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Oldest Woman in Harlem at 114 Years Young

Alelia Murphy was born in North Carolina in 1905, when Theodore Roosevelt was president and on July 6th, she will be turning 114 years old. Ms. Murphy is not only the oldest living person in Harlem, but the oldest person living in the United States.

Ms. Murphy has lived an active, happy life, which, according to her nurse Natalia Mhlambiso with the Visiting Nurse Service of New York (VNSNY), "is as good a recipe as any" for longevity. She attended college in North Carolina before marrying and moving to New York, where she was a seamstress, a baker, and an award-winning salesperson for Fuller products. She was also a passionate dancer, being regularly tossed into the air while jitterbugging at Harlem's storied Savoy Manor.

"She grew up in the South in the days before processed food, so she ate very healthy," adds Natalia. "Keeping active when you are younger, and eating healthy and continuing to do so—it really does help a lot."

Natalia visits Ms. Murphy twice a week to clean and change the dressing on a non-healing hip wound and to check her medications and overall well-being. She also communicates regularly with Ms. Murphy's close-knit family and with her doctor.

Ms. Murphy's rich and varied life is on full display at her Harlem apartment of many decades. The residence is filled with family photographs and a "proclamation wall" with citations from local officials honoring her long life. In the more than five years that Natalia has been visiting Ms. Murphy in her home, the VNSNY nurse has also become a familiar face and sounding board to many of her elderly neighbors. "It's a good feeling," Natalia says, "being here to help. In the last year, VNSNY has provided care to over 845 New Yorkers aged 100 years and older."

When asked her secret to a long life, Ms. Murphy has a ready answer: "Trust in God and be a good person."

