Blue Zones icon Jetton dies at 106

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Remembrance: Lin, 93, was jailed in China for his faith

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In Egypt, church

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In recent years, Jetton drew widespread attention after being featured in writer Dan Buettner's 2005 National Geographic article and subsequent book, which focused on "blue zones," areas of the world where people live longer and have a high sense of well-being. Loma Linda -- and, specifically, the already closely studied Adventist community there -- was one of the four zones.

The spotlight on Jetton led to several national television appearances, including the Oprah Winfrey Show in 2008, which featured her workout routine: pedaling several miles daily on a stationary bike and lifting five-pound weights. Buettner described Jetton as "the poster girl" for the Adventist lifestyle, embodying its best practices, such as having a strong sense of community, volunteerism and keeping the Sabbath.

"She was an emblem," Buettner said. "You could tell her story, and it kind of reflected what people should be doing to reach her age. She represented the promise of good living."

Jetton also was one of several dozen centenarians participating in the Adventist Health Study, an ongoing research project at Loma Linda University that is funded by the National Institutes of Health and examines why Adventists tend to live an average of 10 years longer than other Americans.

Dr. Gary Fraser, who is co-leading the study, recalled that the years had done nothing to dull Jetton's sharp mind. "She was so quick-witted and funny," he said. "She was very impressive."

Ora Marge Hodge was born to a muleskinner and ranch cook in Yuba City, California. She attended Sutter Union High School, where she was a member of the debate team, according to a biography by granddaughter Shawn Casey-White. She graduated in 1921.

While a nursing student at St. Helena Sanitarium and Hospital in California's Napa Valley, she met a bellhop who would later become her husband, James Aston Jetton.

The couple married in 1926, after a three-year, chaperoned courtship. Jetton then worked as a nurse in Walla Walla, Washington, and later, San Francisco, Los Angeles and Santa Rosa, while her husband was in medical school.

They spent their nearly 77 years of marriage opening and running the first clinic in the small community of Fallbrook, California; offering their services to the Army during World War II; establishing Woodruff Community Hospital in the Long Beach area; and serving as medical relief missionaries in Zambia and Ethiopia.

Jetton's active lifestyle continued into retirement, Casey-White said: She worked at the Loma Linda University Medical Center library and volunteered for Voice of Prophecy, an Adventist radio broadcast.

Jetton was preceded in death by her husband in 2003.
Remembrance: Lin, 93, was jailed in China for his faith

Though he was later exonerated, Seventh-day Adventist Church administrator David Lin was jailed for his faith for 17 years in China under Chairman Mao Zedong's regime.

Lin, who died February 10 at age 93, was serving in Shanghai as secretary of the Adventist Church's China Division when the country was swept by momentous political and social changes under Chairman Mao. When the assets of the Adventist Church in China were frozen, Lin turned to other employment, while in his spare time translating the Adventist book Desire of Ages from English to Chinese.

Lin and his family's commitment to practicing their faith continued to attract the attention of authorities. He was arrested in 1958 on charges of "counter-revolution activities," and in 1960 he was sentenced to 15 years of imprisonment.

After serving his term, Lin went on to pastor one of the largest Adventist congregations in Shanghai. He retired in Loma Linda, California, United States where he continued his translation and philanthropic work. In 1991, Lin was fully exonerated by the Chinese government of all charges of wrongdoing.

Lin later wrote about his incarceration, forced labor and separation from his wife and five children without bitterness, saying: "In retrospect, I praise God for His providential care in making all things work out for the good of all those concerned."

John Graz, secretary-general of the International Religious Liberty Association, called Lin a "giant of moral courage, whose life stands as a testament to the endurance of faith."

"In the story of David Lin's life, I hear echoes of the stories of hundreds and thousands of men and women around the globe today who are harassed, jailed, and sometimes put to death, simply because they have chosen the path of faithfulness," Graz said.

Adventist world church President Ted N.C. Wilson spoke of Lin as a "valiant servant of the Lord who stood courageously for God's church during very difficult times."

"On behalf of the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist family, we offer our deep sympathy to members of Pastor David Lin's family," said Wilson. "Through God's leading, may we learn from David Lin's stalwart example of proclaiming the three angels' messages as we face the future challenges to our faith in God and His Word. What a blessed hope we have in Jesus as we look forward to seeing Pastor Lin at Christ's soon return."
In Egypt, church

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The academy is one of two church-run schools that suspended classes last month due to ongoing political unrest in the country.

Alex and Kate Podbrezsky, both teachers at the academy, are reportedly on their way back to the country after an evacuation of non-essential expatriate staff and faculty at the school, local church leaders said.

Egypt Field president for the Adventist Church, Llewellyn Edwards and his wife Karin, both of whom stayed in Egypt during the revolution, said the event has strengthened ties between the country's small Adventist community and its neighbors.

Edwards, who stood outside the Adventist Church he pastors in Heliopolis on the evening former President Hosni Mubarak resigned, said many of his Muslim neighbors approached him, reminding him "this victory was for Christians as well" and "assuring us of their friendship."

The couple prayed together in the church, then joined the crowds, they said. "We stood in awe at what we were experiencing ... the jubilant deafening noise, flags waving, people leaning out of car windows, standing on top of cars and monuments, shaking hands an congratulating everyone around them," Karin said.

"It was surreal," she added.

As Egyptians shape the future of their country, the Edwards are soliciting prayers for a peaceful transition of government that results in freedom for all of Egypt's citizens.

"There are many forces -- internal and external, hidden and open -- who would seek to manipulate the future of Egypt," Edwards said. "Now is the time for prayer for God to ... bring about the freedom that would bless the good people of this country," he added.

In addition to prayers, the Adventist Church in Egypt is also offering practical support for community members who may be affected by the recent turmoil. The church is running a stress management course led by Karin at the church's Healthy Life Center.