

## **Ethel Nick Simpson: Just Do It**



*Ethel Nick Simpson was born in Cape Town, South Africa to Orthodox Jewish parents Isaac and Annie Nick. She is the mother of two daughters and the grandmother of four. She currently lives in a retirement community in Agoura Hills, California.*

Ethel Nick Simpson was born to Orthodox Jewish parents in Cape Town, South Africa, and lived for most of her adult life in Rhodesia. She was raised with the strict traditions and values of her parents' religion, including keeping kosher and celebrating the Shabbat. "We just lived Judaism," she said. "It was part of me."

For most of her life, she has drawn on her mother for strength and on her mother's teachings in order to overcome life's challenges. "My mother was a very strong person. She passed away 18 years ago, so she was always there. She always knew the answers to everything. She would say, 'Don't fret. Take things as they come.'"

Ethel said her mother grew up "very, very poor and she built herself up. When something bad happened, she had the attitude, 'Too bad. Do the next thing, just pick yourself up and go on.'"

"When my mother was growing up she had to go to work and look after her grandfather. The family was in the country. When she was at school, on Fridays she would have to go home at noon and make the chicken for Shabbat dinner. One Friday she came back late and her teacher asked her why. My mother said, 'How can I tell the teacher I was busy cleaning a chicken for supper tonight?' She was really brought up the hard way, but those difficulties gave her strength."

Ethel said she also always worked. She worked in a bank and in a garage, or she worked helping out with family businesses. "My family was in all kind of business and I always went to help one of them in the shop. We had movie house when I was growing up, and I used to come home late at night on Saturday night on the caboose along with the train workers. The whole train would be locked up but my people got

special permission to go on the caboose with the workers because we would get out late when the movie was over.”

For Ethel, family was always the most important part of life. “We had an enormous family. If we had a ceremony we had to invite about 75 people before you could start inviting strangers or friends. It was an absolutely enormous family and we were very close.”

Ethel met her husband at the beach in Cape Town and married at the age of 21, but not before she fulfilled one of her life dreams. “We fell in love and he wanted to get married straight away. But I had never been overseas and I really wanted to go. I told him he’d have to wait. And he did.”

“It had been my goal all my life to come to America, but unfortunately for me I had to go via England and it make the trip that much longer. But I went with my mother on a thing called the See America Ticket: for 99 days for \$99 you could go wherever you wanted. You could just get on the bus and get off the bus anywhere in America. It was 1962 and we started in New York, went to Niagara Falls, through Ontario to Detroit, Chicago, Iowa, Nebraska, Reno, Salt Lake City, Sacramento, San Francisco, down the coast to Los Angeles, to Las Vegas and to the Grand Canyon. I wanted to go on to Miami, but my mother said she was too tired. So we both went up through Dallas, Kansas City to Washington, D.C., and back to New York.”

“After I fulfilled my life dream, I went back and got married and we moved to Rhodesia,” she said. “I loved him. He was a wonderful, wonderful man – a fabulous man!”

Ethel said her most difficult experience in life was when her husband passed away suddenly of a heart attack in 1982. “I was just thankful that he didn’t suffer and that is what sort of helped me over it.”

Ethel said that while she isn’t usually the one giving advice, she does have one important piece of life wisdom to pass. “Just do it,” she said. “If you stop to think about it, you won’t do it. I’m not a very decisive person because I think my mother made my decisions for me, she influenced me that way. But if I stop to think about - should I do it, perhaps I shouldn’t - if I just get down and do it, it’s done!”

She credits her brother’s influence for pushing her along in life. “I have had my brother behind me, pushing me. He sponsored a lot of my trips and he kept me on the go all the time.”

Although they weren’t particularly close growing up, after Ethel went to Rhodesia and came back, her relationship with her brother changed dramatically. “He did

something for me one day and I realized he thought of me differently than I had believed. My brother is a 'just do it' person. He built up business and still went overseas whenever he wanted to. He traveled the world and been absolutely everywhere."

Ethel said she has much to be thankful for in her life. "I've been very lucky. My brother has been wonderful to me and my husband and children have brought me the most joy in my life. I am very, very thankful."



## ***Embrace the Medicine***

***“They say wisdom is lost. It’s not lost. It comes in the wind. It comes all over. It surrounds us. It comes in our dream time. It comes in our hearts, in our blood. But because we walk upon the mother earth in a different time we forgot. But the tree has a voice. And the wind has a voice. And the star people have a voice. And the mountains have a voice. And the earth between us, underneath us has a voice. And all that is about has a voice ... And all we have to do is just open ourselves, embrace it. Embrace the medicine that the elders and the ancestors have to give.”***

***—Adelina Alva-Padilla***