

Natural Healing Express Weekly

Column Volume 92 Longevity, Part Eight – Mary Leamon

This week we feature our final interview in our Longevity Series with a very special Lady of Lena – Mrs. Mary Leamon. Mary Murphy Leamon was born April of 1927 in Macomb Hospital near Carthage, Illinois where her family operated a 360 acre farm 5 miles outside of town. Mary's parents were Bertha and Leander "Lee" Murphy. She has two sisters, Martha and Stella whom were both older than Mary. Mary graduated from Carthage college and married Jack Leamon of Lena in 1949 and has resided in Lena ever since. Mary and Jack raised three fine children, Tom, Janet and Paul. Mary is a wonderful shining example of Longevity and she is still very active in all Leamon owned businesses and the lives of her children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. She has also been a wonderful mentor to me as I build and operate Natural Healing Express.

Susan: Mary, please tell me a little bit about your early life:

**Mary: I was raised on a farm and went to grades 1-8 at a one room country school. Then I went to high school in Carthage and then Carthage College before it moved to Kenosha, Wisconsin. My Grandma lived with us – her name was Mattie Murphy.**

Susan: What about your childhood do you think contributed to your longevity?

**Mary: We had good meals and a great big garden. We canned vegetables and had lots of fruit trees – cherry, peach, pear, persimmons. We had chickens and gathered our own eggs. I believe eating our own food was a big benefit.**

Susan: You've been married for a long while now. How did you and Jack Meet?

**Mary: My roommate was going out with Jack's roommate. They were going to a movie and asked us both to join them. I guess it was a blind date. Then the next time, he asked me to go again and it went from there. We were married 64 years in June.**

Susan: Oh my gosh, that is so amazing. Can you tell me what's made your marriage so successful?

**Mary: You give some and you take some. Be smart and know when to give and when to take. After we got married we settled in Lena. Tom was born the next year. Janet came three years after that and then Paul, the baby. They were good kids, but like all kids, they scrapped a bit.**

Susan: Tell me a little bit about some of the "firsts" that you experienced?

**Mary: TV was something then. We had a black and white one. And I think the biggest thing was a tape recorder from Sears and Roebuck. That was a big deal. Sharon Lobdell came over and recorded a message for Duane who was in the service at the time. When we sent the first man into space that was something to see someone go that far and reach that distance.**

Susan: You have been a pillar of the Lena Community for many years, having the downtown anchor store for how long? Please tell us about your business and how it came about.

**Mary: I settled in Lena when Jack and I were married. Soon after I had my hands full with the kids. His family has been in business in Lena since 1869. Jack's great grandfather had the funeral home, mortuary and furniture, all where Fitness on Main is now. The business then grew to include the ambulance service. I got involved when Jack's mom's health started to fail, I guess that was sometime in the 1970's. I hopped right in, starting waiting on people and did on the job training. I had fun and enjoyed meeting people. I think Janet and Paul were still in high school then. Jack's great grandfather JT was the founder, then RB, then RP and then Jack. Now more of our family is involved.**

Susan: What an impressive history. How many businesses has your family help launch?

**Mary: Oh gosh. The Christmas Store was in your space here. Before that, Dan Steven's paper, and the Verizon Store which Janet started and then Buss Boys bought and moved to their current location. Sylvia Vehmeier worked with us and then bought out the furniture side and moved it to her current location near Rafters – Mill Furnishings. Ed Snapp was one of our employees and he started the Huron Farm Market in Eleroy. Also Dave Swift was with us. He founded Lena Auto Mart and now has Swift Hospitality. And of course you have Natural Healing Express.**

**Paul runs the concessions for two parks in Lena and our pop machines. Over the years we have added more funeral homes. First it was Winslow, then Warren, then Orangeville. And Tom has been the coroner for 4 terms now. Jack had one term before him.**

**With our business now, we have a good group of employees. I think they keep me young and everyone works well together. If there is work to be done, they do it.**

Susan: Forgive me for asking, but is it difficult living in a small town and being in the ambulance/funeral business?

**Mary: Yes, some days are harder than others. I think the worst was when we had all three ambulances at the scene of one accident where a doctor, his wife and four of the five kids all perished. We were able to save one. Those are tough days.**

Susan: What was the toughest period of your life?

**Mary: One day, Jack went into the building to check the boiler as we had stopped in on a Sunday. Before he returned, smoke was coming out of the building. I got very excited and of course called the fire department. There was damage to the building and our property, but everyone was ok. It was pretty confined to the furniture section but still it was very overwhelming.**

Susan: How did you overcome this?

**Mary: Fortunately we had insurance and we rallied together and began clean up.**

Susan: What are you the most proud of?

**Mary: The Longevity of the Business**

Susan: Do you have anything in your life you would like to do over?

**Mary: I don't think so; I would probably do it the same way again.**

Susan: What do you like most about your life today?

**Mary: It's nice to have all my family in the area, kids, grand kids and great grand kids.**

Susan: What is your favorite activity?

**Mary: Playing Bridge. There are 8 of us that get together each week and play. We have done this for 60 years. We go to each other's houses and play for the afternoon. It's big stakes, we all throw in a quarter and the winner gets \$1.25 and second place gets 75 cents.**

Susan: What is your advice for people regarding a long, healthy and happy life?

**Mary: Get plenty of sleep, eat properly and be compatible with your companion.**

Susan: Is there anything still on your bucket list?

**Mary: Oh, I don't think so**

Susan: Anything else you would like to add?

**Mary: Jack and I had a wonderful time travelling together. We went on cruises to the Caribbean and one from China to Japan up to Alaska. It was about 12 days and the seas were a little rough, but I didn't get sick thankfully. We went to Jerusalem which at that time was peaceful, but we arrived on their day of fasting. We were very hungry and had a hard time finding something to eat. We've been to Europe, Canada and Hawaii a couple of times and once to Puerto Vallarta. There were three couples and we all very much enjoyed travelling together. One time we went to Mexico, rented a Jeep and drove out into the Boonies. We saw how all the rural people lived. I wouldn't do that again today. (giggle).**

Susan: Mary, thank you so much for doing this interview and for being a great landlord.

Mary smiled and one of her employees pulled her car up to the store since it was beginning to rain. I couldn't help but think this was the type of grand camaraderie and respect that she had helped foster for her family, her business and the town of Lena. We walked her to the door and she didn't want help after that- she simply got into her vehicle and drove to her next appointment.

Enjoy! Hope to see you soon and as always, please contact us via one of the following methods. Natural Healing Express: Phone 815 990 8732, email: skscham@aol.com 204 W Main St, Lena, IL 61048.

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