

Hi Drisha,

This is a beautiful piece about my mother written by her friend Bruce Gaims in 1990. If you like you could update it to today for future uses. Bruce doesn't care how we use it.

Happy New Year

Danny

Elaine LaLanne - A Legacy of Her Own

In July 1945, Elaine Rorem, a nineteen-year-old University of Minnesota student, went to California for the summer. She was smart, pretty, and capable and looking forward to seeing her relatives in San Francisco and Los Angeles. Little did she know she would not be returning home soon and that her study break would lead to a professional career and a lifelong romance beyond her greatest expectations.

Within a decade Elaine was a radio/television veteran and a producer/personality on one of the most successful syndicated television shows in history. She married a man, Jack LaLanne, with whom she became famous and had a family. Together they inspired generations of people and met kings, queens, presidents, and leaders from all around the globe.

This is a true Hollywood story, yet there is nothing Hollywood about Elaine LaLanne. She never wanted to be larger than life. She was simply ahead of her time. Elaine stepped into a man's world and became a media and fitness pioneer on the strength of her character. Her life personifies the powerful philosophy that she and Jack developed around exercise, health, and happiness.

Having celebrated her 90th birthday in March, Elaine maintains extraordinary vitality. She lives in a secluded hillside Central California home that the La Lannes built in 1981. She might be expected to retire for any one of several reasons - the biggest being Jack's passing several years ago. Instead, she works full speed ahead, managing BeFit Enterprises (one of the businesses they built together). Her life is richer and more productive than ever.

She has never been the retiring sort. Born in Minneapolis on March 19, 1926, the family lore is that Elaine came out smiling. She grew up a "terrible tomboy" who loved baseball and spent most of her free time playing with her brothers (one older, one younger) and their friends. She was not one to sit out the occasional "scraps" and exasperated her mother with stunts like prancing atop the clothesline supports.

Her parents, Allen and Sylvia (nee Michelson) were of Norwegian descent. Elaine's given surname, Rorem, was an Americanized version of Rohrheim, a name taken from the fjord where her father's family lived and he was born. Her mother was born in Iowa. Elaine spent many a child's summer-in-paradise there on her uncles' farms playing in the haystacks and oat bins.

Her active spirit was tempered by her father's patient guidance. He was in the legal profession and often counseled that "there are two sides to every story" and if "you're around something going wrong, you're implicated!" He wanted all his children, including his only daughter, to develop their own ideas. For example, when Elaine was ten, he instructed her to keep a journal during a long family car trip to Florida.

Allen and Sylvia respected and trusted their children. Elaine did not want to disappoint them. She unabashedly confesses to being a "miss goody two shoes". She was raised to be herself and to do the right thing by others. Elaine has always done well following that compass in business and in her personal relationships.

Her good old fashioned American values are matched with a swashbuckler's laugh and disarming confidence. That explains how someone with a temporary gold front tooth (courtesy of a baseball incident) became her high school Vice President.

Like her husband Jack, who often recounted his transformation after attending a lecture by the nutritionist Paul Bragg, Elaine discovered her inner strength in evangelical fashion. As a sixteen year old auditioning for the Minneapolis Aqua Follies, she was petrified about holding her breath under water. She overcame her fears, made the troupe, and became a performer. All through her life, facing any new challenge she would remember her father's words, "You learned to swim, didn't you?!" She felt she do anything if she persevered.

Elaine's determination was fostered by her parents. She owes her great sense of style to her Aunt Gladys. Gladys, her father's sister, was an attractive, sophisticated woman who taught Latin, played golf, and loved going downtown for manicures. She reminded Elaine of Merle Oberon,

the movie star. Gladys' advice to Elaine was simple and taken to heart: "Buy clothes that look good on you and don't be a slave to fashion."

Aunt Gladys likely had little worry about her niece being a slave to fashion. In fact, Elaine has always been well-liked because she does not conform her dress or behavior to elevate her status or to fit into a group. At the University of Minnesota Elaine opted not to be a member of any sororities. She thought the rushing process "made many people feel inadequate". She was voted Queen of the College anyway.

Elaine's lack of pretension defines her. While her mind, energy, and beauty have opened doors, she wins hearts because she is the last person to ballyhoo her assets and successes. Even at the height of the national popularity of the Jack LaLanne TV show, Elaine chuckles that she and Jack "never thought we were famous. We were too busy taking care of our fans and audience."

People, not fame or money, have driven Elaine's career. Ask her why and she exclaims, "I really like people. Everybody's interesting!" People in all walks of life feel this compassion. Elaine puts others at ease. She makes them feel important. Her confidence inspires. She sums it up simply, "I already know I will always get along. I want to build the other person up. If you put yourself in their shoes, nothing can go wrong."

Her independence has been the backbone of her life and her career. When Elaine says, "I am very independent," she means it. In an era where few women aspired to or had access to financial and emotional freedoms, she always worked - because she wanted and enjoyed those freedoms.

Her independence emerged during that California summer vacation in 1945. Rather than return to Minneapolis, Elaine struck out on her own in Los Angeles. If that was a bold move for a nineteen year old Midwestern girl, she would have been the last to know. She found a job at a drugstore and a place to live. She enrolled in the NBC-UCLA Radio Institute (she had always loved radio). She dismisses any suggestion of being scared at the time, "Where I live, I live. Any place I hang my hat is home."

Such confidence might imply that Elaine has led a charmed life. Not true! She had to grow up just like everybody else. Shortly before she came to Los Angeles, her high school sweetheart was killed in Iwo Jima. After her move, four years would pass before she got her big break into television. During that time, she would get married, move to San Francisco, and become a mother. As her father said of that time in her life, she "jumped from the frying pan into the fire."

Elaine married Joe Doyle at the end of 1947. Joe, six years older, was a gentleman who had become a good friend. She enjoyed his sense of humor. Shortly after getting married, they relocated to San Francisco when Joe found work there in the newspaper business. Their son, Danny, was born in 1948. Their daughter, Janet, was born in 1952. By that time, however, their marriage had come apart.

Whatever her pain and regrets, Elaine moved on with two children to support. Being a single mother was not easy, but the burden was less than it might have been; Elaine had not stopped working after getting married and having her children. At the end of 1948, she had found employment with a modeling agency that placed her with exhibitors at conventions and other events. Elaine remembers selling anything "from blow torches to hospital beds to row boats."

At one such promotion in 1949 she got her break in the entertainment business. She was having her usual fun at an RCA Victor Records demo at the Emporium Department Store in San Francisco. One shopper asked, "Can you get Bing Crosby on these records?" Elaine quipped, "No, but you can get Perry Como and he sounds just like him!" This display of wit was overheard by Les Malloy, a pre-eminent San Francisco radio personality. He approached her directly and asked if she'd like to help with his upcoming TV show. Elaine, of course, did not hesitate and said, "Yes!"

They met several days later to discuss the business in more detail. She got a bigger surprise. Les wanted her to produce the show! That turned out to be everything from booking the guests, appearing on the show (which ran live on KGO every afternoon from 4:30 to 6:00PM), running the cue cards, and keeping the crew and guests on task. If that sounded good to her, could she have the first show together by next Tuesday?

Elaine gave Les another big "Yes!", and her career in television was launched....

It was an exhilarating time! Her first office at KGO in San Francisco was on Twin Peaks at the old Sutro Mansion (where the transmitter was located) on the ballroom floor. Elaine booked horses, museum curators, artists, inventors – in short - every conceivable kind of guest. In a pinch, she would snare anyone in foyer of the studio. "You're my next interview," she would tell them with a smile.

Les trusted Elaine's talent and was ahead of his time in hiring capable women to help his cause. How did she feel as a young, single mother with an important role in a male dominated workplace? Elaine answers, "I've always worked with men, and I've never had any problems. I even like to think like a man, sometimes... maybe that's why I'm ambidextrous."

Her results trumped any questions about her gender (or at this time in her life – about her age). From swimming in the Follies to waiting tables to managing television shows to marketing products, and opening health clubs, Elaine has always completed the job. She is not one to quit or waste time analyzing events and issues over which she has no control. On the subject of work, she is high-spirited, adamant, and succinct – "Let's get the thing done!"

With her professional life in full swing and two children at home, Elaine's heart did not skip a beat when Jack LaLanne, a body builder and fitness advocate, appeared on the "Les Malloy Show." When Mr. LaLanne got his own show on KGO (1951) and began showing an interest in her, she resisted his requests for a date. After the break-up of her marriage she believed she would "never love again." "Besides," she explains, "the movies made musclemen like Jack look like they had no brains."

Elaine preferred to keep her private life out of the workplace. She might have brushed off Jack's flirting and chiding about her health habits forever. One day, however, she saw an associate of hers, whom she highly respected, go out to lunch with him. She thought, "Hmm, maybe

if he asks me out again..." Of course, Jack did ask her out again, and as they say, the rest is history.

In January 1953 their first date was in downtown San Francisco. It was a special, life-changing night. Elaine's preconceptions were swept away with her heart. Jack was smart, funny, and he was a good dancer. She "fell in love with his brains, not his body." He even sang for her, "Because You're Mine" - which became their song. Jack was equally smitten. Of that first date, Elaine declares, "From then on, we dated forever and did everything together."

Elaine and Jack were matching whirlwinds. Elaine had her job and children. Jack had a daughter, Yvonne, from a previous marriage, his TV show, and his public gym - Jack LaLanne's Physical Culture Studio. Jack's friends warned her that she would never keep up with him. She parleyed that he would never keep up with her. The truth was that they were in step without even trying. Elaine recalls, "he never liked dissent and neither did I." Their bond was elemental. As she told Jack early on, "I don't want you if you don't want me."

The pace was frenetic. Elaine and Jack saw each other after work on Tuesdays and Thursdays and on weekends if possible. Elaine lived and worked in San Francisco. Jack's residence and his gym were in Oakland. After their first date, it was six months before Jack visited Elaine's house. It would be six *years* before they could catch their breath and find a time to get married!

In 1953, Les Malloy stopped producing his television show and bought a radio station KVSM - a country and western station. Jack wanted Elaine to work with him in his growing business, which included fitness and nutrition products that he was developing and selling. Elaine, however, had already made a promise that she would help Les get the new radio station and show up and running.

For the next year Elaine did everything in the world that had to do with radio. She was a live deejay playing the latest hits from Elvis Presley, Hank Snow, Eddy Arnold and others. She created show content, pitched the show to sponsors, wrote ad copy, and spliced tape (sometimes as she was talking on the air!). She became a member of the International

Brotherhood of Electrical Workers because at times she had to put the station on the air.

Prior to partnering with Jack in 1954, Elaine had told him a thousand times that she would never commute across the Golden Gate Bridge to work in Oakland. But after offering fond goodbyes and thanks to Les Malloy and KVSM, she started making that dreaded commute every day. Remembering that long ride back and forth now, she cautions with a grin, "Never say never, because you'll end up doing it."

After joining Jack's enterprise, Elaine's official title was "office manager." Her first official act was to change the locks. Jack had attracted a large following with his strength, charisma, and personality. Among this group were "too many people who took advantage of him" and took product from his storehouse. She then concentrated on more formal duties, whipping the books in shape and improving organization in every area of the company.

Subsequently, Jack would tell interviewers, "she runs the business." Elaine's strong hand gave Jack the freedom to expand his horizons. One can only imagine the schedule that they maintained. 1955 was the same year that Jack won the Mr. America title and completed the feat of swimming from Alcatraz to Fisherman's Wharf in handcuffs! In the midst of the entire hullabaloo, Jack and Elaine also created and began selling the world's first instant healthy breakfast.

In 1958, their life together took a big turn southward. Jack began taping (take out) a second TV show for KTTV in Los Angeles. Because they still had a contract to fulfill for the live show in San Francisco, he and Elaine took turns running up and down the state of California every other week - switching off the live shows until they were able to tape or film the shows for national syndication.

The following year they finally wrapped up affairs in the Bay area and moved to Los Angeles. Elaine refused to sleep in the house they had bought until they were married. She and Jack rushed off to Las Vegas and tied the knot. In typical style, they returned the same day to their new home and got back to work.

The Jack LaLanne Show ran for 34 years on KTTV, KTLA, and KHJ and also nationwide. From the beginning, Elaine LaLanne did for Jack's show what she did for Les Malloy in San Francisco - namely anything that needed to be done. This included typing the daily format for Jack's ad lib performance and appearing with him on camera from time to time to help him demonstrate exercises for the audience.

By this time, Elaine had taken Jack's philosophy of fitness and nutrition to heart. She was an excellent role model for viewers! Her experience in front of audiences and on camera made her a very polished entertainer and natural partner.

The early years of syndication were exciting and grueling. Jack and Elaine regularly traveled to different metro centers, New York, St Louis, Philadelphia, Washington D.C., etc. to tape the show live for two weeks and break open new markets. These show tapes were rotated into syndication. Jack and Elaine loved interacting with the people who came to the shows. She rolls her eyes remembering how she had to manage the autograph lines, because Jack "wanted to get to know everybody".

Her business travel was curtailed with the birth of their son, Jon LaLanne in 1961. Elaine went from hopping on planes and entertaining live audiences to caring for a newborn infant. In the coming years she would throw herself into PTA meetings, Cub Scouts (she was the den mother!), and helping with school work. When asked today if she felt a bit melancholy or resentful to reduce traveling with Jack to assume her role as a mother, she replies, "No, life changes, I just focused on getting the most out of whom I needed to be at the time."

She needed to be a lot of things. Along with her family and business responsibilities, she began working closely with the actress Jane Russell, founder of the World Adoption International Fund (WAIF). At the time state-to-state adoption was prohibited in the United States, and WAIF found American homes for thousands of unwanted children from other countries. In the mid-1960's, Elaine served as President of WAIF and met wonderful people of all stripes from all over the world, including Princess Margaret and the king and queen of Thailand.

Another important development in the 1960's was golf. Elaine tried the game, found she was very good, and loved it. For awhile Jack teased her, "There's no exercise in following that little white ball around!" But then, he logged a few rounds himself and became hopelessly addicted. They were "golf-a-holics". Whenever the family got away for vacations, Elaine and Jack made sure that they had reservations to play the local links. Today, at ninety years young, Elaine is still eager to pull out the clubs if she has a break in her schedule.

Travel and vacations were family adventures. Of note, in 1967, the LaLanne clan went to Minnesota for the 50th wedding anniversary of Elaine's parents. Local excursions usually featured the dog. On one such occasion they all piled into the car with their German Shepard ("Happy" or "Smiley" or "Chuckles" – Elaine cannot remember which one) and drove to Lancaster for a special canine training class. They left balmy Los Angeles wearing only T-shirts, but the temperature in Lancaster was a frigid 35 degrees. The dog loved it, but Elaine had to distribute golf club covers for the whole family to use as gloves!

In the late 1960's, Jack and Elaine began what Elaine calls their "spa era". They partnered with owners and investors and began opening health clubs bearing Jack LaLanne's name and image. In the 1970's, with the fitness running and aerobics crazes in full swing, the Jack LaLanne health clubs exploded to become a national brand, numbering over 100 clubs by the close of the decade. Jack and Elaine and family often mixed business and pleasure as they traveled the country to launch and promote the health clubs.

During this time, their family was struck by tragedy. Janet Elaine LaLanne, their 21 year old daughter, died in an automobile accident on May 24, 1973. Janet was a vivacious redhead who had inherited her mother's poise and ability to light up a room. She had been doing summer stock theater work in Michigan. For Elaine, and for Jack, who had adopted and loved Elaine's children as his own, their daughter's passing was the only great sadness in their lives together. Among the ways they chose to honor her memory is the Janet LaLanne Performing Arts Scholarship Fund (now 38 years strong) at Hollywood High School. When Jack passed away the family added the Jack LaLanne Sports Scholarship Fun.

Many parents who lose a child never recover their own lives. In testimony to the strength of their relationship, Elaine and Jack were able to keep their family together on a positive path in the aftermath of Janet's death. Although Elaine will always shed tears for her daughter, she does not wallow in the memories. "If a tree falls down in the road in front of you, do you turn around and give up? I don't like to have a pity party about the things that happen to me." And so with heavy hearts they moved on...

With the dawn of the 1980's, Jack and Elaine made another major geographical and psychic shift. The TV show was winding down (it would go off air in 1984). Their children were grown. They had been in the Hollywood fast lane for over two decades. In 1981 they bought a beautiful, secluded ranch home property on the coast of Central California. Jack had grown up on a ranch and fell in love with the area and the house. After the TV show ended, they left the big city behind, moved to paradise, and started a new business - BeFit Enterprises.

In 1986 the move to the Central Coast was the beginning of another era. The LaLannes had more time to enjoy each other's company, entertain, and play golf. Their new life, however, could never be called "retirement". Over the next few decades they fortified their business, promoting products, books, and training aids. They traveled extensively and gave countless lectures as pioneers and educators. It was never dull. On Jack's 70th birthday, they ventured to Long Beach, where he towed 70 people in 70 boats for 1.5 miles while handcuffed and shackled.

In other highlights, they were seen and heard on radio and TV shows ranging from Good Morning America to Howard Stern. Breaking into a new broadcast medium, they hosted a weekly internet radio show with their son, Jon, on the health and wellness channel of VoiceAmerica. Never ones to be limited by national borders, they spent Jack's 90th birthday at the birthplace of his parents in the south of France....

Elaine and Jack remained a visionary force in health and fitness. In 2001, Jack endorsed a product called the Jack Lalanne Power Juicer, which allowed people to create fresh, highly nutritive vegetable and

fruit juices in their own homes. Elaine and Jack had been "juicing" for decades and had a sincere belief in the value of the practice. With Jack and Elaine very busy with videos and appearances, the Power Juicer sold a million units between the years of 2002 and 2004 alone! This incredible machine, better than ever, is still a best seller in the marketplace today.

Jack and Elaine loved each other, loved their work, and loved working together. Only one thing could get in the way of their joy. On January 23, 2011, Jack passed away at age ninety-six after a short bout with pneumonia. Elaine wrote to the world, "I have not only lost my husband and a great American icon, but the best friend and most loving partner anyone could ever hope for." Even in her deepest grief, she knew she had been lucky to have Jack and that she had many dear family and friends to cherish. She still had much she needed to do....

Since Jack's passing, Elaine has entered the most dynamic chapter of her life. She is the president of BeFit and the principal advocate for her husband's legacy and their philosophy. She manages the core business of products and memorabilia. She has spearheaded an annual golf tournament in Jack's name. She recently worked with NBCUniversal when they to open a Jack LaLanne health club in Orlando. She has been the keynote speaker/presenter/sponsor at dozens of conventions and events. She is working on Jack's biography. She is appearing in a video that she and Jack developed for seniors called "Better Balance for Life".

Elaine's train keeps roaring down the tracks. A knee replacement at eighty-six years old was a mere bump in the road. Of her speedy recovery, she admits, "I don't sit well. I have to be up and moving." She does get a regular massage. And, in testimony to her powers of persuasion, she has convinced her podiatrist to clip her toenails every six weeks! It would take the space of this article to detail everything that happens between just two of those appointments.

One thing is clear to anyone who meets her. As truly extraordinary as Jack was in his vision, his fitness, and his commitment to people, Elaine is just as extraordinary in his absence. She is the Godmother of the Fitness World. She is known and is loved by people from all corners of that world - bodybuilders to yoga gurus. At ninety, she still has the

mental focus and physical presence to captivate a huge audience. She also has the personal wherewithal to reach for and to connect with almost any individual she meets.

As Jack was, she is - one in a million. It is her time now. Elaine proves that with every new day and every new person that she inspires. The phone never stops ringing in her office! People want to work with her, play with her, and learn from her. She shows everybody the value of life without taking herself too seriously - a high art. Her biggest guffaws are always at her own expense. You meet her and you believe that Jack's famous words are true, "Anything in life is possible, and you can make it happen."

Elaine-isms

"Where I live, I live."

"Happiness is me."

"There's always a middle ground."

"I don't mind talking about my demise."

"I don't have a best friend. I can't segregate love like that."

"Let's get the thing done!"

"Everybody's interesting."

"Never say never. You'll end up doing it."

"I really like people."

"I fell in love with Jack's brain, not his body."

"Just keep your nose above the water."

"I don't have any fears."

"Learn to love yourself from the inside out."

"If you put yourself in other people's shoes, nothing can go wrong."

Written in 1990 by Elaine's good friend
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