

DECEMBER
2024

AQUA

SOUTH FLORIDA

WISDOM OF THE CENTURY

STORIES FROM 90 FLORIDIANS
AGE 90 AND OLDER

GIFT GUIDE

FOR OCEAN LOVERS

REVIVING OPA-LOCKA

THE ART OF
TRANSFORMATION



90 STORIES TO INSPIRE US ALL

***Wisdom of the Century* shares stories and insights from 90 Floridians age 90 and older.**

BY ROCHELLE B. WEINSTEIN

IN A WORLD BUZZING with quick soundbites and rapidly changing trends, *Wisdom of the Century* stands out as a poignant tribute to the resilience and wisdom of 90 exceptional individuals in Florida—all over the age of 90. This project isn't just another coffee-table book; it holds a rich tapestry of experiences and lessons from those who have lived through the most transformative events in modern history. A blend of storytelling and soulful photography, *Wisdom of the Century* gifts its readers insights that can be infused into their own lives and passed on for generations to come.

THE HEART OF THE PROJECT

Founded by Sandra Coiffman, who has a background in psychology, the project is rooted in the belief that everyone has a story worth sharing. She wanted to shine a light on a generation that has lived through life-altering transformations brought by wars, pandemics, economic and social collapse, immigration, poverty and success, and the exponential development of technological leaps—changes that seemed unimaginable just a century ago.

“What can these individuals teach us about love, life, and legacy,” Coiffman wondered, “and how can we honor this

PHOTOGRAPH THIS PAGE BY LESLIE GABALDON. ALL OTHER PHOTOGRAPHS BY PIPE YANGUAS





The *Wisdom of the Century* team, from left: photographer Pipe Yanguas, author Merle R. Saferstein, project founder Sandra Coiffman, and designer Jenny Menzel.

“

Don't underestimate yourself. Trust your intuition. Be open to opportunities."

— Marilyn Kreisberg,
born 1928



generation and preserve its wisdom?"

Each story included in the book offers a glimpse into the human experience, highlighting themes of love, perseverance, and legacy. Coiffman explains, "This project has transformed my view of aging and how I see my own life. It reminds me to cherish the present, to find strength in vulnerability, and to approach the future with an open heart and the understanding that nothing is permanent. Meeting these 90 remarkable souls has been one of the greatest privileges of my life, and their stories will stay with me forever, guiding me in ways I'm still discovering."

A MOSAIC OF LIVES

Wisdom of the Century displays a colorful array of lives and cultures. Immigrants from over 20 countries share their journeys, enriching the narrative with their diverse backgrounds. Among the featured individuals are authors, artists, musicians, physicians, inventors, engineers, teachers, secretaries, clergy, businesspeople, Holocaust survivors, homemakers, and more—all

with unique and relatable tales defining the human spirit.

Take Victor Billig, for instance. Beginning his career as a pilot in the U.S. Air Force, he later became a mechanical and electrical engineer, inventing the bomb bay doors and designing Helios, the satellite that circles the sun. His contributions to defense and international space programs underscore the impact one person can have on technological advancement. Billig's dedication to bridging the digital divide in underdeveloped regions through satellite technology leaves a legacy impacting an untold number of people, directly and indirectly.

Then there's Dr. Enid Pinkney, who shared her journey as a young Black child growing up in Miami, where the harsh prejudice weighed heavily on her. In search of a life free from discrimination, she left for Chicago. However, one pivotal moment would make her realize that racism was not confined to the South. While Pinkney was serving as a social worker alongside 11 white women in a community project, they all went to a restaurant for lunch one day. When

the food arrived, everyone's meal was served on a plate except Pinkney's, which was given to her in a basket. She instantly recognized that she couldn't run from racism, leading her back home to Miami with her family and community. Pinkney became an educational administrator and devoted her life to activism.

COLLABORATION AND CAMARADERIE

The collaborative spirit of *Wisdom of the Century*'s dedicated team illuminates every aspect of the project. Coiffman has been the driving force from the start. Author Merle R. Saferstein weaves compelling narratives authentically representing each person's voice and legacy. Pipe Yanguas brings his world-traveled lens to capture the essence of everyone in breathtaking portraits. And designer Jenny Menzel combines her eye for detail with a modern, classic touch to create a visually attractive book. "In my almost 80 years, I have worked with many teams. Never have I been with such an amazing group of people," Saferstein remarks, reflecting on the seamless chemistry experienced throughout the project.

THE LEGACY OF SHARED WISDOM

Legacy stands at the cornerstone of *Wisdom of the Century*. Many of the people interviewed shared their desire to be remembered for their achievements, meaningful connections, and the acts of kindness they cultivated throughout their lives. Their stories weave a powerful narrative about the value of relationships and the lasting influence of others on our journeys.

Several conversations revealed the impact mentorship had on some of the subjects during their formative years, emphasizing the ripple effect of positive guidance. It's a striking reminder that our legacies are intimately shaped by the bonds we build and the values we choose to live by each day.

Recounting these conversations, Saferstein shares, "Every conversation was an opportunity for profound learning. The wisdom imparted

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Give to others who have less than you do.”

— Olga Gilbert,
born 1933



“

Nothing happens if you don't have determination.”

— David Schaefer, born 1929





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Once there was, and now there is not. You have to conform with what is.”

— Sally Dorfman,
born 1933

by these remarkable individuals is not just valuable; it has the potential to be life-changing. Their experiences remind us of the power of resilience, the importance of community, and the impact one person can have on many lives.” This sentiment echoes throughout the project as the team collectively strives to honor the legacies of the nonagenarians and centenarians interviewed.

INSPIRING FUTURE GENERATIONS

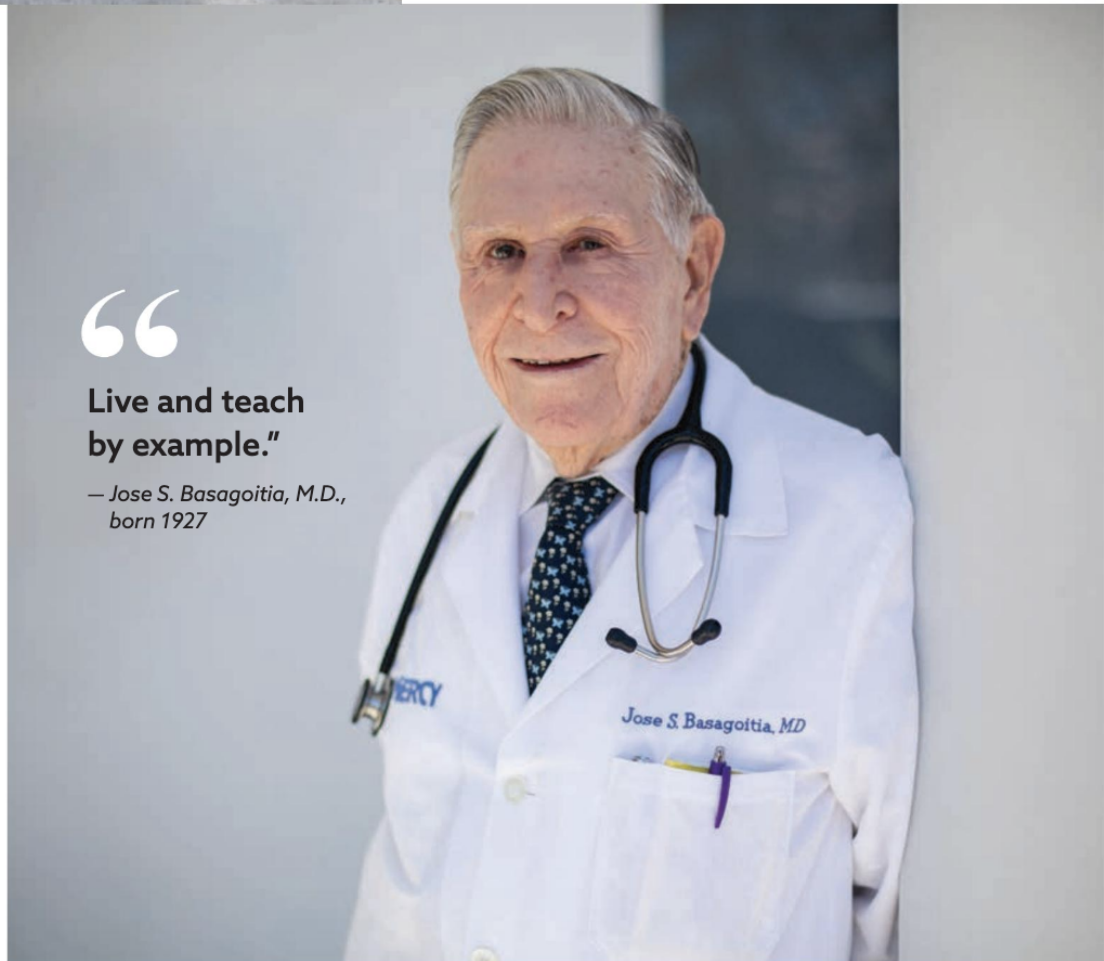
As readers delve into *Wisdom of the Century*, they are invited to reflect on their own lives and consider the legacies they wish to create. The book serves not only as a celebration of life but also as a guide for current and future generations, emphasizing that our actions today define how we will be remembered.

The project deeply resonated with the younger members of the team, who recognize the importance of learning from those who’ve come before them. When asked how he felt about meeting and photographing all 90 participants, Yanguas replied, “I was honored to

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Live and teach by example.”

— Jose S. Basagoitia, M.D.,
born 1927





“

Communication is the key to everything.” — Victor Billig, born 1931

take their portraits. I carry with me all the wonderful perspectives of life and will hold on to the words of wisdom and love that they shared with us. Being old is just a concept in the mind because these people are younger in spirit and lifestyle than many my age that I know.”

Menzel attended three interviews as the only team member who doesn't live in Florida. Remembering how they affected her, she states, “Three of my four grandparents passed away either shortly before or just after my birth. By the time I was 20, my surviving grandmother had developed dementia. I didn't have grandparents to turn to for guidance. Listening to Betty Brosz recount her life on a farm only

hours from where my grandparents were raised made me feel connected to family I never had the chance to know. Meeting these participants brought the project to life for me, deepening my realization of how necessary it is to learn from those who have lived so much longer than we have—even those we've not met.”

Wisdom of the Century is more than a collection of stories; it serves as a testament to the value of our elders and the richness of the human experience. By safeguarding these narratives, the wisdom shared becomes a vital blueprint for cultivating respect, demonstrating resilience, and embracing the transformative power of community.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

Wisdom of the Century launches at the **HistoryMiami Museum** on December 12, 2024, featuring a photo exhibition that will run through February 16, 2025. The book will be available online at www.wisdomofthecentury.com and **Amazon**, and at local bookstores. For more details, contact Sandra Coiffman at info@wisdomofthecentury.com.