



E. Edward Zinke

I was eager to get my hands on the latest issue of *National Geographic* magazine. A friend had just forwarded an e-mail clip from the National Geographic Society featuring Seventh-day Adventists as a culture of longevity. I was proud to be an Adventist and curious to read the article for myself.

The article discussed three cultures whose people outlive their counterparts. These three were geographically diverse: Sardinia, Italy; Okinawa, Japan; and Loma Linda, California. The author of the article found Loma Linda (representing the Seventh-day Adventist Church) to be the most surprising. Seventh-day Adventist lifestyle is not the result of a regionalized cultural inheritance. Rather, it is a belief-based system dispersed among and lived within many different cultures.

According to the video clip, Seventh-day Adventists tend to outlive the general population by about 10

HOW ENDURING WILL OUR LONGEVITY BE?

years. Why? Because their religion reinforces positive healthful lifestyle behavior. The devout are vegetarian, non-smokers, non-drinkers, and take Sabbath every Saturday to separate themselves from the demands of the world.

I had always been curious about regional cultures of longevity and even somewhat envious of those who were born into those societies. Wow! So I, too, had the advantage of belonging to a culture of longevity—not because I was born in a unique geographical location, but because I choose to be part of a society that has a longevity edge!

What made this culture unique from the other disappearing cultures? Why is it that I didn't have to be born in Okinawa or Sardinia to be part of a culture of longevity?

As I thought about it, I paused for a moment to thank God for the wonderful message that He has given, a message that goes far beyond a healthful lifestyle. It out-

lines how to live at peace with God and fellow humans, how to know God as He has revealed Himself in Scripture, how to understand and live in the world around us that God Himself created. I gave thanks to God for the meaning and purpose this brings to life—to live in the presence of God, who created us, redeemed us, and longs to live with us throughout eternity.

And then I thanked God for the intentionality of those who purposed to share this overarching worldview with me, for those who sacrificed, spent themselves, devoted their talents, energy, and concern so that I and others could be part of this enduring culture. I thanked God for the revelation of Himself in the Bible, for the pioneers of our church, and His servant, Ellen G. White, for my parents, my teachers, my pastors, enthusiastic and committed Pathfinder leaders, church administrators, and my entire church family who caught the vision to create a heritage, to prepare a people of longevity, not just for the present, but for eternity.

Then I received a jolt from a bold

claim in the clip. Of the cultures of longevity surveyed in the article, Seventh-day Adventism is the only one that will not lose its longevity edge because, by virtue of the church community and the nurture and education of its young people, it is the only culture that is still growing and carrying its principles forward.

Now more pointed questions occurred to me: Do we really have a longevity edge as the clip claimed? Do we really have the urgency as did our pioneers to pass on our culture of longevity? Is it true that the next generation is being nurtured in our heritage? Is our incredible legacy enthusiastically shared with them? Do we prefer compromise and doubt over the intentionality, sacrifice, devotion, energy, and concern of our forefathers?

Our descendants deserve no less than we have been given: the privilege of living in a culture that is not losing its longevity edge. And God has given us the challenge of sharing His message in its fullness to a world wandering far from God's plan. This *National Geographic* article is a challenge for us to be true to our calling.

