

## Trying to Understand...

By Karen Russo

Don't you think it is hard to imagine being old? I mean *really* old. Our grandchildren probably think we are already bloody ancient. Of course we never imagined being this age either, whatever age that might be. But Alzheimer's, dementia, walking with a walker? No, not us. Oh, we laugh about losing our car keys, or forgetting a name, or God help me, becoming computer proficient. But it is all in jest. Some of you may be plan-ahead types for such an eventuality. Not me. I can't imagine losing it entirely.

Some of us have had to give up tennis or skiing, but we are resourceful finding other fulfilling replacements. Getting out of the car after an eight-hour drive can be a sight to behold. Slowly unbending either brings on a giggle or a profanity. But the real indignities of old age? No, not us.

And the media would have us believe that too, if we just live right. Eat right, exercise regularly, drink little, smoke not at all, build strong families, surround ourselves with fun, interesting and supportive friends, support the community and those less fortunate, pursue new interests, travel new routes, take a zillion pills, and engage in games that challenge the mind. Just do all that and we will remain vigorous until one day—a long, long time from now—lightning will strike us down without our ever suffering a moment's discomfort or our families a bit of inconvenience.

I want to buy into that too. That is why it was so hard to accept my mother's decline, and now that of my mother-in-law. My mother died a few years ago at 91. My mother-in-law just turned 96 and is visibly nearing the end. It is not that death at that age is unacceptable. It is the piece-by-piece failure of the body and mind leading up to it that is so grueling. The legs that won't stand, the bladder that is out of control, the loss of hearing and eyesight, hallucinations, the loss of spouse, siblings and friends, with the growing lack of interest in the world. The isolation.

Not fair, I say, for that is what happened to my mother and mother-in-law. And believe me, both these women were models

of living right. Both were career women and both were singularly responsible for making their families strong. Both were at every grandkid's birthday or graduation, bridal shower and wedding. Both had lots of friends and activities. My mother was tops in real estate sales in Brentwood up into her 70s. After that, a docent at the LA Zoo, a bridge shark, a crossword puzzle devotee and a world traveler. She spent her 80th birthday in Tibet. My mother-in-law worked in retail sales and management her whole life, and was such a supporter of the church that she received the papal lifetime achievement award straight from the Pope. The ceremony at the Los Angeles Cathedral Our Lady of the Angels was a pageant to be long remembered. Up to a few years ago, she collected all the condominium dues for her building and collected and distributed her church's donations to St. Vincent de Paul, always a ledger book in hand.

So living right did indeed enhance the quality of their lives and perhaps lengthen them, but did not guarantee a fairy tale ending. All we can do as offspring is be patient, try to help make the last years or days as pleasant as possible, and to recognize that many of the older people we see falling asleep in their soup, or saying, "What?" "What?" "What did you say?" lived right too.

We celebrated my mother-in-law's 96th at our house just a few weeks ago. John always picks her up in Glendale and brings her to all family occasions. She did not feel well and wasn't sure the day before that she could make it. But she knew all the family would be there from San Diego to Laguna Beach to Indian Wells, and that I had gone to some effort to make it special. So, as not to disappoint us, she came. That is the kind of person she is. But she has been in bed ever since. I used to be impatient with my mother, urging her near the end to try harder. I wish I had just understood. I am trying with my mother-in-law. Maybe this visible decline is God or nature's way of helping us to let go.

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## How Well Do You Know Your Town's History?



In 1937, the WPA added to the north side of the old City Hall to accommodate additional City employees.

Abridged from *A Walk Beside the Sea*  
By Jan Dennis

The Depression years were coming to an end, businesses were getting back in the black and it was time to forge ahead. "Improvement" was the word.

Roads were regarded and surfaced in order to open up lands for housing tracts. In January of 1937, work had started on the contraction of 24 homes and there were to be 65 to 75 homes built between January and October. One tract of homes was located on 3rd, 4th and 5th streets between Crest and Ingleside. The community witnessed an increase in new home buyers, pointing out that for the first time in Manhattan Beach's history few houses were vacant during the winter months. The summer rental rates jumped and permanent year-round residents finally outnumbered the summer visitors.

As the new and improved roads made the area more accessible, chicken, fox and mink farms in the "Back Country" (east of Sepulveda Boulevard) were being divided into 50 x 100 foot lots. The Pacific Land and Title Company purchased many of the small farms, which had delinquent taxes.

With the increase in building came problems with encroachments by private property owners onto City property. There were more than 250 cases of illegal private encroachments from: feces, retaining walls, house stairs, sets of steps, porches, wrapped driveways, garages and houses. The controversy went on for weeks and the Manhattan Beach City Council took a hard line. On December 3, 1937, the Council drafted an official stating that all encroachments on City property were to be removed as soon as possible.

However, there was no debate for one

project—the enlargement of City Hall. The Works Progress Administration, for the sum of \$45,000, added 17 feet to the north end of the building. On the first floor, jail facilities (cells) were added and garage space for both police and fire apparatuses. On the second floor was a new area for a drafting room and offices for the engineering and building department.

Another project which residents welcomed was the 700-set La Mar Theatre. In 1937, the Pacific States Theater began construction for the sum of \$65,000. The promotion for the facility claimed to have the finest sound equipment available, built by RCA Photophone. The architecture was modernistic/art deco with sea motifs, blue ceilings and mirrored walls. The building represented one of the outstanding structures in the state of California.

On July 30, 1938, the theater had its grand opening with every lady who attended receiving a piece of beautiful pottery. The first double feature was *Three Blind Mice* with Loretta Young and *Go Chase Yourself*. After being a landmark with its 50-foot tower and neon-lighted, angled marquee, the structure met its demise in 1978.

With all the new development in town and much of the good land held in oil leases, the City passed an ordinance in 1939 forbidding any drilling west of Sepulveda. There were restrictions and regulations placed on drilling east of the boulevard as well. A \$500 permit fee and a yearly \$500 license charge were put into place with a \$300 fine or three months in jail if the new rules were not followed. These rulings effectively ended oil drilling in Manhattan Beach.

To be continued...



Beginning of road improvement looking north from 17th Street and Pine Avenue.