

Living a Simple Life with a Back Porch View

Dear Listener:

Thank you for stopping by for a visit at Living a Simple Life with a Back Porch View podcast! To make it easy, you will find a transcript of each episode. I hope you enjoy the visit!

Episode 19- Sherman the Goldfish Gives Life Lessons on Resilience

Welcome to Living a Simple Life with a Back Porch View. Thanks for stopping by! Grab a glass of Lemonade, pull up a rocker and join me for conversations about living the Simple Life. Go ahead. Get comfortable and settle in for a good visit. It's time to relax and enjoy!

Life lessons come in all different ways. They are taught by other people, experiences, and activities. I have even learned some of my life lessons from the cows and chickens. But never in my mind did I ever expect to learn a life lesson from a goldfish! But that is exactly what happened.

Our goldfish is named Sherman, after the Sherman tank. The Sherman tank was named after General William Tecumseh Sherman, an American Civil war General, and was used in military battles. It was a tough tank in its day, which is why we chose this name for the goldfish. It fit. All too well because Sherman is one tough goldfish.

We got Sherman by accident. The Country Boy stopped to pick up some shiners one day, and in the bag was this one spark of bright orange among all the dark gray. The Country Boy didn't do more than smile at the addition and dumped all of them in an ice chest he kept in the shop. This ice chest was rigged up with an aerator to keep them alive as long as possible. He also kept plastic bottles filled with water and frozen to keep the water cool.

A few days later, our world came to a screaming halt. I had to rush the Country Boy to the hospital for stomach pains. The next day he was in surgery, and once he came out of surgery, he was diagnosed with Stage 3 Colon Cancer.

After almost two weeks in the hospital, he came home to recover. We focused on his healing, finding an Oncologist, and setting up Chemotherapy treatments. Considering this was in the height of Covid-19, we were taking additional precautions, and very few were allowed close to him to help. Our kids came to help for stretches of time, and the rest of the time it was up to me.

It was almost two months later the Country Boy was talking about going down to the pond for some fishing therapy. Just as he was lamenting not having any shiners, he remembered the ones he got before he entered the hospital. Knowing the shiners were gone, we still needed to clean out the ice chest. By this time, we figured the water was stagnant.

You can imagine our surprise when we lifted the lid and found nothing but water and one lone goldfish. And he was a bit bigger than when we first got him. He had been surviving on all the other shiners. As we lifted the lid, he eagerly looked up – probably hoping for some more food.

After all we had been through, our hearts went out to this little guy. He was a survivor, just as the Country Boy was. So, he got named Sherman, because of his toughness and resilience. We purchased a small round fishbowl and moved him into the house.

It wasn't long before our attachment to him began to grow – and so did Sherman. We had to get a bigger tank. The Country Boy was concerned Sherman was lonely, so we bought two other fish. My fear was that Sherman would revert to his old ways and consider these two as snacks, so rather than get attached to them as well, the Country Boy just gave them generic names – This One and That One.

This One and That One must be survivors as well, because they are almost 8 months old and have avoided Sherman's attacks. And Sherman just keeps growing.

Before I share the life lesson I learned from Sherman, let me tell you a little bit about goldfish. They are actually a Carp, which is a freshwater fish. It is an omnivore, which means it feeds on plants and small animals. It can grow from 2 to 4 inches, if kept in a tank, and up to 14 inches if they live in a larger fishpond. Growth will depend on how much its fed and how large their living area is.

Originally, they were gray or silver, but were selectively bred in Ancient China for the brilliant colors now associated with these fish.

I'm not going to delve into the science behind goldfish, but I will say this much about it. Because of their genetic abilities, they have some of the best sight and hearing in the fish world. And Sherman must have inherited strong genes in that area because he definitely knows when the humans are approaching or are standing close by. He immediately begins swimming in circles, peering out of the glass or speeding to the top of the water, demanding food.

We have noticed lately that he also has become demanding. We can't be positive, but we think he is spitting rocks at the glass when we take longer than usual feeding him. We keep hearing this muted tap, tap, tap. It took us a day or two, but we finally realized it was Sherman.

It was observing and studying this simple goldfish that made me realize Sherman was actually teaching me a life lesson. And that is the lesson of Resilience.

When you make the decision to live a Simple Life, one thing you need to have in your arsenal is a sturdy sense of Resilience. The definition of resilience is: the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties; toughness; and the ability of a substance or object to spring back into shape; elasticity.

As you begin the journey of living more simply, you find you are having to let go of some things that no longer add quality to your life. This could mean eliminating activities you enjoyed, but no longer had the time to commit.

It may be through the process of decluttering your home. It's tough to give away items that have sentimental (or even monetary) value – but you know you only have room for so much 'stuff'. Or, we may be changing professions, or leaving the corporate world to stay home.

It may even mean letting go of ideals of what you should be doing – whether that be professions, behavior, personalities, or goals, in order to become the person you were meant to be.

Once you have progressed in your simple life, you quickly find that just because it is simple, it isn't always easy. We still have difficulties. As we discovered, health issues can consume your world. We face obstacles that need to be overcome. And it feels as if we are always in school, learning new aspects of living a simple life, such as how to grow our own food, canning and preserving the harvest, or even a new way of living.

To do all this, it takes resilience. Being tough. Finding ways to quickly recover from difficulties and moving forward. It is a constant challenge to set our goals, take the necessary action steps, and learn to celebrate our successes.

It also means facing our fears and learning how to overcome them, as well as accepting the mistakes we will make along the way and moving past them.

Living a Simple Life also means growth. Like Sherman, we grow according to the food we eat and the size of our environment. As for the food, it doesn't just mean healthy foods from our gardens. It also means feeding ourselves with curiosity, researching things we have as our goals, and trying new things.

The size of our environment isn't just limited to the space we have for living. A person in an apartment may not be able to raise cows, but they can adopt many aspects of simple living and grow within their space. Even a person who has a lot of room, such as a farm and acreage, can't do everything. Instead, they learn to focus on their priorities, and stick within those parameters.

I think my favorite part of the definition for resilience is the ability of a substance or object to spring back into shape. Take some time to allow this to sink in.

Although the biggest goal of living a Simple Life is to slow down and learn to enjoy life, there is another aspect that holds just as much importance. It is learning how to become the person we were originally designed to be.

Too many of us have allowed family, friends, society, and even the media to tell us who we should be. Often, our professions are chosen by family, who want us to either follow in a family member's footsteps, join the family business, or just obtain a profession that provides a hefty bank account and all the trimmings.

Friends and peers want us to adapt to the things they like, want, or need, out of life. Society dictates we should do what is 'acceptable', and the media just wants us to spend our money on things that really have no significance to use. But advertisers do it in a way that makes us feel as if we won't fit in, be accepted, can't be beautiful, or at worst – be laughed at and shunned – if we don't buy their product.

Instead, living a Simple Life gives us the opportunity to tune out all these naysayers and explore our own passions and goals. We then turn them into a life that is filled with richness, joy, and contentment. We are no longer dictated by others, and instead, start following our own paths.

I'm 'one of those' who broke out of the mold. Instead of staying in the city, working a traditional job, and doing the 'acceptable' thing, the Country Boy and I packed up and followed our dream of living on a farm.

I am also one of the fortunate ones. My family, although shocked at our about-face, were supportive. My Mom didn't know whether to shake her head or burst with pride. It wasn't long before she even got on the bandwagon.

It was after a weekend church outing when she came home stating she wanted an 'Oreo' cow. Apparently, she had seen a pasture filled with Belted Galloways on her trip and fell in love. She told me it was that moment she fully realized and understood the blessing I had been given to follow our dreams. She saw the change in me – a change for the better. I had become the happiest and most content she had ever known me to be. And yes, she got her cow as a Christmas gift.

The very act of becoming the person we are meant to be, rather than who everyone else says we should be, is activating our ability to 'spring back' into our original shape. It means we haven't dry rotted to the point that any change we make causes us to disintegrate.

Instead, we are reshaping ourselves into our original form. We learn to relax. We find a happiness and contentment we had only once dreamed about. And even when difficulties and obstacles arise, we find we are better able to cope with them and keep moving forward.

Thanks to Sherman, I have an even better appreciation of my own Simple Life. One of my new goals is to learn to be even more resilient, and accept things – good, bad, or indifferent – as they come. I am also going to take more quiet time to spend with my animals. I mean really – if a goldfish can teach me a life lesson, then just imagine what else I can learn from the other critters we have around here.

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If you have questions or need some help with learning to live a Simple Life, you can stop by for an email visit at thevirtualporch@gmail.com. I am happy to help in any way I can.

And be sure to subscribe – you don't want to miss a single conversation. I'll be sitting on the porch every Monday morning waiting for your visit!

Thanks again for stopping in. I will see you next week on Living a Simple Life with a Back Porch View. And while you are waiting on the next episode, grab that glass of refreshment, pull up a rocker, and sit back for a while. It's time to

Relax & Enjoy!

julie