

❧ **EDITH CIAMMAICHELLI** ❧
VICTORIOUS WOMAN OF THE MONTH
SEPTEMBER 2007

As she celebrated her eighty-fifth birthday, change was the last thing on Edith's mind. She figured her next big change would be like the old 1950's movie: "from here to eternity." In fact, Edith told everyone, "I'm ready when God wants me...and the sooner the better." However, life had other plans for the octogenarian.

Earlier this year, Edith was wondering, "Where did the time go?" Though it seemed like yesterday, it had been fifty-four years since Edith and her spouse, Vincent, nervously put their deposit on a stone and brick Cape Cod with four bedrooms and a big, family-size backyard. Edith's mind wandered back to that December morning in 1953 when the small family moved into their new suburban Philadelphia home. "It was the Feast of Santa Lucia," Edith recalled, "and it was *cold*."

A few months later, Edith was pregnant with her third child. Like many young couples, they nervously wondered how they would pay the "sky-high" \$125/month mortgage *and* care for their growing family. Happily, they *did* they manage. They even added another child a few years later, and raised all four children in the house on Drexel Avenue.

Edith, a typical 1950's stay-at-home mom, took care of the house and kids and orchestrated the planning of family events, like birthdays and holidays. Nostalgically she recalled some of those times, including a late-season snowstorm that knocked out the electricity the day before Vincent's March birthday. She said she was determined not to let a power outage ruin her spouse's celebration and found a way to prepare a special ravioli dinner using the wood-burning fireplace. The birthday dinner by candlelight turned out to be a memorable meal that the family laughed about for years.

Sadly, in 1980, Vincent passed away. With the kids mostly gone, Edith struggled to live alone for the first time ever. It was slow-going at first, but in time Edith built a new life for herself.

Through ups and downs, for more than fifty years, the walls of her house had resounded with laughter, happiness, anger, sadness and tears. Edith knew every nook and cranny, every sound, every subtle nuance. She could find her way around her house in the dark, which became increasingly more important as she aged. She still enjoyed excellent health. If ever her memory failed, she'd laughingly explain, "I'm 90% here and the other 10% is floating around somewhere."

By 2005, however, though she refused to admit it to anyone, the two-story house had become too much to take care of, too costly to heat and even going up and down stairs could soon become risky. *She knew it*. Still, she wondered, "*how could I move? How could I start over now?*"

As one who typically resisted change, Edith says the decision to move was the most difficult one of her life. Not only was it emotionally hard, but even the idea of selling, packing and moving simply overwhelmed her. Moreover, when she thought about being around new people in a new environment, Edith worried about fitting in because, she claimed, she was never "forward."

Still, in spite of her fear of change, she made the courageous decision to move. She learned about a retirement community that was just being built. In early December 2005, in weather that reminded her of the day she moved into her house, Edith put the deposit down on her new condo.

Soon Edith would discover how making that decision was the easiest part of the process. Over the next eighteen months, with the help of her daughter and son-in-law, she reorganized her finances, fixed her house, and rummaged through closets and drawers. It was gut-wrenching work, but she sorted and tossed, gave away precious possessions, had garage sales, and sold furniture.

Logistically, the move demanded every ounce of Edith's physical and emotional strength. She often felt angry and embarrassed that she couldn't do it all herself...something very difficult for the proud woman to admit. The one bright spot was that, once it was ready, the house sold quickly and privately. Edith was happy because, she confessed, "I didn't want to put a sign on my lawn."

As if moving wasn't enough, in the middle of everything, she had a cardiac emergency that resulted in an angioplasty and three stents. It was a lot for anyone to handle...*harder still at her age.*

Yet, step-by-step, Edith did it. In 2007, at age 88, Edith Ciammaichelli started a new chapter. She is happy to be free of the stress and strain that was part of maintaining the big house on Drexel Avenue. Instead, these days she's adjusting to her new life and, happily, Edith thinks it is going easier and faster than she expected. She giggles when she tells people that she "feels like a young school girl" because of all the new things she's learning, including how to find her way to social events and fun activities. Most importantly, she's making new friends, feeling very comfortable, and with the in-house availability of services and transportation, she's enjoying more independence than she's had in years. When asked recently what she missed about her house, Edith thought about it for a few minutes and, surprising even herself, said, "Nothing, really."

Change, no matter what our age, is never easy. Change makes us wonder if we will be happy, safe or if we will "fit in" and reminds us that we don't like the discomfort that is an intrinsic part of change. Sometimes change feels like too much work, requiring too much physical, mental and/or emotional effort. Fear of change makes us hang on to things, like a relationship or a job or a house. We might stick with what we know because we seem comforted by the idea that we can handle it...even when people or things no longer serve us or our lives...and even if it's a struggle.

When we face change and go into a challenge, we question our abilities and confront our unspoken fears. Then, when we come out on the other end, we feel stronger and more confident.

That's how Edith Ciammaichelli is feeling these days, in this happy new chapter of her life.

Thank you Edith!
***You model for us a most valuable lesson:
Regardless of our age or stage of life,
And no matter how stuck, overwhelmed, trapped, or blocked we feel,
We can find the courage to start over,
And happy, new beginnings are possible!***