

How Not to Just Survive, But to Live!

By Molly Hegman

Survivors are people who exist despite all of the road blocks that slow them down. I know many survivors, alive or dead, who showed me not just to survive but to live. They had some characteristics in common.

My father-in-law lived to be 95 years old. I saw him two days before he died. He was sharp and ready for whatever the next day would bring. He was forced into retirement when he was sixty-two. That didn't stop him from working. He became a mentor for people who were trying to start their own businesses. He and his wife became associated with a group sponsored by the Rockefeller family. He was an expert in the paint field and was sent to third world countries to help start up paint factories. He did this for about 10 years. Meanwhile he and his wife, Laura, kept up their social life. They played bridge, traveled and best of all they were terrific dancers. She died the week they moved into an independent living facility. He survived for a few more years, playing bridge and reading all of his grandson's text books. His grandson was in law school at the time. I don't believe he survived ... I believe he lived.

My mom was ninety-one when she died a very quiet death surrounded by most of her eight children and some of her grandchildren. She was fine until the last year of her life when she became confused. She was only fifty-six when her spouse died. She still had three young ladies at home. She had to hold it together for us. My two younger sisters were fifteen and seventeen. As they grew up, married and started families, mom lived with my youngest sister. She took care of six children and the house while Cathy and her husband worked. Mom still had her social life. She played cards and Mahjong. She and her sister, Rachel belonged to an African Violet Club and displayed their violets at the county fair. At one time she had over 300 violets. She was the ultimate grandmother, showing unconditional love to all of her thirty-nine grandchildren. Somehow she made each one feel as though he or she was her favorite. She survived but she also lived, using her sense of humor to deal with a large family and the changing world around her.

Aunt Marty, my aunt-in-law, is ninety-three ... almost ninety-four. She still lives in her house alone but for her two cats. She taught high school Math classes for many years. She was still tutoring her grandchildren just a couple of years ago. As an adult, I have met many people who remember her. They knew that she meant business but they still loved her. Over the years we have become close. She is so much fun! She played golf until she was ninety-one. She still plays bridge. She has a group of ladies who go out to dinner every Monday night; the driver is ninety-five. She has a boyfriend who lives in North Carolina but calls her every night at 9:30 and comes to visit her every couple of months. He is a year older than she is. Marty is not just a survivor, she is full of life!