

PROFILE: She's Planted 126,000 Trees

"He that plants Trees, loves others besides himself."—Thomas Fuller

A tree grows every day of its life. Maybe that was what Mary Chandler of Ulysses, Ky., had in mind when she planted those first 500 trees.

"The doctors gave me a 13% chance to live," she says, recalling her open-heart surgery.

In 1965, the operation to mend a hole in Mary's heart was experimental. People still marveled at surgeons repairing a heart by removing it from the chest.

At the age of 56, Mary was among the oldest people at that time to undergo the risky heart surgery.

But, like the hardy tree that lives through a catastrophic lightning strike, Mary survived the five-hour operation, the wires, the drainage tubes. Lying in her hospital bed afterward, she pondered the meaning of life.

"Take it easy," the doctors said. But Mary, having learned just how sweet life can be, wanted to shout, "I'm alive!" And living didn't mean sitting; it meant doing.

It caused quite a stir in the community when just six months after the

operation folks spied Mary trudging up and down her hilly Kentucky land. She was planting seedlings.

"They thought I had lost my mind," she says and chuckles. But the feisty Kentuckian was making up her own rules for survival.

"They said repeatedly I had the most determination of any person

they'd ever had," Mary remembers her doctors saying.

The medical folks asked her to be a part of their cardiac research project. Agreeing meant more pain, this time purely for research. "You've been through enough," Mary's loved ones argued. "I thought it might help someone else," she says.

Therein lies the other reason for Mary's longevity. If the first half of the secret to her longevity is "live life doing," the second half is "do for other folks."

Trees have always been part of new beginnings. God created them on the third day. Man has valued them ever since, from the first wobbly wooden wheel to the yew tree's possible cancer cure.

In the 26 years since her operation, Mary's forest has increased to

vintage tree, Mary's face records a lifetime of pain and caring. Worry wrinkles tell of the trying times—the heart surgery and, more recently, the hip operations and the stroke.

But laugh lines recall her family, her 44 years of teaching, and her forest. "When I wanted to get 20,000 trees out when we had spring break, [my students] came and helped," she says.

They still bring their children or their grandchildren. Former students also write the teacher who made sure their roots in life were firmly planted.

The self-taught forester has won several awards, including the tristate Tom Wallace Forestry Award and being named the Kentucky Conservationist of the Year.

"I had the best survival rate of planted trees, I think, in the state," she says. "I've planted trees where a billy goat couldn't go."

The award she is most proud of is the Outstanding Citizen Award for Lawrence County. "I used to do for all the elderly in the community. And I still do a lot for the kids, although I'm not as active as I used to be."

Despite her recent hip operations and stroke, she continues to lead. Local Scouting, 4-H, and science clubs still come in droves to her farm for outings. And she serves on the Lawrence County

Extension District Board, the Soil and Water Conservation Board, and the 4-H Council.

She worries that she can't do justice to these roles because of her poor health. She thinks of stepping aside for someone younger.

"But every time I mention it, they say, 'Oh, no. You never miss a meet-



"Pamper yourself," the doctors told Mary Chandler after her open-heart surgery. But Mary decided that a life worth living is a life worth doing.

126,000 trees. "This last year, I planted 2,000," says Mary, 82. Now, she has workers do the actual trudging and digging. But she still prepares every seedling before it goes into the ground.

"If I can pull them out, I make them replant them," she says.

Like the annual rings found in a

PHOTO: FRANK ANDERSON

ing," she explains. If pressed, she admits, "I don't know why, but I can get things done."

So she continues to live life the way she always has: as fully as possible and thinking of others. It's why she keeps planting those trees. She knows she will never see most of them reach maturity.

"There were trees when I came into this world," she says. "Why can't I leave them for somebody else?"

Her words echo those of President Bush. "Forests are the sanctuaries not only of wildlife but also of the human spirit," he said. "Every tree is a compact between generations."

The President was speaking of his goal of having citizens plant and maintain nearly a billion trees per year in the nation.

Mary hasn't heard of the President's plan, but she volunteers to be one of his thousand points of light.

"All he'd have to do is come and ask me, and I'd try it," she says. She chuckles at the image of the President driving up to her farm, a billion seedlings in tow.

A tree grows every day of its life. So does Mary Chandler.

Nancy Dorman-Hickson

Editor's note—Mary can't do it all. If you'd like to help, write to the National Tree Trust, 1001 Pennsylvania Ave. N.W., Suite 1201-South, Washington, DC 20004; or phone 202-628-TREE (202-628-8733).

LETTERS

Flattery Will Get You . . .

Progressive Farmer is my favorite farm magazine; I have been a reader for more than 50 years. The "Country Voices" and "My Thoughts" columns are the pages I turn to first.—*Betty Whitcher, South Pittsburg, Tenn.*

Thank you for printing the many interesting articles about farmers and ranchers who are also conservationists. It is good to know what they are doing. We receive several other ag-industry periodicals, and, as an environmentalist who ranches, I have been distressed by the hostile and defensive attitude toward environmental issues taken by most other ag-industry editors.

Thank you for presenting the mid-



Merry Christmas
Happy New Year

Cattle Card

We get several Christmas cards each year from our readers. But this one from F.D. Read of Weatherford, Tex., may be the most unusual. In his spare time, Read trains oxen. Here, he is shown with his two 1,600-pound Red Brahmans, Spot and Red.

dle ground, for showing us how and why, and for applauding those who are leading the way toward a better world for all of us. Each of us can make a difference.—*Dauris J. Granberry, Robstown, Tex.*

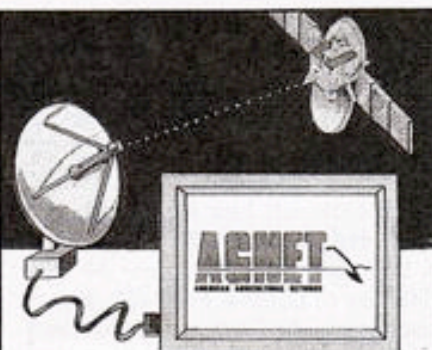
I have had many calls and comments about Operation Orphans—all highly complimentary. (See "This Hunt Is for Kids Only," September 1991.) As a matter of interest, my biggest hunt is the exotic hunt, where I take 20 to 30 boys.—*Jim Inks, Llano, Tex.*

Coon Away

This summer, I have been taking care of my dad's sweet corn, and I've discovered a simple way to keep the coons out of the field. I call it Coon Away.

All you have to do is take some of your mom's cheap perfume or some of your dad's aftershave and sprinkle it around the outside edges of the corn patch. The coons think someone is in there, so they go away. We had more than 1,100 ears of corn, and the coons only got 4 ears.

I guess this won't qualify for "Handy Devices," but I hope it will



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