

Silvia Stoik Christianson: Respect, Choices, No Fear

Silvia Stoik Christianson was born and raised on a farm in Rice Lake, Wisconsin, the daughter of Archie Stoik and Hildur Andersson Stoik. She is the mother of nine children and the grandmother of 16. She currently divides her time between Delavan, Wisconsin and Coco Beach, Florida. She is the author's former mother-in-law and remains a life-long friend.



For Silvia Stoik Christianson, deciding the end a 57-year-long marriage was the most difficult choice she ever had to make. “I felt that I had a life to live beyond my large family and beyond my marriage. And I realized the only way to live it was to free myself from my marriage.” Although making that choice and telling her nine adult children wasn’t easy, for Silvia the pathway was the right one to take. “When I was thinking about getting a divorce, the decision was not done with haste. It was well thought out. I tried every avenue possible to avoid it – getting counseling and working for years on the relationship. But after I became ill and recovered from cancer, I came to realize that it was the right decision for me, despite what my family may have wanted.”

“I read long ago when I was a teenager that if you are going to change people you have to go back and change the grandparents, if you are going to have a chance of changing the next two generations. I made the decision that I am going to do that - that the change is going to be with me.”

Silvia said her life has changed dramatically since she decided to leave her marriage and take care of herself. “The freedom and good health I have now is unbelievable. When I first went into divorce I told myself some people going to not like you, and that is the way it is. I went into it with that philosophy. But now I have so many friends and acquaintances and a rich extended life filled with interesting, wonderful people. We enjoy each other for our diversity. Some things I could never have

dreamed of opened up. All sorts of joy opened up. I joined groups and my input is heard. It's like blossoming out."

"I took control of my own life and now I have the philosophy that if I get myself into a situation, I have always had the ability to get myself in the right direction. I just take care of things and just move ahead - no moaning and groaning. I just take care of it. I realized that I can just take an action; forget about what happened in the past and do what is necessary as the next step. I just move forward and don't dwell on things. You can always handle and take care of what needs to be done, go forward and continue living your life."

"When I was a young girl I was told by an authoritarian religion that if I took good care of my husband, he would always love and take care of me. I have found out that wasn't true. And I have talked with other women who have decided to get out of marriages and we all agree that is the biggest lie we were ever told. If you believe that you have to be with someone through thick or thin, you are going to sacrifice yourself and not be fulfilled as an individual."

"My ideas of relationships have changed 180 degrees. I don't believe that when you get married it is forever, because people change. Maybe you got in your relationship because of your hormones and the excitement of being in love. You should not be tied to that person. Maybe you married a lemon! It all goes back to respect. If the person you are with doesn't know how to respect you, there really isn't much to the relationship."

Silvia said the strength she has to face all life's difficulties came from her upbringing and from her ancestors. "My grandfather was in immigrant from Sweden. He had come to Barin County in Wisconsin in 1891 and my grandmother followed in 1892, coming across on a ship with a baby girl, a five-year-old girl and a seven-year-old son."

Silvia said she knew that her mother always believed in her. "She wanted more for me, and although she often didn't know what to say or how to say it, I knew she wanted something more for me. And on my paternal side, my father and my paternal grandfather were very respectful of women. It gave me a sort of a strength and determination that when problems began to arise that I could not solve, in me somewhere was strength to go on. I think I was born with a strong sense of inner strength and knowing who I was. The support from my mother and father and the stories I heard about life before I came on the scene, as well as the respect of my father and paternal grandfather, gave me a sense of self respect."

Silvia said she now works to encourage and promote respect for oneself among her grandchildren. "I try to instill in them that they deserve respect, that they are unique

human beings and they need to find out what is the special thing they are to do. If they can find what is special and unique to them, that will be the thing that will add to their whole life, to their family, community and to the world. Each of us has something to offer and that thing will add to the whole picture of what life is. If you can find that within you, then you will know what you can contribute to the whole world.”

“I am proud of my children and proud of my grandchildren, because they took advantage of the opportunities presented to them. I encouraged my children and sacrificed so they could have piano lessons. At that time it was 75 cents a lesson, but there were lots of times when I had to go scrounging for that 75 cents. But I made the decision to get a better piano because I felt the training of their musical ear needed a piano that could stay in tune. I struggled for a whole year to buy a new piano. I could tell my children had musical talent, good voices and loved music, and that was to bloom and blossom and mature. I still have a son who plays piano and I have a lot of children still interested in arts, things they can do with their hands as well as vocal part of it. I feel a lot of pride in them and feel I had a little part in their success.”

For Silvia, education and continual learning is food for life. “Read, listen to politics, learn about all kinds of different things. The most exciting thing for me is when I find out one new thing every day. Have a question. There is an answer. I just find that exciting to learn and ask intelligent people.”

“Another thing I think is important is to do one good deed every day. Take out someone’s trash, say hi to somebody, do a good thing and don’t be afraid to tell someone you did it! When someone drops something and you pick it up, say, ‘Now that’s my second good deed of the day.’ And they will smile and maybe that will be passed on to someone else.”

“I always tell young people, if I see a young girl when she has performed, how much I really enjoyed their performance. I’ll say something like, ‘Do you know you have a lot of talent. Remember you have a wonderful voice and remember don’t give up no matter what.’ I see the faces of people receiving a compliment light up like a 200 watt light bulb. It’s important to let people know that there is something good about them.”

“And I really think it’s important to let your facility for humor grow every day. There is so much humor in the world. You just have to laugh and find the positive in things.”



You Don't Need a Lot of Things

“Another thing I have learned is that finances have a place in happiness, but you really don't have to have a lot of things. I don't have to have brand name things or a big house anymore to be happy. I really think getting in debt and overextending yourself is a big mistake. Being in debt is very stressful and it can disrupt a happy marriage.”

—Vera Earl