

Encouraging Email sent by Gary Beikirch, Medal of Honor Recipient

This email was sent to provide some encouragement for all of us. To provide some direction on how to face uncertainty and fear that can threaten us as we journey through this life.

Lolly and I want to let all of you know that you are in our thoughts and prayers during this serious situation that we are all facing. It seems that there are so many “uncertainties” about COVID-19 that have suddenly made “social distancing”, school closings, business closings, and a plunging stock market a part of our new “normal” way of life. All these events have affected so many of us in ways we have never experienced before.

We watched a news report the other morning where a father was sharing with his children how that in the future they will be able to look back and say to their children and grandchildren, “We **survived** the COVID-19 Pandemic of 2020”. As I heard him speak, the word that caught my attention was “**survived**”. I thought of all the **survival** courses that I have taken both in and out of the military. I thought of **survivors** of accidents, and natural disasters.

I thought of the many times when people learn that after the war I spent almost 2 years in a cave, I am asked, “How did you **survive**?” To survive means many different things to different people...but my answer to that question about surviving in the cave has always been...“I did not go into a cave to **survive**...I went into the cave to try and remember how to **live**”. I believe, there is a difference between **surviving and living**. The war in Vietnam taught me that.

While in that cave I remembered that during my first few days at a remote jungle camp in the Highlands of Vietnam I asked a young Montagnard boy to “*teach me how to “**survive**” in the jungle.* I told him I was afraid of snakes, tigers, and all the other “unknowns” that were there. He smiled and said, “*I don’t want to teach you how to survive in the jungle. The jungle provides us with life. We **live** by what we get from the jungle. I want to teach you how to **live** in the jungle.*” His answer was surprising to me at that time...but through the years it has given me encouragement and hope as I have faced many challenges in life. **For the next year in the jungle he taught me how to “live” in the midst of something that I had been afraid of...he taught me how to look beyond what was “unknown” and find things that could give me life. He taught me something that his whole tribe had learned...that in the midst of something that is terrifying, and threatening... that by working together they could create a village...a place where each of them could not just survive...but live...live without want...live without fear...live helping each other.** Each member of that village could very easily “survive” ALONE out in the jungle...but their goal was more than survival of just one person. Their goal was to live...live as a family...as a village...as a people.

The current pandemic of COVID-19 with its closing of stores, schools, malls...and its warning of staying away from each other has in a sense created a “cave” situation for our country. It has created a sense of “unknown” and fear for many...and caused some to react by behaving in a

“survival mode”. Lolly and I have seen so many examples of this in our town...in our stores...as people are hoarding...pushing others out of the way to get that last roll of toilet paper. Their motivation seems to be **“I NEED this to survive!”** Their own **survival** is foremost in their heart and mind.

As sad as **that is** we have also seen examples of others who look beyond “surviving”... and choose to **LIVE**. One small restaurant, known for its dish of macaroni and cheese, was forced to close to patrons. However, it has set up a table in town and is handing out free bowls of macaroni and cheese along with a roll of toilet paper to individuals in need. Chick Filet and McDonalds have brought over free meals to hospital workers. Younger veterans in our community have set up a general assistance network to help with picking up groceries, prescriptions, walking dogs for the elderly and those that are house bound. These people have discovered that **to really live** means **realizing that there is something more important in life than self...to really live is reaching out to others...to really live means caring for and loving others...making a difference in their lives.**

Each of us has been given a very precious gift...a gift of life. It is a life that can be spent focused on **“surviving”**...looking out only for myself... or it can be a life dedicated to and focused on **“living”**...thinking of others...reaching out...caring... to be there when needed...to let others know that they are not alone

As we go through this crisis Lolly and I are comforted by the thought that we are not going through this alone. There are so many who have become a special part of our life...a special part of our “living”. We are thankful for each of you and for the important part of our life that each of you have become. We are thankful for all that you have added to our lives. Knowing you has made it possible for us to know that we are never alone.

Through the things we have faced in life we have also learned that there is another that is also **always** with us...it is our God... who has promised to never leave us ...who has promised to give us life. As this Pandemic continues to impact our lives our hope and prayer is that each of us will continue to choose to live...continue to remember and think of others in need. May each of us never forget that we are not going through this alone. We have each other and we have a God who loves us and will always be there.

During this difficult time...Remember...Life is more than **surviving**...may each of us choose to truly **live**.

For His Honor
Gary and Lolly Beikirch