

## **Doreen Jacobs Roe: Education and a Fuchsia Bedroom**

*Doreen Jacobs Roe was born in Detroit, Michigan, the daughter of Betty and George Jacobs. She is the mother of one son and daughter-in-law, and has one grandniece. Her career was spent working as a nurse. We met Doreen while she was out walking her dog along the old Ventura Pier on a bright, sunny afternoon in Ventura, California.*



Doreen Jacobs Roe was married to her first husband for six and a half years. She said she was very naïve at the time and didn't realize that he had an alcohol problem until it was very serious. "We had to end the marriage when my son was two," she said. "We were never enemies but there was this big white elephant in the living room that neither of us knew what to do with."

Doreen said she was a single parent for seven years, and never thought she would ever marry again. But later she met her second husband, a surgeon, to whom she was married for 21 years.

In her teen years, Doreen said it seemed to her she was so different from everyone else in school. "I was short and skinny when I graduated from high school. I was five feet tall and weighed 89 pounds. I was a stick. I didn't have any boobs and I had this curly, curly hair. And of course that was back in the 50s when everyone had these page boys and flips. I would put in these big rollers and by the time I got to the corner to catch the bus my hair was curly again."

"Parents, family and everybody would always say that I was cute. And cute to me was like, 'You're not pretty, but your face won't stop a bus either.' In my 40s I could look in the mirror and like the person I saw and not worry about those things so much. I won't say I don't worry about it at all, but I don't carry that burden around. It was a burden of my own doing and I really wish I hadn't put that on myself."

Doreen wants young women today to learn from her mistake. "Don't be so hard on yourself. Try to have the inner strength to say, well what those people are saying is

not of value and it isn't true. It doesn't make me less of a person to not look like Reese Witherspoon or Paris Hilton. From somewhere find the inner knowledge that you are a good person."

Doreen said one of the proudest moments in her life was when she finished nursing school. "I had to leave in my second year in school because my parents had been ill and I had to go home and help them, and I didn't go back for 10 years. So it was a great feeling when I finished and had to take the boards. There were a lot of classes I hadn't taken for ten years and the state boards were two days and six tests. You had to score 350 on each of the tests to pass and when I got back the results I had scored 600 in three of the tests. It was a great feeling of accomplishment."

"I think it's really important for women to get an education. It makes more difference in your life than anything else. And it doesn't matter how hard it is. If you have to work and go to school and raise a kid, and still go to school taking one class a semester at night. Maybe it is an hour or two hours once or twice a week; but do it for your own self - to find out that you have the intelligence to do things. It changes the kind of life that you live."

"My education gave me the freedom to move from Michigan to Texas to California, and all I had to do was get a nursing license in each of the states and I could get a job within two weeks. Education is so important, especially for women. You can't move up until you have an education."

Doreen cited a nursing school instructor as one of the most influential women in her life. "As small as I was, she came up to my shoulder. She taught us humanity. She taught us to have a sense of responsibility to people. She taught us that nursing wasn't just a job, that it was important to be kind and to be nice to people. And sometimes it is important not to not be nice - because you might have to make a patient get up and walk when they don't want to. If you don't, then maybe tomorrow they are going to be in bed with a tube down them. She was an amazing example."

"Doreen also said the things she learned from her parents' example growing up also inspired her life. "We were all hard working responsible people because that is what our parents were. And it wasn't drummed into us, but we just saw them doing it every day."

Doreen said the birth of her son brought amazing joy into her life. "Every day it was a joy to be with that little infant and watch him grow." And she is pleased that her son absorbed some of his life lessons from her example. "I didn't find that out until he was 30 and I was 50 that every day he saw my husband and I going out and helping people and that he had those core values. We used to take old clothes to

the Salvation Army and to the church, and we would give food. I think that's one thing we forget nowadays. Hopefully, the new administration will take us back to remembering that we are a cohesive group and that we are all Americans.”

Doreen said it was also the values she learned from her parents and the support of her close friends that helped her get through the depression she felt after the death of her husband. “The year after he died was dreadful. I really didn't want to see other people. I didn't want to talk about it. I had to grieve in my own way. Because people have a tendency to say, ‘You should do this, or you should do that.’ But I had to grieve my way. But I guess it was the inner strength that my parents gave me, because they were strong determined people that started out with nothing, and just by living with them we learned to be that way.”

And while she still feels the loss, she is learning to enjoy the freedom she has to face life alone. “My husband died when I was 60, and it was the first time in my entire life I lived alone. I bought a car on my own. I bought a house on my own. Now I have a fuchsia colored bedroom. I painted the house and every room is a different color. I go to bed when I want. I get up when I want. I really enjoy being able to do what I want to do when I want to do it.”

“I am happy with my life. I think women need to learn that you can manage to squeeze it all in, but not at the same time.”



## *The Spiritual Path*

*“So the ancestors, they are out there and they want to listen to us. Our strongest element is our voice. They want to hear us. They want to see our tears. They want to see that we know that they are still around, that we still embrace them with everything.”*

*—Adelina Alva-Padilla*