

Love, Laugh — And Help Each Other

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Shari Cohen

A centenarian and his “rescuer” — his cousin — live one day at a time, with humor and humanity.

By any standard, Vicki Howard qualifies as a *mentsh* — “a person of integrity and honor.” Vicki, 62, has cared for her 100-year-old second cousin, Manny (Emanuel) Silverman, in her Huntington Woods home for the past 10 years. She also took care of her mother when she had cancer and assists an elderly aunt and uncle.

“We’re running a senior center,” she laughs of the home she shares with Devlin Burton, her partner of 36 years. “I’ve always been kind and sensitive to elders, but this has taught me how vital seniors are. It has taught me how they love unconditionally and how you can care for them more deeply than you expect.”

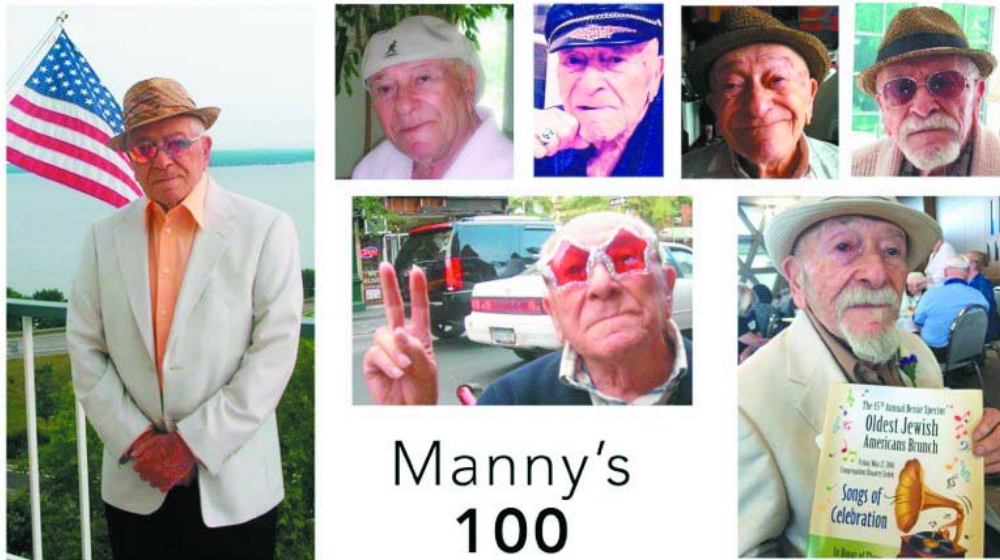
Vicki and Manny were close when she was growing up in Detroit. “I was the child he never had,” she says. “He would read to me, and his wife, Babs, who was an artist, painted with me. He took me fishing,”



Manny and his caretaker, cousin Vicki Howard, have a special, playful bond



Manny and Vicki



Manny's 100

Please stop by the Food Court
at Somerset Collection, between 2-4 on July 15
to shake hands, hug,
take a photo or well wish a centurion for his 100 th birthday!

The invitation Vicki created to celebrate Manny's 100th birthday



Manny joined the U.S. Cavalry in 1943 at age 27.



Manny Silverman turns 101 on July 15.

Vicki remembers Manny as kind and generous, to her and to others. He offered to send her to college. He and his wife would often visit residents of what was then the Jewish Old Folks Home.

Manny owned Oak Park Tool & Die and also was an inventor. "He has done amazing things — inventing the synthetic ruby, the rear-screen projection for movie theaters. He was a scientist — brilliant, but not a businessman," Vicki says.

Manny moved to California years ago to care for his parents who lived there. Eventually they died, as did his wife, and he lived alone in an apartment in Sherman Oaks.

Manny called his first cousin, who is Vicki's uncle, and told him that he had no food and couldn't get money out of the bank. Her uncle, then 82, called Vicki and they flew to California.

There they found Manny's apartment was located near a park which attracted street people, one of whom, Joyce, had ingratiated herself with him and gained control over some aspects of his life. While Joyce did take him to medical appointments and brought him groceries, she was clearly taking advantage of his kindness and memory loss. Vicki noticed, for example, that Manny reimbursed Joyce twice for the same groceries within a short time span.

The camera at Manny's bank recorded Joyce hitting him in the parking lot, and their staff called social services. Vicki contacted the Veterans Administration and found that Manny had been missing medical appointments. She talked to his landlord and a lawyer. She realized that he had Alzheimer's and started to pack up his things.

Abuse of elders — emotional, financial or physical — affects an estimated 5 percent of people over age 60, according to a 2010 study cited by Peter Lichtenberg, Ph.D, a national expert on elder abuse, a professor of psychology and director of the Institute of Gerontology at Wayne State University.

"Many live alone and aren't able or don't want to report problems. Those over 85 are often fearful and don't think of the options," he says.

Fortunately, Manny had a determined and resourceful protector who quickly took control and rescued him. Vicki knew that her elderly aunt and uncle couldn't take care of him and she decided to bring him into her home.

"He is my oldest relative, had nobody, and he was so good to me when I was young," she says. "I love him, and I was taught to respect my elders. I've always loved old people and helped take care of my grandparents.

“Manny’s life has been full. We never treated him like he has Alzheimer’s. We traveled and sometimes I took him to work. He still talks about getting a job, doing something creative or scientific. We are blessed that he has the happy gene,” says Vicki, who noticed that with Alzheimer’s he became more light-hearted and affectionate. “Many people don’t know how to treat the elderly as intelligent people.”

Vicki and Devlin share responsibility for Manny, who is never left alone — only occasionally do they rely on outside caregivers. Vicki has cut back on her work as owner of Ta-Dah Productions, which presents fashion shows and other special events for businesses and hospitals.

In 2013, Vicki enrolled Manny in the Dorothy & Peter Brown Jewish Community Adult Day Care Program, which The program provides social connections and cognitive stimulation for participants with memory loss, says social worker Dorothy Moon.

During the few days a week that Manny attended, he was “delightful and full of life,” she says. “His sense of humor and wit were always there — and he appreciated women.” Last year, a group of Brown Center participants joined Manny’s 100th birthday celebration at a party at the Somerset Collection Food Court, organized by Vicki.

The pair’s relationship made a special impression on Moon. “Her connection with him was so heart-warming,” she says. “She engaged him and didn’t treat him like someone with memory problems, and he was affectionate with her.”

Manny will turn 101 on July 15. Now he is frail and spends most of his time in bed. However, says Vicki, “he has an appetite, has the will to live and is always positive.” He doesn’t remember much but he recognizes Vicki and expresses gratitude for her care.

She urges people embarking on the care of an elderly relative to have a positive outlook.

“It’s not the end of either of your worlds. I’ve always looked at it as a fun adventure. Every day is a new experience, but in a fun, light-hearted way,” she says. “I hope that my son and his kids will recognize this.”

The experience, Vicki says, has allowed her to “see the possibilities of getting old and still being young.”