

In “Thriving,” Tepley Recounts Stories of Triumphant Over Trauma

In 1995, Joyce Ann Tepley became the principal advocate for her father-in-law’s care during the last few years of his life. Even though she was an experienced clinical social worker who knew how to negotiate resources, she was constantly frustrated by the lack of coordinated care and impediments placed by nursing home and hospital staff regarding the preservation of his dignity and management of his pain. She wondered if there was a better way and why some people seemed to thrive or flourish through the hardest times in their lives. After he died she happened to find an organization called the Health Forum that offered a fellowship program sponsored by the American Hospital Association. It was called Creating Healthier Communities, encouraging best practices across the United States.

She was accepted into the year-long program and chose as her project 20 people with long-term physical disabilities from all walks of life who were referred to her as thrivers. (One of them was PHI director, Joan L. Headley.) She wanted to know what they all had in common. Through taped interviews asking each person the same questions, she discovered particular personality traits, beliefs and support they each told her they had.

With 40 hours of interviews, she took a break to figure out how to write what she discovered in a way that anyone would want to read it. She took several creative non-fiction writing classes and then marketing for authors courses. She wanted to honor the people who generously shared their life stories with her – ordinary people who live extraordinary lives but who do not think of themselves as heroic.

The book, *Thriving Through It – How They Do It: What It Takes to Transform Trauma Into Triumph*, is divided into three sections: *My Who’s Who of Thrivers*, *What Kind of Person is a Thriver?* and *My Findings*. The book provides something for everyone who has ever gone through difficult times.

Tepley describes herself as a thriver. What did she learn in writing the book? “I am not going to be that careful anymore.” She will rest when need be, but she will push herself now. “This is my last hurrah. I spent much of my life being fearful. I am not afraid anymore.” ■



Joan L. Headley, a thriver, with polio survivor and author, Joyce Tepley at PHI’s 11th International Conference. Tepley donated \$500 from book sales to PHI.

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