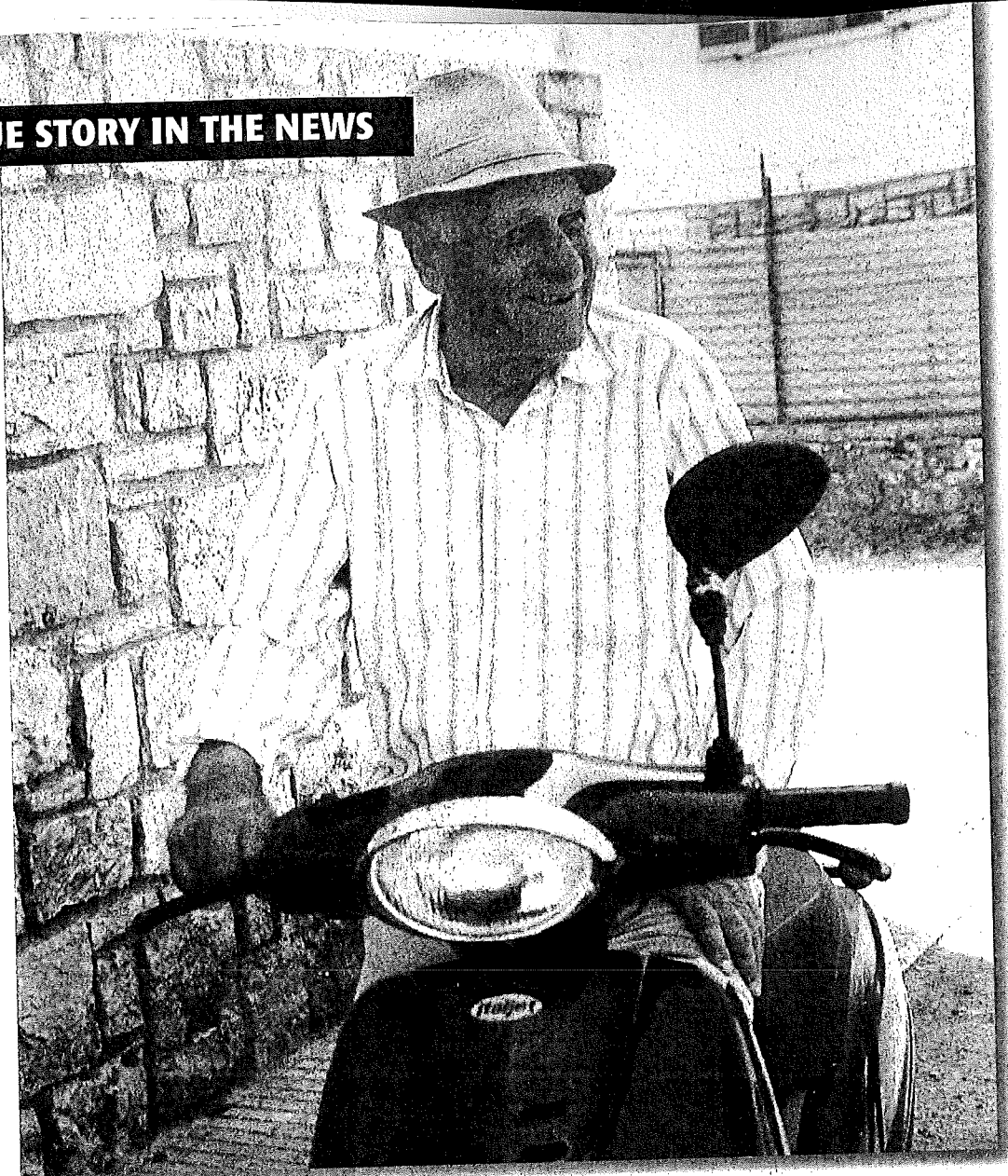


A TRUE STORY IN THE NEWS



PRE-READING

Look at the photo and read the title of the story on page 3. Then think about these questions. Discuss your answers with your classmates.

- ▶ The man in the photo likes to ride his bright blue moped up and down the mountainous roads near his town. Can you guess how old he is? Look on page 154 to find out.
- ▶ The man lives in Campodimele, a village in Italy where people live to be very old. It is rare for anyone to die before the age of 85, and most people stay healthy and busy well into their 90s. What do you think might be some reasons for their health and longevity?

With your classmates, make a list of possible reasons people stay healthy and live long in Campodimele. Then read the story to find out what researchers concluded.

La Dolce Vita (The Sweet Life)

1 When he was 34 years old, Gerardo Pecchia left his village in Italy to work in the United States. He worked in the United States for 40 years; then, at the age of 74, he retired and returned to Campodimele, his native village.

2 Campodimele was as beautiful as Gerardo remembered it. The tiny town is on a mountaintop 75 miles south of Rome, surrounded by olive trees. A medieval wall encircles the village, and narrow stone streets wind between its quaint old houses. In the center of the town there is a picturesque *piazza*—a town square—where people gather to chat in the shade of a 300-year-old elm tree. Even the weather in Campodimele is beautiful: At 2,100 feet above sea level, the town catches fresh sea breezes that keep the temperatures moderate—not too hot, and not too cold.

3 Gerardo was happy to be back in Campodimele among family and old friends. He was happy, too, that he had enough money to enjoy his retirement. During his 40 years in the United States, he had paid into the Social Security fund, so he received a small pension. Each time he cashed a check, he exchanged his U.S. dollars for Italian lira, and he had enough lira to live a simple but comfortable life.

4 Gerardo lived contentedly in Campodimele for 25 years; then, when he was 99 years old, he had a serious problem—not with his health, as could be expected at that age—but with the U.S. government. Officials at the U.S. Embassy in Rome noticed that a 99-year-old man named Gerardo Pecchia was cashing Social Security checks in Campodimele. They had a hard time believing that Gerardo Pecchia could still be alive. Perhaps he had died, they thought, and a son or nephew with the same name was illegally

cashing the checks. Embassy officials wrote Mr. Pecchia, asking for proof that he was alive. Gerardo traveled to Rome and went to the embassy in person. “I am Gerardo Pecchia,” he told the officials there. “As you can see, I am still alive.”

Gerardo Pecchia was not just alive—he was 5 alive and well. He was still taking care of his garden, still doing his own shopping, still taking the bus to visit his son. Anywhere else in the world, people would be amazed to see a 99-year-old man with such vitality. In Campodimele, however, it is not a surprising sight. In the tiny town of 890 people, 48 are over the age of 90, and most of them, like Gerardo, are healthy and busy. They chop wood, milk cows, and hunt; they take care of gardens and olive trees. One 94-year-old man is often seen riding his bright blue moped on the mountainous roads around Campodimele.

When Gerardo retired in Campodimele, he 6 retired in one of the healthiest places on earth. It is rare for anybody in Campodimele to die before reaching the age of 85, and people remain healthy and active well into their 90s. In 1985, the World Health Organization sent a team of medical researchers to Campodimele. Their task was to determine why people there lived such long and healthy lives. The researchers discovered that the blood pressure of elderly Campodimeleans was exceptionally low. It was not unusual for a 90-year-old man to have the same blood pressure level as his 20-year-old great-grandson. Cholesterol levels were low, too—around 100, less than half the usual level in most Western nations. These findings fascinated the researchers. If Campodimeleans can have such low blood pressure and cholesterol levels, why can't we all? What is their secret? Is it diet? Is it lifestyle? Or is it simply good genes?

(continued)

7 Some residents of Campodimele credit the water they drink for their longevity and health. For centuries the village has been known for its mineral water, which people collect from several fountains in the town. People claim the minerals in the water prevent hardening of the arteries. Other residents credit the food they eat for their good health. The people of Campodimele eat a traditional Mediterranean diet, which consists mainly of fresh vegetables, pasta, wild mushrooms, olive oil, shallots, and a moderate amount of red wine. They eat very little meat, salt, or butter, and very few people in the village are heavy coffee drinkers, unlike other Italians. A typical lunch in Campodimele might be homemade bread grilled with olive oil and tomatoes; spaghetti with carrots, onions, and tomatoes; and perhaps some seafood, snails fried in olive oil, or local beans, called *cicerchie*.

8 The researchers wondered if the lifestyle in Campodimele could be having a positive effect on residents' health, so they observed people as they went about their daily lives. The researchers concluded that the lifestyle did have a positive effect. In Campodimele, most people follow a traditional rural timetable: They get up at sunrise, go to bed at 8 P.M., and eat at the same time every day. They also get plenty of exercise. Because the streets are so narrow, walking is the usual way to get around Campodimele. Nearly everyone works daily in gardens or takes care of chickens or other small animals. Many of Campodimele's inhabitants are farmers, and they keep fit walking up and down the steep hillside that separates the village from their plots of land. In addition, the lifestyle seems, at least on the surface, to

be free of stress. There is no crime in Campodimele, and there is no traffic because cars are not allowed in the center of the village. Perhaps most important, elderly people are not separated from younger people; they do not live in retirement homes but instead are well integrated with the rest of the population. In Campodimele, it is not unusual to see four generations gather to chat under the elm tree in the piazza. Dr. Pietro Cugini, who led the research, noted: "The elderly person is never alone, but has a life synchronized with that of others, as in one big family."

9 In addition to examining the water, diet, and lifestyle in Campodimele, the researchers tried to determine if the longevity of Campodimeleans, who have been members of only a few families for centuries, has a genetic cause. Dr. Cugini believes that genes do play a role. Many inhabitants have a special enzyme that reduces blood pressure and cholesterol levels. Moreover, a study of Campodimeleans who left the village for Toronto, Canada, in the 1960s showed that they, too, lived long and healthy lives—an indication that Campodimeleans carry a gene for longevity. Still, Dr. Cugini does not think that good genes alone guarantee longevity. "You also need a well-structured lifestyle," he warns. At the end of the four-year study, he concluded that the villagers' health and longevity are based 30 percent on genetics and 70 percent on environment.

10 The old people in Campodimele seemed puzzled by all the laboratory tests and record-keeping. Pasquale Pannozzi, 83, wondered, "I don't know why they are spending all this time in Campodimele. The answer is easy: This is a perfect spot. No stress. Who would want to die?" ♦

7. In Campodimele, people are not surprised when they see 90-year-olds hunting and chopping wood. In other places in the world, however, people would be so surprised, they would find it hard to believe. They would be _____ to see it.
8. Campodimele sits on the top of a mountain, so its streets cannot be straight. They go around the mountain and _____ between the houses.
9. Many of the people in Campodimele are farmers, and almost everyone has a garden or small animals. Campodimele is in a _____ part of Italy.
10. The old people in Campodimele didn't understand why the researchers wanted to study them. They were _____ by all the laboratory tests and record-keeping.

◆ USING CONTEXT CLUES



Sometimes you can find the meaning of a word or phrase from the context clues—the surrounding words and sentences. Before looking up a word in a dictionary, check for context clues.

In each sentence, circle the word or words that have the same meaning as the words in *italics*. The first one is done for you.

1. In the center of the town, there is a *piazza*—a town square—where people gather.
2. Campodimele has *moderate temperatures*—not too hot and not too cold.
3. Gerardo was happy and satisfied because his life was good in Campodimele. He was *contented* there.
4. A typical lunch in Campodimele might be homemade bread; spaghetti with carrots, onions, and tomatoes; and perhaps some seafood or local beans, called *cicerchie*.
5. In Italy, there are people who drink a lot of coffee, but the people in Campodimele are not *heavy coffee drinkers*.
6. The researchers wondered if the lifestyle in Campodimele could be having a positive effect on *residents'* health, so they observed the people living there as they went about their daily lives.
7. Elderly people are not separated from younger people; they are well *integrated* with the rest of the population.
8. Researchers wondered if genes have an influence on Campodimeleans' longevity. They discovered that genes do *play a role*.

DEVELOPING READING SKILLS

◆ UNDERSTANDING THE MAIN IDEAS

There are three correct ways to complete each sentence. Draw a line through the one incorrect answer.

1. Campodimele
 - a. is a tiny town on a mountaintop 75 miles from Rome.
 - b. ~~was the birthplace of many famous Italians.~~
 - c. is a beautiful town that has beautiful weather.
 - d. is one of the healthiest places on earth.
2. The people of Campodimele
 - a. rarely die before age 85.
 - b. travel to Canada for medical care.
 - c. remain healthy and active well into their 90s.
 - d. have low blood pressure and low cholesterol levels.
3. The medical researchers who went to Campodimele
 - a. were sent by the World Health Organization.
 - b. tried to determine why people in Campodimele lived such long and healthy lives.
 - c. observed people as they went about their daily lives.
 - d. concluded that the lifestyle in Campodimele did not have a positive effect on residents' health.
4. The doctor who led the research in Campodimele
 - a. noticed that elderly people are never alone.
 - b. believes that good genes guarantee longevity.
 - c. believes people need a well-structured lifestyle.
 - d. concluded that Campodimeleans' health and longevity are based 30 percent on genetics and 70 percent on environment.

◆ UNDERSTANDING SUPPORTING IDEAS

The ability to understand which information supports a main idea is an important reading skill. Sentences with supporting ideas give you more information about the main ideas, often by explaining or giving examples. For example, look at paragraph 2 of "*La Dolce Vita*" on page 3. The main idea of the paragraph—that Campodimele is beautiful—is followed by many supporting ideas: "The tiny town is . . . surrounded by olive trees . . . narrow stone streets wind between its quaint old houses. In the center of the town there is a picturesque *piazza*—a town square."