And you're right on the water. Did you build this yourself?

Bill Taylor: Yeah, we had a built in 1990. My grandmother bought this land, you won't believe it in 1906 for \$50. Can you imagine that?

Diane: Right on the lake?

Bill Taylor: Right there. 50 bucks.

Diane: No, I can't believe it.

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Bill Taylor: Nobody had houses back then. So it's worth, I think it's 100,000 bucks now, probably.

Diane: Probably more. Probably more. Lakefront property. So did your grandparents build something here? Has, has there always been something on the land?

Bill Taylor: Well, when you drove this way, there's a house they call it Leavitt Frey Taylor House. That was my great grandfather's house right there. And now the town has it and it's a museum. So all the old furniture, all the old stuff, we kept it right there, so the town has the whole thing.

Diane: So this a museum of your family or?

Bill Taylor: Yeah, my family..

Diane: So you've got a pretty famous family.

Bill Taylor: Ha, ha, ha. Well, just local. Ha, ha, ha.

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Diane: What makes your family famous other than just being local?

Bill Taylor: Well, all I know is my great grandfather used to make clothing and they made suits and stuff like that and they sent them to Boston. That's how they made a living.

Diane: Made a good living.

Bill Taylor: Yeah. And he was living in his Saco at the time and he was here in the winter some of the time.

Diane: He was here on the lake in the winter when most people, they wait until summertime to come to the lake.

Bill Taylor: No, he was in and out a lot.

Diane: Did you spend summers up here as a kid?

Bill Taylor: I did. I'm 97 so in 1922, that's when, the year I was born and the first time I came here. I don't remember

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that, but I do remember I was here. I've been doing this summertime forever.

Diane: Well, tell me about some of the summers when you were a boy. What did you love about being here?

Bill Taylor: Well, a big thing. The local thing is this jumping in the lake and fishing. Those are the two things. And we, there's a mountain over here, call it a mountain, but it's a big hill, that's all it is. But the blueberries would be out there a lot. There used to be raspberries and blueberries. We used to go picking all the time and that was fun. And there's a tower on the top, a fire tower there for just lookout just in case there is a fire. So we used to climb that all the time. And at my grandfather's house, and I have to show it to you later, but my brother and I took a compass and we aimed it right at the top of the mountain. Went right through the pucker brush everywhere. It was kind of fun.

Diane: You know, kids these days wouldn't be allowed to do some of those things like climbing that fire tower. Did your mom and dad know that you were doing that?

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Bill Taylor: Uh, I don't think they did know.

Diane: And you lived to tell the tale. Lived to 97

Bill Taylor: Well, they were pretty tolerant parents. In fact, they were, they were, they were very thorough people, but they let us do every kind of thing. I'm amazed how much we could do.

Diane: But isn't that kind of what it used to be like?

Bill Taylor: Oh yeah, and we, when I was a kid, we lived in Falmouth, Maine, which is a town that's totally, totally changed. You wouldn't even know as the same place anymore. There's a woods across the street from where we were. We used to go in the woods and we made tree houses and you know, lean tos and cabins and all sorts of stuff. I don't think the folks even know what we did.

Diane: So I've heard stories. I think it happened and I grew up in the 50s and it was sort of like that. You'd say

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goodbye in the morning and be back in time for lunch or supper.

Bill Taylor: Yeah, my grandma, my mother had a call, call yoo hoo yoo hoo hoo and she was so loud we can hear it. So we'd come to lunch and so she'd get us in that way.

Diane: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

Bill Taylor: I had two brothers.

Diane: And where were you in the mix?

Bill Taylor: I was the oldest, the eldest, oldest.

Diane: Whatever. So did that mean that you had special duties? Were you in charge of your younger brothers or were you all equal.

Bill Taylor: No, no, we were all equal.

Diane: Now I happen to have two daughters and I remember reading somewhere in some book about raising

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children. Yeah. that it's easier to raise boys because when they get mad at each other, they just fight it out and they're done with it.

Bill Taylor: Well, I had one brother we used, we used to fight a little bit, but the other fellow, he's a doctor as well and he ended up in Maryland, but the two of us got along real well and my other brother sort of went his own way. It was all right, worked out okay.

Diane: Cause y'all were, you always remained friends. Are they still alive?

Bill Taylor: No, neither one is.

Diane: You have outlived both of your younger brothers.

Bill Taylor: That's right. Well, one of them had diabetes and had a stroke and the other one had something else. Amyloid disease. You probably never heard of it. But it's a kind of a disease that slowly gets into your body and his crept into his heart and it also, yeah, get it into his intestines so it slowly caught up with him.

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Diane: Is that the same thing that happens in your brain with people who get Alzheimer's? Amyloid plaques or something?

Bill Taylor: Oh yeah. That's different. The amyloid disease is all over the place, not just your brain.

Diane: Huh. Interesting. What's it like to lose your siblings? I know that sounds like a very idiotic question, but it must be awful.

Bill Taylor: Always hard. It's always hard. I was there for both of them when they did die. I went down there to see em. And it was, It was tough and all their family was right with them near the end. So it was a very hard thing to put up with. It really was.

Diane: And how long ago was that?

Bill Taylor: Well, my second brother died about three years ago and the other one died about eight years ago, the one with the amyloid, he died about eight years ago.

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Diane: So they did both live to be in at least what? In their eighties?

Bill Taylor: Yes, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Diane: How about your parents? How, how old were they when they died?

Bill Taylor: 88

Diane: So are you the longest living relative or are there other people?

Bill Taylor: Well, I outlived them all.

Bill Taylor: It's kind of lonely too, you know, cause after a while all of your best friends have gone.

Diane: So at 97 you've had a lot of loss.

Bill Taylor: Had a lot of what?

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Diane: At 97 you've lost a lot of people that you love.

Bill Taylor: Absolutely. Yeah. Uh, I had a bunch of kids that I went to grade school with and I was with them for a long time, but they all, they've all passed too. I have one that's still around.

Diane: And is still in great shape like you?

Bill Taylor: No.

Diane: Can this friend carry on a conversation or is that friend independent?

Bill Taylor: Yeah, he can't, he doesn't want to get out and do anything. So I haven't seen him this year.

Diane: So That's interesting because you're a guy who wants to get out and keep on doing things.

Bill Taylor: Yes, I do.

Diane: What motivates you?

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Bill Taylor: I just like, I'm a curious guy. I like to be curious about everything and I think positive all the time. That's my way of thinking. I don't get depressed ever.

Diane: Never. Not even when you're feeling lonely or missing your loved ones?

Bill Taylor: No, I don't let it happen. Oh, I know, when my wife died, that was tough. Yeah. She had one of these aneurysms in her head and she lived about 13, 14 days. Slowly down, down, down. It was really sad.

Diane: You almost started to cry just then.

Bill Taylor: Well, I, I, I felt bad about her.

Diane: Yeah. So that's been the hardest one for you to accept?

Bill Taylor: Yeah. She and I were actually, uh, champion windsurfers. Maybe you don't know that.

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Diane: I did hear a rumor and I have seen a few pictures, I think. At least one picture. So let's go back a little bit in time because this is not your first wife, right?

Bill Taylor: Correct.

Diane: Okay. We'll go to, we'll go way back in a minute, but let's say let's go to how you two met.

Bill Taylor: Oh, yeah, you've probably heard about that one. Anyway, she's a windsurfer and so am I. I went out on the back cove and the tide is right, you can windsurf right there. And I went over to Payson Park. I don't know if you know where that is. And they had a, they had a gathering right there of all the windsurfers. So I went over and there was my wife, Maggie,

Diane: That you hadn't met yet?

Bill Taylor: Hadn't met. That's how we met.

Diane: How old were you then?

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Bill Taylor: Gee, I don't know.

Bill Taylor: 1980, something like that.

Diane: Okay. And how did you know that she was the one?

Bill Taylor: I don't know, just like that we hit it off and then, about two weeks or so after that, I was at the gas station pumping gas and she was there and she said, you know, I'm going to Florida to learn, to take a windsurf lesson. Do you want to go? So I took about two seconds, said, yeah, I do. 'D like to go too. So she went and I flew down and met her and we spent a week. That's how we really got acquainted and it worked out great. There was a lady who used to live right here in Portland and gave when surf lessons.

Diane: Down in Florida. So you both became ...

Bill Taylor: She had lessons here and then went to Florida.

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Diane: Okay, your wife's name was Maggie? Yeah, Maggie. Was she already a champ when she met you?

Bill Taylor: Uh, she was a heck of a good sailor, I know that. We were, no, we weren't we didn't do any race competition until we get to Florida? Oh No, no. I'll take it back. We raced up from Eastern Promenade to probably, I'm trying to think, Chebeague Island and back.

Diane: On a windsurfer.

Bill Taylor: On a windsurfer.

Diane: So tell me what, tell me about windsurfing. What, how do you windsurf and what's the draw?

Bill Taylor: Okay. Number one, the board is about 10,12 feet long and has a little sail sticking up and you stand on the board, you figure out where the wind is, and you can hold on to, t you have a boom you can hang, hold onto. And then if the wind gets real big, you have this strap that has a hook on my body right here. Yeah, the strap that that'll help, the weight of your body will hold you up, won't

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pull you over. So that's how we sail and you have to figure out the wind cause you can't, you can't go sail right into the wind, you have to go one way or the other and then you can turn around and go in the other way in there, pull the daggerboard up. Oooc

Diane: Wow. So is the draw just the mental piece of it, knowing when to do what? The physical piece of it?

Bill Taylor: Well it turns out that my daughter, they got married right here

Bill Taylor: and they had a reception after that and somebody brought a windsurfing board, and said come on dad, try it. So I got on the board and I went about five feet and fell in and I go another 10 feet and fall in. But I thought, oh I was hooked. I had somehow that was something I wanted to learn.

Diane: When was that like, um, about how long before you met Maggie had you started windsurfing?

Bill Taylor: Probably 19, seven 1979 or something? 1980.

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Diane: Okay.

Diane: So you had been windsurfing for a number of years when you met Maggie. That's right. You already loved it, you didn't start loving it when you started loving Maggie.

Bill Taylor: No, no, I was into it all away.

Diane: What's it feel like when you're out there catching the wind just the right way?

Bill Taylor: It's a kind of a freedom you can't get anywhere else and you have to learn how to hold the sail just right. You can see little waves coming up and down. Look for some of the fish some of the time. I was in, I was in a race one time in Massachusetts and a whole bunch of little, uh, what kind of fish were they? Doesn't matter. We're in a race and I stopped because they were so pretty to look at them. My wife Maggie says come on, get going. And I came in last.

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Diane: But you were happy.

Bill Taylor: Oh, I loved it. I loved it.

Diane: So how fast can you go?

Bill Taylor: Oh, can go about 20, 25. That's a lot of wind when you go that fast.

Diane: You've got to good balance. You got to have good concentration.

Bill Taylor: Yup. Yup, Yup.

Diane: Can you sail anyway? Did you already know how to sail a boat?

Bill Taylor: I sort of knew it, but when I was a kid my uncle had a sailboat, a good sized one, but I never sailed with him. I just was a passenger.

Diane: But you liked the feeling of being out there on the water.

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Bill Taylor: Absolutely.

Bill Taylor: I can't do it anymore. I could sail in a straight line right now, but if I go to turn either way, I'm in the water.

Diane: So what do you not have?

Bill Taylor: Balance. Balance is terrible.

Diane: And at what age did you start noticing that your balance wasn't good enough to be able to do it anymore?

Bill Taylor: The last time I windsurfed I was age 92 and I just, I was in a race and I came in last for sure. I mean really last then I just knew I could not stand the right way or anything else to race.

Diane: That must've been difficult to give it up.

Bill Taylor: Well, yeah, but I was at a point, I said what the heck?

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Diane: You were ready.

Bill Taylor: I was ready. Yeah.

Diane: So tell me about being married to Maggie. Did you travel all over the place on your windsurfers?

Bill Taylor: We went to lots and lots of places all along the east coast of USA and we sailed one time in Oregon, a place called a gorge and I don't know if you ever heard of that. It's a place, the Columbia River, there's a place where the mountains come down like this and there's a huge wind that comes right through there. And if you, you have to have a real small sail and maybe you can do it, maybe you can't.

Diane: And you did it.

Bill Taylor: I did it, but you know, I got dumped off a couple of times.

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Diane: So I just learned something else about windsurfers. There are, they're not all cut the same. You've got different size sails on them.

Bill Taylor: Yes, you do. And you have to figure out how much wind there is. The standard sail that I've been using is seven five, which is 77 and a half square yards sail and you get down as low as a four, but you have to sail with a big, big, big wind for that.

Diane: So I'd love to talk a little bit more about Maggie because I have found that some people don't believe that love exists when you get older that it's, especially if you've been married before and it's a good marriage and suddenly you're alone.

Bill Taylor: I have something right here.

Diane: I'm going to follow you, in case you say something.

Bill Taylor: Okay,

Bill Taylor: That's Maggie.

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Bill Taylor: There she is right there.

Diane: Always smiling.

Bill Taylor: Oh, she is.

Diane: You were married a long time and you had more than windsurfing and common, obviously, it sounds like you had a really happy marriage.

Bill Taylor: We were into more things. We used to, uh, we had a job taking care of nursing homes in Florida. We were the ombudsman, if you know what that is. And we went to about 20, 25 homes down there, did that. And she was in a, some other kind of, she did all kinds of different stuff. We were, we were in a choir in church.

Diane: So you did a lot of things together.

Bill Taylor: Sing in group together. Oh yeah.

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Diane: And what happened? Did she, you said that she got ill, she had an aneurysm.

Bill Taylor: Yeah. She all of a sudden, right in my house. Boom. And it went into, you know, ruptured an artery in her head. So I brought her to the hospital and over 13 days she just slowly went down, down, down, down and passed.

Diane: And how many years have gone by now?

Bill Taylor: 2011 she died. So that's what, eight eight years? Yeah.

Diane: And you're still kicking?

Bill Taylor: I'm still kicking. You're right. I don't understand. I had pneumonia last February and I was in intensive care for three days.

Diane: And did everybody think this is it?

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Bill Taylor: Well a few people did. Yeah. I didn't know how. I wouldn't let myself think that way.

Diane: That's really interesting because you still, even though you were really, really ill, you had that fight.

Bill Taylor: Sure, absolutely. I'm just going to be positive all the way.

Diane: Do you worry about dying?

Bill Taylor: Not a bit. Not a bit. I loved my brothers. When he died the day he died, he says, uh, it's either going to be nothing or it's going to be a wonderful adventure and within hours he died. So it's either it's a wonderful adventure or it's nothing.

Diane: Either way it's okay.

Bill Taylor: That's right. That's what it is. Don't have any choice as to what you do.

Diane: I'd like to go back in time now.

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Bill Taylor: Okay.

Diane: You had a wonderful childhood.

Bill Taylor: ([31:12](#))

Yup, I did.

Diane: And then you, somewhere along the line you decided you wanted to be a doctor. Why?

Bill Taylor: Well, somehow or other at age seven, seven, they gave me a little doctor's bag and say Dr Busby on it. I think that must have got me going right then at age seven. But anyway, for some reason or other I said that's what I want to do and uh, when I went to high school and I went to college, I took a biological science course and wanted to be a doctor. That's the way it worked out.

Diane: And so you ended up being a general practitioner, is that what they called you?

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Bill Taylor: Yeah. Family doctor, general practitioner. delivered babies, sewed up cuts and stuff like that. I didn't do, I didn't, when I was in the Navy I did a couple of appendectomies on a ship, but I didn't do any of those in that practice.

Diane: So your practice was always in Falmouth?

Speaker 2: Correct.

Diane: Did it turn out to be what you thought it would be? Are you glad that that's what you decided to be at seven years old?

Bill Taylor: Yup, I'm very glad I did that. Yup. I've done a lot of things since I retired and I was 40 years in Falmouth being the doctor right there. But after that I filled in at the Navajo Reservation and filled in at the one in the one in the Bangor, what's the name of it? Penobscot. Penobscot and the Shoshones out in Nevada. So I did all that.

Diane: That's wonderful. This is after you retired. Did you retire at the normal age that many people retired?

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Bill Taylor: 70 something. I forget when.

Bill Taylor: I'm getting forgetful.

Diane: Are you just getting forgetful now? What I mean is now at 97.

Bill Taylor: Oh, I'm a little bit forgetful, all you know, forever. But a little more so.

Bill Taylor: it shows now since age 90 for the last five years, I can tell the difference. And the other thing that is quite different than my balance. Those two things. I have to be careful. I don't want to fall down.

Diane: OK, let's go back to um, when you're younger, you got married and you had six kids. Yeah. And you had a practice and Falmouth. Those those years. For me, those years of raising a family speed by. One minute you're having your first baby and the next thing you know you're sending your last baby off to college.

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Bill Taylor: Oh yes. That's the first time when you find, you consider yourself secure when you don't, don't have to pay any more mortgage on a house and you send all your kids to college. That to me is real success if you can do both of those things.

Diane: And all of your kids went on to be successful in their own way?

Bill Taylor: Yeah. It's a different way. Yeah. Yeah. Different ways.

Diane: I met one of them. I met your daughter Martha. That's how we met. Right? Okay. Is she the one that tries to keep you, um, safe and make your toe the line.

Bill Taylor: Oh boy. I'll tell ya. That's a good way of putting it.

Diane: Do you mind really that your kids, especially Martha, sorry Martha, but especially Martha, do worry about you and maybe they nag you a little bit.

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Bill Taylor: Oh, I'm used to that now. I'm able to parry the blows. No, everything worked out okay.

Diane: But somewhere along the line or somewhere in your brain, it must feel comforting to know that there is somebody who's that vigilant.

Bill Taylor: Oh yeah, Well, like my birthday. We had a nice get together and I've got one son in Santa Fe or rather in Los Alamos and one in Florida and three in Maine. All of them came for the birthday. It wasn't on my actual birthday itself, but it was a few days of that.

Diane: You liked that? Family's important.

Bill Taylor: They were all right here we had a grill outside. People jumped in the lake and things like that. It was wonderful. Absolutely.

Diane: When you're up here at the camp in the summertime, what do you do?

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Bill Taylor: Uh, I'm a golfer and I got a kayak, so I do those two things.

Diane: Do you do 18 holes?

Bill Taylor: No, no, nine at a time. Nine is enough.

Diane: And do you go every day or try to?

Bill Taylor: No, right now. Was a bunch of us, we used to golf together and this one fellow has, uh, can't think of the name of it. He has a kidney disease. It was a congenital thing and then slowly, slowly failing. So he's on dialysis now, so he can't, we can't get together with him very often. The other fellow, uh, I tried to golf and then two weeks ago and he was too tired to go golfing and so all my buddies have just left me. And so I've done, I've been down golfing with Martha and my daughter, Nancy and her husband. So I've been doing that and I hope they golf tomorrow with Martha.

Diane: Well, thank God for family.

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Bill Taylor: Oh, absolutely. I'd go nuts. I love to be able to play golf. I'm a terrible golfer, but I don't care.

Diane: Oh, what a great attitude you have about just about everything.

Bill Taylor: I mean, what the heck, you know.

Diane: Yeah. Yup. I noticed behind you your laptop is open so you don't shy away from technology. There are some people as their age, as they age, they say, no, I don't want an iPhone or a computer. I don't know what to do with them.

Diane: You have a laptop, you're on Facebook?

Bill Taylor: Yeah. Oh yeah. I got all that.

Diane: Why?

Bill Taylor: I like it. And that's the one thing about here I'm living alone. This way, you could, you know, keep in touch with people all the time.

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Diane: So it's important for us to always be learning new things, you think?

Bill Taylor: I think it is, I'm curious all the time.

Diane: Was there a certain point when you realized, oh, I think I'm getting older now.

Bill Taylor: No, I don't. I just know it's happening, but I don't think that way.

Diane: But you just noticed like, did you gradually start to slow down? You couldn't do some of the things you used to, you weren't as strong.

Bill Taylor: I used to walk from here to the store. I don't feel like doing that anymore. Things like that.

Diane: So do you have secrets, do you think, to being able to live this long or how do you live your life?

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Bill Taylor: I mean, the thing is be, you know, don't sit around, number one, being grateful all the time. Take some time to pick the daisies. Really get out and do stuff stay curious. Staying curious is my big one.

Diane: Do you ever feel lonely?

Bill Taylor: I really don't. I get bored once in a while but not lonely, That's a different thing.

Diane: What about isolated? Do you feel isolated here?

Bill: Nope, I really don't.

Diane: Is there anything you appreciate about being 97

Bill Taylor: Well, I'm glad I can think and all that stuff and meet people like you and know everybody I've enjoyed them at the place I stay at the Highlands. There's about what, 200 people there in the main lodge and I've met all kinds of people. It's just very nice.

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Diane: So that was a good move for you to move into a place like that?

Bill Taylor: Yeah. For quite a while I regretted it because I would have, I was staying that the last 26 years I went to Florida for the winter.

Bill Taylor: Well in a way I, put that off for another year or two because I had a lot of friends right there.

Diane: (And are they all there or have they gone now?)

Bill Taylor: No, as far as I know they're all there. I'm going to, I probably go back and visit them sometime in October when it gets a little chilly here, I think I'm going to down there.

Diane: Before we say goodbye, is there any advice that you'd like to share? I mean, you've got 97 years of wisdom.

Bill: Well, the big thing is don't sit around, keep moving, and I think I told you this one. Think positive. Spend some

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time picking the daisies and be curious and that's it. But I'm very thankful for my life. I really am.

Diane: You've been listening to Conversations About Aging, a Catching Health special series. I'm Diane Atwood and I've been talking with Dr. Bill Taylor, who's 97 years old. If you have anything to say about our conversation or any of my other Conversations About Aging — please let me know. Something resonated with you, constructive criticism, you want to recommend someone to be interviewed, or you'd like to be a podcast sponsor — whatever. I want this podcast to make a difference in people's lives.

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