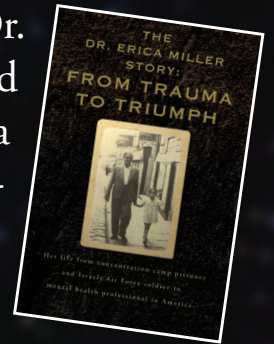




THE DR. ERICA MILLER STORY: THE JOURNEY OUT OF DARKNESS

By Kari Rodems

I was deeply moved... inspired more than anything really, from my visit with Dr. Erica Miller. In her recently published book, *The Dr. Erica Miller Story: From Trauma to Triumph*, Jerry, her husband of 50 years described his wife by saying, "...she is a real survivor, a high achiever and exceptionally intelligent." I certainly echo that sentiment and add that she is a force to be reckoned with, and I am convinced she is nowhere near ready to slow down. Miller says the refrain of her life is "I'm still here!" It is this glass half full perspective that has seen her through some of the darkest moments ever inflicted on humanity.



As a child growing up in Rumania (modern day Ukraine) she was interned with her family under the Nazi regime and endured four years in a concentration camp. In 1944 the Russians liberated her entire family, and in 1949 they relocated to Israel where she later joined the Israeli Army. Then in 1958, Miller immigrated to the U.S. where she went on to not only raise her family, but earn her Ph.D. and open a series of successful mental health centers throughout Los Angeles and Orange County.

I was greeted warmly at the door of her expansive yet unpretentious ranch style home. After a fire destroyed the residence in 2005, every detail in her beautifully re-built custom Hidden Hills estate reflects her intensity of character and eye for finding beauty in the world around her. As we settled in her home office, Miller quickly began explaining the whirlwind of exhilarating adventures she is having surrounding her well-received autobiography. I asked her what the process of retelling her life's story was like, "I [may] come across heartless and very detached, nothing surprised me, nothing!"

Miller went on to explain that it is actually her ability to detach that served her well in her profession as a psychologist because it allowed her to offer wise counsel without being overwhelmed by the myriad of issues she would encounter throughout her career. When I asked why she chose her profession she recalled a distant memory that took place shortly after the Nazis had abruptly taken her family. She remembered mothers crying out for their loved ones, and literally writhing in anguish as they cried out for their children by name.

One woman in particular almost came undone before her eyes. Even at her young age, Miller very much wanted to reach out to her, believing that if she could just touch her, she might be able to lessen her pain and let her know she would be alright. Out of fear, her mother restrained her from reaching out, yet because of that memory she says, "I feel like I am on a mission to spread optimism, the joy of life; and I get a lot back, I heal myself through healing others." Though Miller's young life was forever scarred by traumatic experiences, she would be the first to tell you that your future is informed by your past, not dictated by it.

The groundwork for the book itself began a number of years ago, when a former colleague decided to start chronicling the life experiences of a variety of people. Miller, not one to share past experiences (unless directly asked), warmed to the idea and began spelling out a life most of us can scarcely imagine. Miller initially thought that after the transcription of her life story was completed, that would be the end of her process. Yet, as time went by, Miller decided she would like to leave a narrative recounting her life's journey (thus far) for her grandchildren. After hiring a number of writers to complete her memoir, she was disenchanted with the flowery language often interjected into the text. Miller's husband says his wife is someone who "comes straight to the point..." So, Miller decided the only way this work would be authentically conveyed was if she and her daughter worked together and delivered the final product.

Both of her children and her husband were interviewed independently to garner their thoughts on the real Dr. Erica Miller, as mom and wife. Her return to finish her degree when her son was in 1st grade was a sacrifice for the entire family. They unanimously agree that her decision to earn her Ph.D. in Psychology was a rough patch in the family's dynamic but respect her drive and dedication to her calling. Considered the family disciplinarian, Miller's no nonsense sense of order and responsibility is only matched by her zest for all that life has to offer. She is unabashedly proud of her children, noting they have grown into incredible adults, immensely capable people and wonderful parents. The day I was visiting, an annual summer theater group for young children, run by her granddaughter, was slated to perform in the Millers' 100-seat theatre. The theatre, complete with curtains and a stage, is attached to the guest house that Miller artfully re-designed after the fire.

Though she was quick to say she doesn't need lots of friends and tends to be a loner of sorts, there was a distinct delight that was evident when she talked about the families that would be coming to enjoy the performances taking place over the next three evenings. She was beaming as she described the scores of parents and grandparents that would be filling the aisles and enjoying refreshments with the cast in the theater and plush garden area after their performances. What she is able to provide for a new generation of her community's children is a far cry from her own experiences of a childhood that was marked more by survival than gala events.

With two scheduled book signings at Barnes and Noble this August and multiple opportunities for speaking engagements, the next chapter in Dr. Erica Miller's life has yet to be written. These days I think Miller's cup appears more than half full, in fact it seems to runneth over. When asked what she wanted to do next, Miller's eyes lit up as she explained that she'd love to have her own column in a newspaper or magazine and her book turned into a screenplay with Barbara Streisand playing her! So Barbara if you are available... For more information on book signings or speaking engagements visit www.drericamiller.com or visit the Dr. Erica Miller Story on Facebook. **WM**



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