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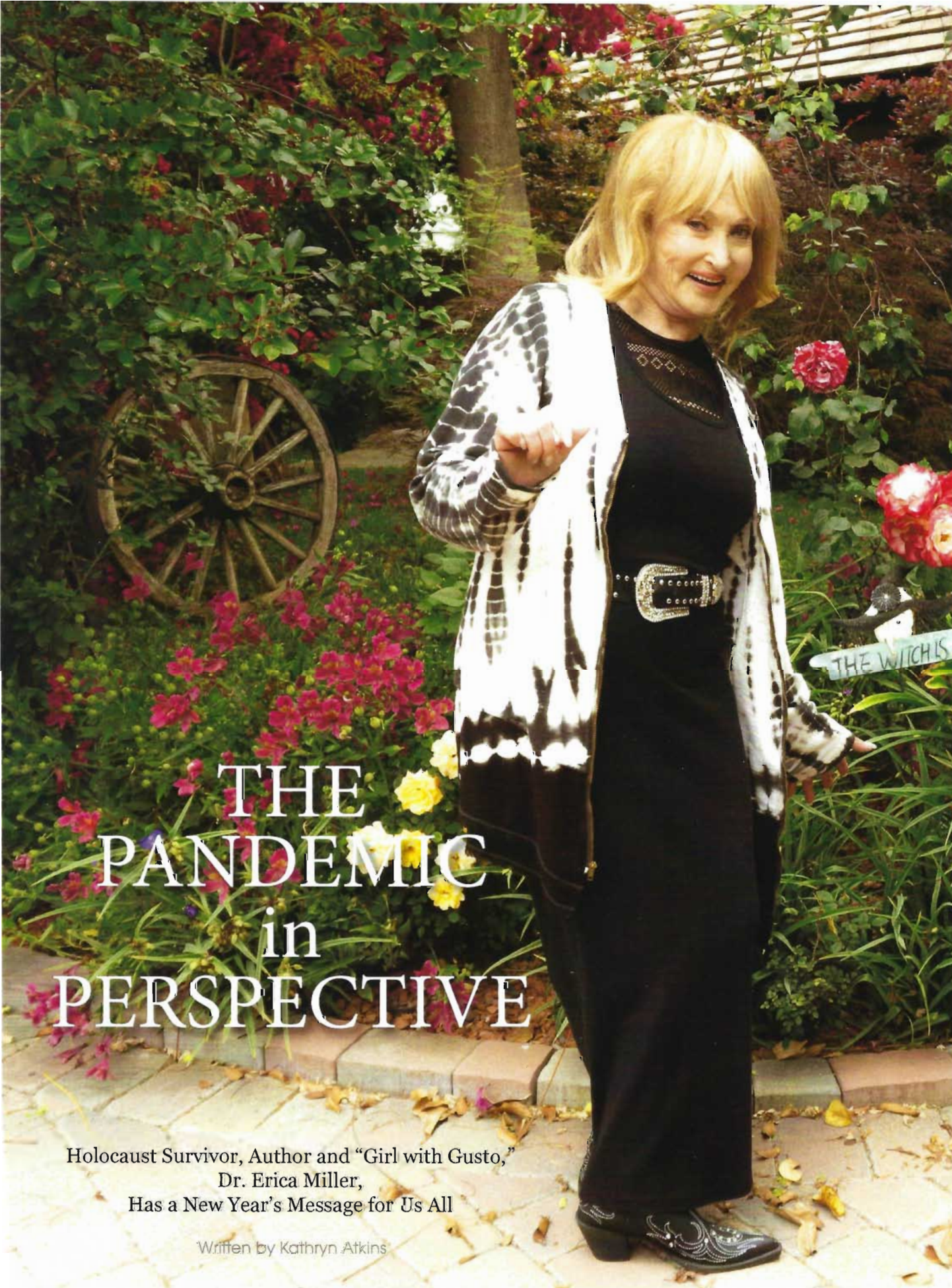
HIDDEN HILLS

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THE PANDEMIC in PERSPECTIVE

Holocaust Survivor, Author and “Girl with Gusto,”
Dr. Erica Miller,
Has a New Year’s Message for Us All

Written by Kathryn Atkins

With the unique challenges our society has been facing this year (and will continue to face into the immediate future at least), “perspective” is a word that is often mentioned. Of course, true perspective is wholly dependent upon the individual. With the COVID situation, for instance, you may hear a difference in how a “millennial” feels about the “challenges” versus what an elderly person might say. Long-time Hidden Hills resident, Dr. Erica Miller, is among the latter, and at 87 years strong, she has a unique and fascinating story that might place the current pandemic in a perspective that few of us can imagine. Dr. Miller spent four years in a German/Romanian Nazi concentration camp starting at the age of seven. She managed to live through that horror (starvation, sickness, filth, cruelty beyond what you can conceive). In 1949, with her family, she emigrated to

Israel. There she worked two jobs during the day, attended high school at night, graduated, and then served in the Israeli Air Force from 1952 to 1954. Destiny had it that she relocated to Los Angeles, California, in 1958, where she eventually earned a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology—all while being married and raising young children.

You’d think the concentration camps would have defeated her, but she was determined to succeed in the U.S., which meant getting that advanced degree. Partway through, she almost flunked out of the program due to what she believed was prejudice (because she was an older woman with children and had an accent). But that didn’t stop her. She fought and won and was reinstated. Handling adversity proactively is her superpower and her message.

Part of her superpower stems from her “secret sauce” for handling this global pandemic. It’s her ability to live with guts, grit, and gusto at 87 years young—especially because she really

wants to live to be 123 (!) years old. “There’s no secret to it,” she says. “Just keep doing all the recommended things like eating well, exercising, reading and learning, finding your purpose, giving to your community, and having some understanding of spirituality. However, you do that is fine,” as she explains in her international best-selling book, *Chronologically Gifted—Aging with Gusto: A Practical Guide for Healthy Living to Age 123*.

As we continued our conversation, we sensed the energy and positivity



YOUNG ERICA MILLER (CENTER) WITH HER FAMILY, IN 1938, JUST THREE YEARS BEFORE THEY WERE TAKEN AWAY TO A NAZI CONCENTRATION CAMP

that explained her traveling and speaking to groups all over the world before the pandemic swept her off stages and onto pages and virtual events. When we asked her about the current pandemic, Dr. Miller said living in the concentration camps made her strong. Maybe we'll all end up stronger from dealing with COVID-19. In that vein she commented, "I am tougher because of the unthinkable conditions from the camp. I learned resilience and grit and the importance of living in the moment." Now, as a world traveler with her wings clipped, Dr. Miller meditates, lifts weights, and walks to keep healthy.

This five-foot-tall dynamo runs circles around people half her age. After getting her PhD, she

"It's best to live each moment fully. Keep trying new things and reaching out to engage with and help as many people as you can."

started a chain of mental health clinics and founded a non-profit in Southern California to help people overcome substance abuse and domestic violence. That should have been enough achievements for a lifetime, but somewhere along the way, the idea of writing a book emerged. Dr. Miller says, "I hadn't intended to write a book! But when a colleague asked me to tell her my life's story as part of the Holocaust survivors' narrative, I realized I wanted my children and grandchildren to know history first-hand and from my perspective." The book that resulted was *The Dr. Erica*

Miller Story: From Trauma to Triumph, which published in 2009.

From there, she realized how important it is for people to have a survivor's mindset to get through the tough times, like now. "Life takes courage," she says, "and I wanted other people to know how to thrive." That inspired her next book, *Don't Tell Me I Can't Do It*, (2014), which contains five principles for successful living.

Especially these days, during the COVID tsunami, people want to know what might make their lives easier and more fulfilling. Dr. Miller says, "It's a fine line. We want to take control on the one hand, but we also need to remember to surrender to the idea that we



DR. ERICA MILLER VISITS AN ISRAELI AIR FORCE BASE, WHERE SHE SERVED FROM 1952-1954



ABOVE: DR. MILLER RECEIVES HER PHD IN 1978
BELOW: DR. MILLER AT A PUBLIC SPEAKING ENGAGEMENT,
CALABASAS, FEBRUARY 2020



never know what will happen tomorrow. It's best to live each moment fully. Keep trying new things and reaching out to engage with and help as many people as you can."

In the "you never know" category, Dr. Miller and her husband's Hidden Hills home burned down in 2005. She says, "It was another life lesson. The ovens didn't get my family during the Holocaust, and the fire didn't kill us in 2005. We survived and rebuilt." She credits her joie de vivre with a few core beliefs. "I think everyone needs a purpose. It doesn't have to be solving world challenges. It can be anything that excites you when you get up in the morning. Planting a garden. Reading to children. It's an attitude, and it isn't all pie-in-the-sky. It's just being excited to be alive, being grateful, and showing kindness. Setbacks happen. But I believe people need to push their boundaries and live audaciously in the moment."

If she could float a message behind a biplane over Hidden Hills during this pandemic, it would say, "Life is a gift—a present to be cherished. Carry on . . . with gusto!" 🍷

ABOUT DR. ERICA MILLER:

Dr. Miller has written three books, *The Dr. Erica Miller Story: From Trauma to Triumph*, *Don't Tell Me I Can't Do It: Living Audaciously in the Here and Now*, and the international best-seller, *Chronologically Gifted: Aging with Gusto: A Practical Guide for Healthy Living to Age 123*. When the pandemic is over, she will be back on the speaking circuit. For further information, contact drmiller@dricamiller.com.