

May Arvo

Mabel Della Ammaz was born May 1, 1931 in Northwest Detroit, Michigan during the depression years. She experienced her parents unemployment, ill health and subsequent broken home. She was fortunate to arrive at the Methodist Children's Home Society with her younger sister and brother in 1943. While there she was offered so many opportunities to learn, grow and accept responsibility that she was allowed "off campus" to attend Redford Union High School where she won top citizenship honors, starred in its musical programs, was a cheerleader and even set a school record for the 220 yard dash.

Music was always a part of her life, from her first church solo at age seven and an appearance on "the Radio Schoolhouse" program. In ninth grade she won her first contest to sing and tour with the school band and then her professional music career began when she won a high school contest to sing with Datus Moore and his Melodiers Dance Band. After High School she was offered scholarships to; the Syracuse Music School of Opera in New York, to Interlochen, and to the Detroit Institute of Musical Arts to study voice and choral directing with Charlotte McCray.

Music was her passion but nursing was practical and she took a scholarship to attend Bronson School of Nursing at Western Michigan University. Just before graduation she suffered an accident to her back and could not finish but the knowledge she had gained served her well when she married and had four children. In the 50's and 60's, while raising her children she attended both Redford Baptist and Nardin Park Methodist Church's where she sang in the choir and directed the youth choirs. She also led a woman's musical choir at the YMCA in Redford and became a Certified Braille Transcriber.

In the 70's, being a single woman with grown children, she returned to school at Oakland Community College to study business and pre-law. She was involved as an officer with the Academic Senate and after two crippling accidents and extensive swim therapy became a swim instructor, a lifeguard, and a First Aid and CPR instructor. She also became a professional model and image consultant. She resumed singing professionally with the Fred Waring Choir, the Rackham Choir and Detroit Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Maynard Kline. Now known as May, she began singing and acting with the Michigan Opera Theater, the Farmington Players, the Farmington Musicale, the Oakway Symphony Orchestra (with Fat Bob Taylor – the singing plumber), the Cantata Academy, the Jewele Chorale and the chancel choir at Kirk in the Hills Church. She sang for many benefit concerts and produced and directed many shows, recitals and seminars.

After marrying a second time in 1977, she continued her active lifestyle and entered the Mrs. Michigan pageant in 1980 at the age of 49, and to her surprise, won! Having in the past, written about outstanding citizens for the Redford Observer in a column called "Hats Off" and about "Student Celebrities" in the OCC Recorder newspaper, she now found herself in the spotlight. This led to a TV show, "Today's Woman" which was a springboard for her image consulting business, which she described as "putting people together." She was awarded "Outstanding Instructor of the Year" from John Casablanca Career and Modeling Center in Plymouth and was advanced to head instructor of the agency. She was also one of the top image consultants with Beauty for all Seasons. She enjoyed giving back to the community with her involvement of, women helping women put their best foot forward, a one-day seminar titled "Design a total new you."

In the 90's, she decided to "slow down" and concentrate on the "arts" and her music activities. Now the Farmington Musicale, the Farmington Community Center at the Longacre House, the Finnish Cultural Center and the Rotary Club became her focus. In addition to her musical endeavors, she also was a tireless volunteer for many causes and organizations. She said, "volunteering is a way of life for my family, it only takes a spark to get a fire going, and others will join your efforts and reap the benefits."

In 1999, having reached her "golden years", she brought dignity, maturity and inner beauty to what she considered achieving "the age of elegance." At age 68, she was selected as one of 10 finalists for the Ms. Senior Michigan pageant. After finishing as runner-up in the statewide competition, her comment was, "regardless of your dimples shifting, there are always opportunities, open doors and fun to pursue." One of her favorite songs to sing in these competitions was "The Impossible Dream". Other accomplishments that year included the Farmington Area Arts Commission making her the recipient of the Distinguished Service

to the Arts award, and she was also named outstanding volunteer for music outreach from the Michigan Federation of Music Clubs at Interlochen.

There was nothing impossible about her stance to not let advancing years thwart happiness, motivation and achievement. She often said, "Life is turning adversity into opportunity." She continued to set goals and impressed the importance of that to others, young and old.

In the fall of 2003, Betty Walker wrote some beautiful memories of her in the Metronome: (these are just a few)

On November 5, 2003, amidst tears, music and loving memories, friends and family said farewell to May D. Arvo who succumbed to injuries during a tragic traffic accident October 31, 2003. The Musicale Chorus opened the service by singing her requests. She served her Christian duties well, teaching Sunday School, attending Bible studies, using her God given voice through church music. Not only was her Christian life important, but also her community service went beyond what most of us would shun.

She served in so many ways through performances, especially recognizing the talents of others and ensuring them opportunities to perform and be recognized. She was gifted in so many ways: excellence in programming, designing displays, designing costumes, decorating tables, and also for Holiday festivals and tree trimming. Who will forget her efforts in making Veterans Day a special event for our veterans and husbands who fought in the wars?

Friendships and contacts with old friends and the sick and elderly were important to May. She could use her charms and smile to obtain the nicest donation from merchants in the area for the benefit of many organizations and get the best price for them in auctioneering. Beautiful, talented, style-conscious and giving, her energy was unending!

One of her famous lines was, "I thought it would be nice if we..." and follow it with some unique or helpful idea that she thought would enhance a performance or give a talent in Musicale or a scholarship winner a chance to be seen and heard.

She was an outstanding woman that we can be proud to say we have known and worked with for many years, and we all admit we will miss her. We pray God will bless her forever in her new home with Him.

She had planned out her funeral the way she wanted it and on the cover she requested this poem:

Let there be
MUSIC
In my heart
Throughout all seasons...
Let my spirit sing
A song of hope
In happiness or tears...
Let me live my life
In harmony with God,
At peace with others,
As love plays out
The melody of all my days.

This May Arvo Educational Assistance Fund brings her life full circle. It fulfills her purpose in life; where she reaped what others had sown, now others will reap what she has sown. It makes her memory live on. It is an honor to her and to her family that you have provided this "circle of life" in her name. We thank you deeply from the bottom of our hearts. On behalf of the family, it is my privilege to make a donation to further the cause of MUSIC in the lives of others.

In Mom's memory, "Keep a song in your heart"!

Written by;
Shari Jackson

May's children: Shari Jackson, Scott Griffin, Curtis Griffin, Bradley Griffin