Mark Higgins

GIVE THANKS

Brier Dudley

Opinion

Editorials

Letters

## At 114 years old, Emma Otis knew a thing or two about the secrets of life

Originally published November 6, 2015 at 3:55 pm | Updated November 12, 2015 at 4:07 pm

Kate Riley



Emma Otis, left, and Stefanie Ellis, in 2012 on Otis' 112th birthday (Picasa)

#### drink lots of milk.

Want to live to 100? Spend more time outdoors, love one another and



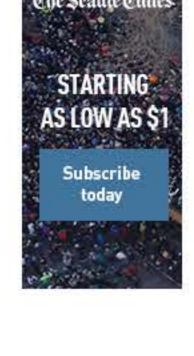












### MAYBE it sounds a little cheesy to say I loved a 114-year-old woman whom I

By Stefanie Ellis

Special to The Times

met only twice, but it's true. I work for the Girl Scouts. The supercentenarian whose smile is draped across

my heart like a well-worn sash was our country's oldest living Girl Scout. Emma Otis, who also held the title of the oldest Washingtonian, died in her sleep Oct. 25 just three days after she officially became the second oldest person in the country and 10th oldest person in the world. When they found her, she was holding a Girl Scout doll. If you sleep with a Girl Scout doll you've had for more than nine decades, you probably managed to soak up a lot of Girl Scout honor. In fact, you likely

invented the term. Emma saw our organization in its infancy, and dedicated her life to introducing girls to powerful leadership and confidence-building opportunities that weren't widely available at the time. She also helped found in Belfair 80 years ago one of our most beloved camps. Truly, it was impossible not to instantly love this woman. 'My take' I first met her in 2012, when she was a spry 110-year-old Got something to say about a topic in the in pink pants. Her hair was sprinkled in baby's breath news? We're looking for personal essays with

prepubescent crescendos and timid whispers. She was like a sweet, wrinkled child, peering up at me through glasses nearly as big as her face. "Everything about Girl Scouts makes me so happy!" she said, clapping. "Everything!"

and her voice was both tiny and big, excited and

During my visit, she danced with Jamie, one of the

mad crush on him, and he didn't seem to mind the

refused to use a cane or a wheelchair.

frustrated, pouring out of her throat in cracked

constant hand holding and googly eyes she made. When we celebrated her 112th birthday together, she

caregivers at her Poulsbo senior living facility. She had a

family snapped a photo of us together. I was kneeling beside Emma's chair, and she took my hands in hers. "They're so cold!" she exclaimed, rubbing her soft, weathered palms against mine. Then she looked me straight in the eyes and said, "I love you." I couldn't stop the tears.

When I presented her with a Girl Scout blanket, her

Now, though, a few days after her passing, I'm celebrating a woman who dedicated her life to service,

age 69.

education and savoring life. I'm raising a cookie in her honor, to go along with my glass of whole milk, which was the secret sauce for Emma's feistiness and impeccable health. She drank a glass every day. That impeccable health allowed her to climb many mountains, visit every state and ride a camel in Egypt at

Emma helped establish our state bird — the American Goldfinch — in 1951, and spent her lifetime giving to others by volunteering at organizations dedicated to leadership, youth empowerment and the outdoors.

We're at a pivotal moment in history when those who have seen and experienced the world in a way most of us never will are disappearing. This means valuable advice, wisdom and ideas for a simpler way of living are disappearing with them.

I believe the driving force behind her desire to establish Girl Scout Camp St. Albans was the driving force for her entire life. "I knew I had to have a camp there," she said. "There was such lovely land everywhere. I said, 'I want

Emma Otis knew what she wanted, and seized every moment and experience she could. I think she'd want us all to do the same. She would probably also want everyone to love each other. There is nothing

someone's hands in yours, and your heart does the rest.

Washington, a freelance writer and trained pastry chef who lives in Seattle.

cheesy about it, really, and Emma proved just how easy it is. You take

Stefanie Ellis is the public-relations director for Girl Scouts of Western



that!""







Thanh Tan

Jonathan Martin

Blanca Torres

strong opinions that are tied to current events.

Send your submission of no more than 400 words to oped@seattletimes.com with the subject line "My Take."

# Most Read Stories

solidarity Seahawks fire back at Tonight Show host

community gathers in

Seattle's French



own superlatives Nordstrom pulls controversial Hanukkah sweater

WSU players felt

Jimmy Fallon with their



used it to fuel their 31-27 win Huge snowstorm forecast in mountains, and rain elsewhere

'disrespected' by UCLA

in pre-game warmups,



Unlimited Digital Access. \$1 for 4 weeks.

