

# 'An American Tragedy' U.S. Ranks High In Chance of Death Before 65

By BOB WILSON  
Americans have a built-in handicap in trying to reach the ripe old age of 65. They are dying too early - some 700,000 pass on before the traditional retirement age each year. Statistics show that people in nearly all other developed nations have a better chance of reach-

ing 65. Because of this, the U. S. should consider a realignment of its efforts in health care, a Duke University researcher says. Dr. James W. Vaupel says the "early dead" are the nation's most disadvantaged minority and "an American tragedy" because something can be done to change the picture.

The U. S. ranks 26th among the 28 major developed nations in the percentage of its newborns who'll never reach 65, Vaupel notes in a new study.

"The United States is accustomed to view itself as the world's leading developed country," he says. "In terms of early death - which surely is a key indicator of the quality of life - the United States is a relatively backward and deprived nation."

A member of Duke's Institute of Policy Sciences and Public Affairs, Vaupel is investigating the social and economic consequences of early death. By his calculations, early deaths:

-Cost the nation \$64 billion a year in lost earning power.

-Leave almost 400,000 children a year without the guidance and affection of a parent.

-Strip from the dead themselves 23 million years of life expectancy each year.

Vaupel said in an interview that a newborn Swede has the world's best chance of making it to 65. Only 18.3 per cent of that Scandinavian country's newborns will die early, as opposed to 27.5 per cent of American newborns.

Although the likelihood of dying before 65 for a newborn is 27.5 per cent, the early dead account for more than a third of the nation's two million deaths each year because of the large proportion of people below 65, Vaupel said.

The relatively high pre-65 death rate in the U. S. is not due to non-white deaths as much as is commonly assumed, Vaupel said. Even if the early death rate for whites alone is considered, the U. S. still ranks no better than 19th, on the level of Austria or Ireland.

Vaupel uses the convenient, if admittedly arbitrary, boundary age of 65 to separate early and late death in a paper written for the policy sciences institute.

While only a minority of deaths each year are early ones, these deaths account for the vast majority of life-years lost, the Duke policy analyst said.

"Reducing the incidence of early death is more important than simple comparisons of the numbers of early and late deaths suggest," Vaupel said, "because early death deprives an individual of life - and society of the individual - for more years than late death."

He argues that the nation should "restructure the way we perceive" health care, shifting and increasing resources and manpower to combat early death more extensively.

Said Vaupel: "We have to begin worrying more about the equity of prolonging the lives of the elderly while not funding those programs that could avert the deaths of those who will never reach old age."

The Duke researcher said almost eighty per cent of the 700,000 early deaths each year are due to cancer, heart disease, infant mortality and accidents and homicides.

The average age in this group is 47, according to Vaupel.

He argues that a well-designed package of programs aimed at reducing early death would result in millions of life-years gained, as well as huge economic benefits.

Thus, Vaupel advocates a four-pronged attack by:

-Providing better health care delivery to all Americans

-Altering "self-hazardous" behavior, such as smoking too much, reckless driving and neglecting high blood pressure.

-Reducing environmental hazards, which are implicated by many researchers in causing cancer.

-Expanding biomedical research into the causes and cures of diseases that strike down many pre-65 Americans.

Cutting the early death rate only one per cent would mean 25,000 lives a year saved, Vaupel estimates.

The early death rate actually has been dropping about five percentage points during this century. Vaupel calculates that raising the decline to six points would be worth \$20 billion a year in total benefits.

He said a lot of attention is given to inequality in American life, especially disparities in income and racial status, but almost no one seems concerned about lifespan inequality.

"A strong case can be made," he said, "that the early dead are at least as disadvantaged a group, both in terms of the proportion of the population affected and the severity of their misfortune, as the poor or non-whites."

Those doomed to early deaths comprise more than a quarter of the population, as opposed to twelve per cent for the poor and thirteen per cent for non-whites, he said.

Early deaths preys disproportionately on non-whites, Vaupel found, putting them in a kind of double jeopardy when it comes to equal opportunity in American life.

A newborn non-white can expect a dismal 39 per cent chance of early death, compared to 24 per cent for a newborn white.

Vaupel said males of all races are the big losers in early death - more than 400,000 a year - and they consequently account for most of the life-years lost.

He draws a sharp distinction between early and late death, that which occurs after 65 by his reckoning, and speaks of "quality-adjusted life years."



AT FOREST HILLS - Singer Arthur Prysock (second from left) and his wife Jean joined Miller Brewing Company president John A. Murphy (second from right) and Miller's vice president of Market Planning Thomas B. Shropshire in the Miller hospitality tent during this year's U. S. Open Tennis Tournament. Prysock is the popular voice for Miller's Lowenbrau commercials.

## Prysock: The Voice of Lowenbrau

MILWAUKEE, WIS. - The voice is deep, expressive, with a resonance that can be felt and an intimacy that lures the listener into the song's mood and easy melody.

The voice, which is not identified in Miller Brewing Company's commercials for Lowenbrau has been prompted a number of inquiries to Miller requesting identification and background information.

The smooth, easy-going baritone voice is that of Arthur Prysock, who has warmed the hearts of ballad enthusiasts for more than 20 years.

In one of the inquiries to Miller an enthusiastic writer said she'd "rather listen to the Lowenbrau ads than opera, symphony, Mozart, Brahms or Bach. The deep voice and easy melody are a very unique combination... the best I've ever heard."

Other writers indicate that the voice attracted their attention to the ad. One such individual wrote: "The ads, the singer and beer are truly something special."

Still other writers request copies of voice recordings and ask if the singer has any other popular songs available.

Prysock, the object of their admiration, was born in Union, S. C., and grew up in Hartford, Conn. His first job was at the Turf Club in Hartford, where he earned \$3 a night with the Harold Holt band.

In 1944, he got his first big break when he joined the Buddy Johnson band as a vocalist. That same year

Prysock ignited his reputation with the recording of "They All Say I'm the Biggest Fool" appearing on the Decca label. His string of popular hits continued with "I Wonder Where Our Love Has Gone" and "Jet My Love."

After recording 15 hits, Prysock left the Johnson band in 1952. He then traveled around the country making appearances in small clubs. His smooth mellow sound increased in popularity as well as attracted aficionados of another famous singer, Billy Eckstine.

When Prysock signed a contract to record on the "Old Towne" label he met a young song writer, Norman Mapp. In 1956, Mapp wrote another Prysock hit, "I Worry About You."

He added to his already formidable reputation with other popular ballads such as "It's Too Late, Too Late," "Stella by Starlight," and "Autumn Leaves."

In addition to his recording success, Prysock has also made special appearances in such major clubs as Mister Kelly's in Chicago, the Fremont Hotel in Las Vegas, the Diplomat Hotel in Miami, Ciro's Memory Lane in Los Angeles and Carnegie Hall.

He has also been a guest on "The Tonight Show," "The Merv Griffin Show" and "The Mike Douglas Show."

Prysock's debut with the Lowenbrau theme was in August, 1976. At that time, domestic Lowenbrau was being test marketed in select areas of the country. However, now that domestically brewed Lowenbrau is available nationally, Prysock's voice is gaining popularity in markets throughout the country.

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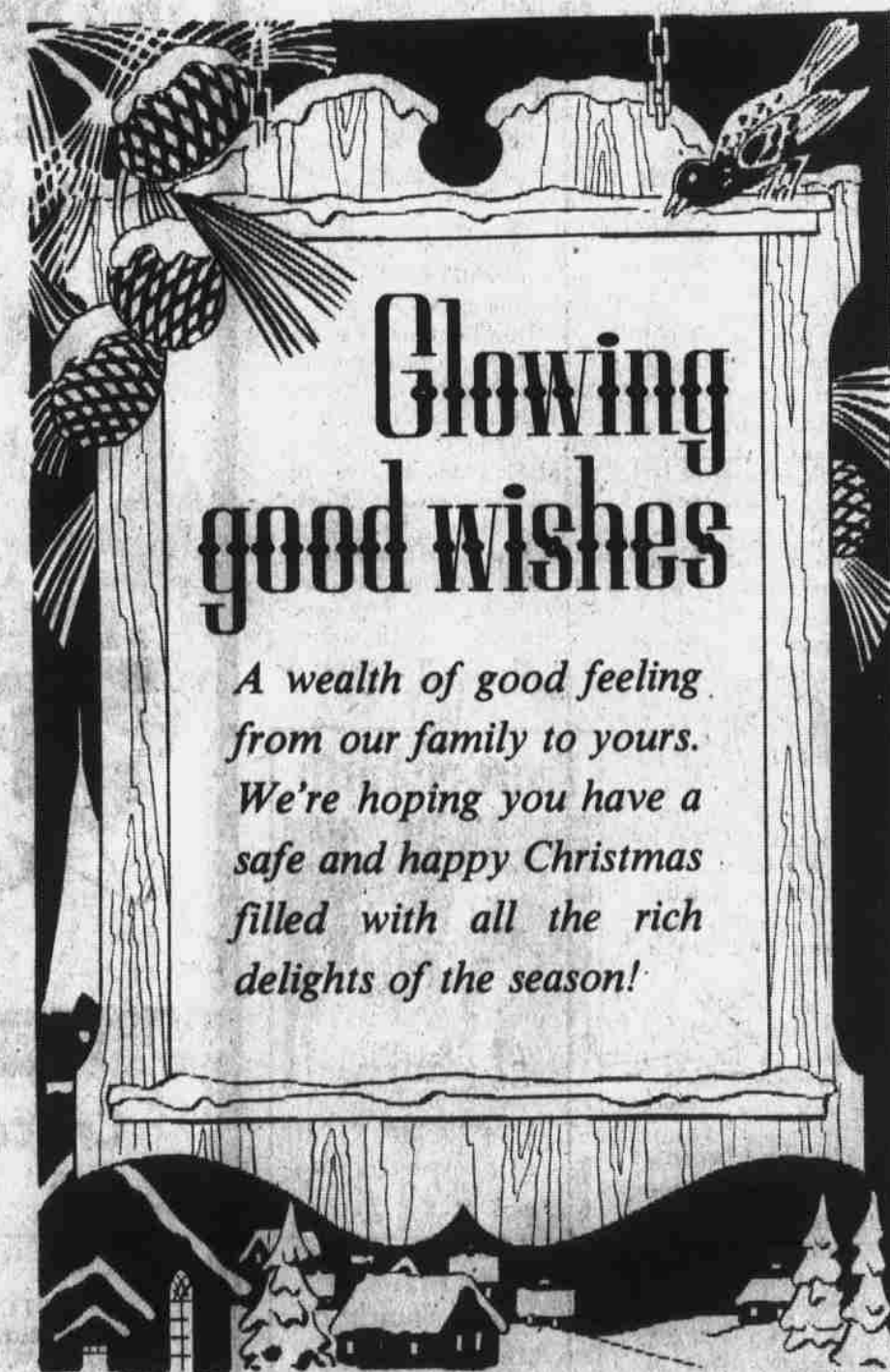
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