



A century of life

Issac N. Long Sr. is all smiles Wednesday as he celebrates his 100th birthday at home. Affectionately known as "Ike the Santa Claus," because of his generosity to children, Long has spent his entire life in James City. He is considered by many in the community to be the town's premier historian and top handyman.

MR. ISSAC DAN LONG SR. was born in 1885 in James City and died 1991. His transcript was the result of an interview in Washington D. C. in 1985 his 100th year. Mr. Long speaks of himself and James City around 1990 to about 1914.

Mr. Long

This is Abba Kano in Washington, my guest today is Mr. Issac Dan Long, Sr. Mr. Long senior, how young are you? (I) Not to young, not now. (Q) Well what does that mean? (I) Not so young, been young, but not now. (Q) When were you born? (I) When was I born? (Q) Uh huh. (I) 1885. (Q) 1885. So you have lived in this world for 100 years. (I) One-hundred years. (Q) In the United States? (I) In the United States? (Q) Mr. Young what is the secret of longevity, long life? (I) Well, I don't know that much, but all I did was try to do the right thing, regardless who you was, I didn't do evil for evil, I did good for evil. And I overcome it every time. (Q) That's very difficult. (I) Yeah, but I did it. (Q) What would you tell the young people of today about that? (I) I tell them regardless how things going, you do the right thing, do the right thing and furthermore, if you just been borned again, you be alright. (Q) Now this is, what are the right things? (I) Born again I mean the Bible, born again you got, you born from the spirit of the all mighty and you know his commandments and go by them. (I) What are those commandments? (I) Thou shalt not steal. Thou shalt not commit adultery. Do unto others as you have others to do unto you, whether they do it or not, you do it. (Q) You have lived in the United States for 100 years, were you born during slavery? (I) Born? (Q) During slavery? (I) Yeah. (Q) Were you? (I) Yeah. (Q) Have you seen some slavery? (I) Yeah I seen

different things happening. (Q) Would you tell us some of them?

(I) Yeah, I seen, uh, mens, what we call right now, kill one another, but I seen a boy, in my days, put a pistol down a mans ear and snapped it three times and she wouldn't fire and pull it, fired right on the ground. I didn't see the man who fired, dead anytime, pistol wouldn't fire. Then the year of 1911, I fell overboard in Chesapeake City, Chesapeake City, place they call Reedville, under the ice, and a fellow that was with me, say I go tell the captain, Ike's drowned. But I --- down there in hole where I went in and come out and I told him here am I. He said, well swim, for God sake swim. So I come out. --- ---- back aboard the boat, was standing up, didn't even get wet, had so many clothes on, 1911.

(Q) Have you, have you ever smoked? (I) No, but a very little, couldn't smoke. (Q) Why? (I) Made me drunk. (Q) If you smoke,

you become drunk? (I) Yeah, come drunk. (Q) So you don't drink?

(I) No, I didn't drink, didn't chew tobacco, didn't, and uh, the only thing I did, but I didn't hurt nobody, I like the sisters, the women folk, I like their. (Q) Tell us about the little town you

were born in. (I) James City. (Q) Yes. (I) It was a little town, it was, in them days, it was a, what we call, free people. We had children over there but all of them was black. Post office, all that, all, up until 1900. Nineteen-hundred, the thing changed.

Man, they worked for who they wanted to work. And so, 1900, a white man came around by the name Senator Simmons, and he got them to vote for him for the Senator, Washington, DC. And he went there and just franchised the whole south. Took the privilege away from

them, what they did have. (Q) What work did you do, at, your early life? (I) Well, I worked with my father, the first work, you know. The first work I ever did was minding birds. I use to mind birds on a farm. The place where we lived at called Graysville, James City was different from Graysville. Graysville wasn't nothing but a farm. And that's were I mind birds, at that for ten cents a day. Then I left there and during 19, 1900's, I was working for my father with sawmill. He was the boss man. And we were piling lumber, 25 cents, getting 25 cents a day, piling lumber 45 feet high. Then I work there, I left from there, then I try to get him let me go away. And so, he say he gonna kept me home until he die. So, he died in 1904 and I left home 1905. And from then, from 1905 I went on a barge, stayed on that till 1915. Left the barge 1915, I went to a fertilize factory, H & J Meadows Fertilize Factory, and stayed there 30 years. Left from there and I went over to a five and ten cent store, Kresses. Stayed there 7 years, left from there, and after I left from there then I went to work around, peddling around from one person to another, Jew's, Mrs Ike, Miss Fittamer, Miss Moore, Miss Stevens, and there. (Q) When did you first, uh, when did you get married? (I) I got married 1912, first wife. I been married twice. First wife, we got married in 1912, I didn't have but one child, by her. And she's the mother, she was the mother of fourteen other children. And she got ten living children over in Baltimore. And uh, she, first wife got sickly, she died. Then I got married again in 39, and that 39, I got nine other children, by my last wife. (Q) How many children do you

have, nine or more than nine? (I) I got nine, ten with my first wife's child. (Q) So you have nineteen children? (I) Uh? (Q) You have nineteen children? (I) Nineteen, see no, I have nine children, last wife, one with my first wife, that make ten. (Q) How many grand children? (I) I can't tell you. I had a fifth generation a few Sundays ago in church, and I don't know how many more. (Q) What do you do now? (I) I do now? (Q) Uh huh. (I) I just do, I mess around, travel. (Q) On you 100th birthday, the mayor of New Bern, North Carolina, declared the day a holiday in the city. Do you live in New Bern. (I) No, I didn't live in New Bern. I lived in place they called Graysville, but it, they call it James City. (Q) Yeah, it's still James City. (I) James City. (Q) But why did the mayor declare the day of your birthday as a public holiday? Why did he do that? (I) Well of course, I guess he go by my age on a book. (Q) Mr. Long, now we have an age called teen-age years. (I) Yeah. (Q) Did you have teen-age years in your days? Teen-age, you know like, uh, when kids are about 10, 12, 14, 15, 16. (I) Same thing changes. (Q) Uh huh, did you have that also in your years? (I) No. (Q) No. (I) Well, what was, when the first time you started traveling, see there wasn't no automobile, ox and carts, horse and buggy, on down. Trains, I seen them, one wood, from wood to coal, from coal to oil, that's three different times. Now we, trucks that took place of trains and traveling, carrying freight and stuff. That's have all you have handled by trains or boat. (Q) People don't know. (I) What have been. (Q) Yes. (I) That's true. (Q) What have been? (I) What have been,

some knows and some don't. (Q) Yes. (I) I knows. (Q) Yes exactly. (I) I know what, I been through it. In my time they use to, uh, shoot marbles, fly kites, play ball and uh. (Q) You played ball too, right? (I) I played ball. (Q) What, uh, what did you play? (I) I played, uh, third base, had a team, was named Brown Sailboys. (Q) Uh huh. And I understand another baseball team in the United States gave you a. (I) That was out Dodger Stadium. (Q) In Los Angeles? (I) Los Angeles. (Q) They invited you. (I) Yeah, I been out there and been, out there, our balls from out there, with all the boys names on it and the manager, at that time. That was in 76, 78. (Q) I don't understand the game of baseball. (I) You don't? (Q) No. (I) That's the reason I love it. (Q) I see. Can you teach me how to understand it? (I) Yeah, I'll do, I don't know it's just like football, I can't understand football. (Q) You can't understand football? (I) No. (Q) Was there no football in your time? (I) No, there wasn't no football in my time. (Q) Only baseball. (I) Nothing but baseball, no basketball. (Q) No basketball. (I) No basketball, it come along later, none of that. (Q) I see, so now you don't understand football? (I) No, I don't understand football. (Q) But you understand basketball? (I) I understand basketball now, but I don't understand football. Cause it looks to me like their fighting. (Q) Now from here, where do you go, from Washington? Do you go, do you talk to churches and? (I) Where I'm going from where? I'm going home. Going back south. Going back home, Wednesday, my life is out there. (Q) And your piece of advice to young people is? (I) Yeah. (Q) To be

clean, to do things that are right. (I) Yeah, that's right. (Q) To live by the ten commandments. (I) Commandments, that's right. Thou shall, what shall not do. What belongs to you keep, what don't belong to you, don't bother it, that's right. (Q) It works. (I) Yeah, it works, yeah. It works. (Q) You have a favorite poem. (I) Yeah. (Q) Would you please give it. (I) "Fight with all your might boys, while they're on the ridge. When you have what to do boys, do it with a will. They will reach the top boys, worse was - ---- hill. Standing at the foot boys, gazing at the sky, how can you get up boys, if you never try. Though you stumble off boy, never be down cast. Try and try again boy, you'll succeed at last." (Q) It is really a beautiful poem. (I) "If I had about a nickel, nickel, never die. Black face, shining eye, crocked toe, snotty nose, that's the way the nigger goes." (Q) Any more like that? (I) Yeah, little boy told me that in 1905. (Q) That was beautiful. (I) Yeah. (Q) Okay. (I) Also like that, I like that, you can figure that 1905, how long that's been. (Q) That, that is, is 81 years. (I) Eighty-one, that's right. That's how long it was, lets see 81, and I got, I had religion, and I got religion in, I got, confessed religion and baptized, 1902. You can figure how many years, that's at. (Q) Eighty-three. (I) Yeah, so I've been around. (Q) You have been around. (I) Do you know, do you know right mind, uh oh, what was just bombed on---, right mind. That's the best day, I ask the master each and every day of my life, keep me in my right mind. (Q) The religion. (I) Yeah, keep me going. Yeah boy. (Q) And you make sure your children are religious too,

right? (I) Yeah, that's right, that's right, that's right. (Q)
Okay. We thank you very much. (I) We thank you. (Q) Thank you.
(I) Thank you. (Q) Uh huh. (I) Thank you.

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