

LESSON IN LIVING

RAISING THE BAR

Elma Allen Milano

Our back yard is large enough that my son, Frank, and three of his neighborhood buddies used it to practice their pole vaulting. They would run from the northeast corner across the lawn to the southwest corner where we had a sawdust pit and crossbar set up. They spent many an hour running and jumping. By raising the crossbar they flew higher and higher. Eventually, each young man became a school champion. Frank's son, Mike, also won awards in pole-vaulting. Each young man succeeded by consistently *raising his bar*.

When I ran the music store, I learned to set goals. The memory of my son's success helped me set goals that were higher and higher. I found it was important to not compare my progress with anyone else, but only with myself. By keeping careful records, I was able to compare each year's total deposits to the previous year and then set a goal for a 10% increase in next year's deposits.

When I taught music, I had students who, when they were ready to compete in festivals, started working on their big main selection a year ahead of the scheduled competition. It seemed overwhelming to them when they began, but, by taking a small amount at a time and constantly *raising the bar*, they eventually perfected their selection to the point of winning an award. Because they carefully perfected each step along the way, it remained in their memory bank afterwards. The longer they worked on a selection, the longer they retained it. The quicker they learned, the quicker they forgot it.

Like a child who crawls, then stands, then takes a few shaky steps before actually walking, it is easy to progress if we take a step at a time. We've all watched toddlers who were too anxious and constantly took tumbles. This is a lot like life itself. When we become impatient and try to force our progress, our achievements are not as dependable. "*Haste Makes Waste*" is a truism we ought to remember if we expect to constantly *raise our bar* and progress to new heights.

I have an 82-year-old, white-haired little neighbor, wife of a 93-year-old retired minister, who began playing the piano as a young girl, and has constantly practiced, so she can still play complicated concertos. What a treat it is to view this tiny, white-haired female's fingers flying over the keys and pounding out perfection because she has regularly *raised her bar*. Her husband is a gifted poet and he too, never gave up, maintaining his talent and *raising his bar* so he can still write inspirational verse, which he shares with others. They are living proof of the benefits derived from consistently *raising our bars* no matter what our age may be.

This was written in 2006 when Elma was 86-years-old. The entire series is on lintonmilano.com.