

• W O R T H Y •

2016 Worthy Women's Professional Studies Scholarship

By Jill Reedy

I lived forty years before I met the woman that is the standard by which all others should be measured. She is the model by which I live my life. If ever I can live my life as generously and as genuinely as she has lived hers, I will feel I have honored her example. A worthy woman demonstrates survival over adversity with strength and dignity. Dee is this worthy of our admiration and respect.

Dee grew up in a small town in New York. She came from a very poor family, whose small apartment burned down in 1946, when she was five years old. One sibling perished in the fire. Her parents had no way to care for the children due to this circumstance, therefore her youngest sibling, then two years old, was given up for adoption. She and three of her siblings were sent to live in an orphanage. The orphanage was a difficult place to live. The children were beaten, abused, and worked cooking and cleaning the orphanage from the day one moved in. She never celebrated a birthday or ever received a Christmas gift she wished for.

Dee lived in the orphanage from the age of five until eighteen, when they simply turned her out to live on her own. Upon leaving the orphanage, she moved in with a family who paid her almost nothing to be the maid, the nanny, the cook, the laundress, and anything else they needed done. Her pay was basically having a place to live and food to eat. Over the years, Dee went on to be a bookkeeper, a caterer, a fitness instructor, a candy maker, a banquet manager, the list goes on and on.

Dee met the love of her life, Toby. They married, had two children, and lived the happiest years of their life. Toby died ten years ago. He took a nap one afternoon, and never woke up. Dee tried to wake him for dinner, and found he had passed in his sleep. She truly lost the man of her dreams, and the man who equally loved her more than anything in the world.

During those years, Dee suffered health issues. She lost one kidney. She had her entire spine replaced with titanium due to a degenerative disease. She was told that after the surgery, she would never walk again. True to form, Dee proved the doctors wrong. Although she is numb from the waist down, she walks and walks better than most.

In spite of all of the hardships, Dee is the happiest, most alive person I have ever known. She never feels sorry for herself for the tough life she's had. She never hesitates to help someone in need. She gives her service, her time and her generosity in countless ways. She has the most infectious laugh, more of a "cackle" which immediately makes you laugh right along with her. She is my inspiration to never give up. I live my life by exemplifying hers.