

Love, Laugh, Pray



THOSE THREE WORDS are one of the signs I have posted on the door of my suite here at Wesley Palms. Laugh, Love and Pray. That pretty well sums up my philosophy of life.

The other sign on my door is a note to God, telling Him that I am ready, but in no hurry. I celebrated my 99th birthday last month, but am in no rush to move on quite yet.

I grew up out in the country in Orange County, California in an area that later became Disneyland. Those were the years of the Great Depression. We were poor, but never went hungry. The chickens in the coop outback and a garden provided our basic needs. We wore uniforms to school, so I never had to worry about whether my dresses were as good as those of the other girls.

My favorite teacher, the one who had the greatest influence on me, taught music. More importantly she taught Life. I had the role of Yum Yum in our school production of *The Mikado*, and leads in several other shows. She was such a meaningful person that for many years twelve of us, three boys and their wives and three girls and their husbands, held an annual reunion with her, until she died.

I always loved to sing. In church, in school, everywhere. In later life I have often wondered why women seem to lose their voices, but men never do. Just look at the choir in almost any church and you will see young women and old men. It just doesn't seem fair.

But I am not complaining. I don't do that. I never did. Well, maybe I did once. In high school I worked in the cafeteria during the lunch hour. I was paid 15 cents a day and had no lunch. That was my spending money. But the boys who washed the dishes were paid 25 cents and given a free lunch. That was not fair, and I took the matter to our supervisor. His answer was: "But you are a girl." I told him that girls get hungry, too, but he didn't budge. Maybe I was a pioneer in the women's movement and just didn't know it at the time.

Later I became a very successful business woman. A friend and I, who worked together in a dress shop in San Diego's North Park area, decided to go out on our own and start our own shop. Older, wiser, and more experienced people told us we simply did not have sufficient resources to begin a business, that we would surely fail, and lose what little we did have. We chose to ignore that advice. We struggled for a while, but we persevered. At least, I did.

My business partner stayed as long as she could and then announced her intention to “marry money” and left it all to me. A change of location to a rapidly developing area of the city brought success.

One era, when women’s skirts were extremely short, I struggled every Sunday to keep my knees covered at church. Capris solved that problem for me. I guessed, correctly, that other women were having the same problem. My shop began to specialize in Capris and capitalized on that fashion trend.

I was married to a wonderful man for nearly 70 years. On our wedding day my father poked a finger in my chest and said, “I give this marriage two weeks.” Every anniversary thereafter my husband would tell me, “Honey, your two weeks are almost up.”

When I was in high school I told my mother, “If you will give me my freedom, I promise I will never do anything to embarrass you.” Later, as a mother, I tried to be the freedom-giving and trusting person I had asked her to be. Raising a daughter was easy, an absolute delight. A son? What did I know about boys? But it turned out well. He is a wonderful man. My only advice to parents is: Love them. Just love them.

I can honestly say that I have never disliked anyone. I have thought about this a lot recently when considering what I wanted to say today, and I can confidently repeat it. I never disliked anyone.

And, I don’t know how anyone could make it without God.

*By Bea Rogers, resident at Wesley Palms Retirement Community
Love, Laugh, Pray is an excerpt from Aging As An Art Form: Through the Eyes Of Residents of Wesley Palms by Wesley Palms resident Don McEvoy. The book contains 50 stories, experiences and life lessons either self-written or told to Don through interviews.*

Don McEvoy is storyteller, former pastor and civil rights activist. Aging as an Art Form is available from Outskirts Press and Amazon.com. Proceeds from the book benefit the residents of Wesley Palms.