



Live! Live! Live!

by Nancy Lee Bethea

"Life is a banquet, and most poor suckers are starving to death!"

—Mame Dennis in *Auntie Mame*, 1958

I recently watched the film *Auntie Mame* starring Rosalind Russell with my teenage daughter. I had seen it before. She had not.

The movie, released by Warner Brothers in 1958, was based on a 1955 novel by Patrick Dennis and a 1956 play by Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee.

Mame Dennis, the film's main character, is a sophisticated society woman who loves all things arts and culture. When Mame's brother dies and his son (Patrick) comes to live with her, their worlds first collide then coalesce. In the end, both Mame and Patrick are better people for knowing and loving each other.

I never realized the parallels between Patrick and myself until I watched the film with my daughter.

When I was a child, I visited my great aunt in South Carolina a few weeks each summer. Going to Aunt Toodie's house was a treat on many levels.

For one, she did not live according to my parents' rules. This meant I could eat as many Oreos as I wanted after supper.

For another, Toodie always let me choose the movie when we visited the multiplex. I remember watching *Benji* on the big screen. Toodie fell asleep.

And then, the cheese parties in Toodie's living room. Picture six to eight women in their sixties and seventies eating a variety of cheeses and sipping champagne. Yes, I drank champagne at age 8. Just a sip, though!

Summer evenings meant walks around the block with Toodie's neighbors, enthusiastic waves from people doing yardwork or sitting on their front porches, and little kids driving their Big Wheels in the street.

After the trek, Toodie and the friends she collected along the way would often sit in her front yard and chat. I sat there, too, smelling freshly cut grass, counting lightning bugs, and hearing authentic Southern dialogue night after night.

"Dora back from the mountains?" one of the women would ask.

"Lord, no! That rascal son of hers hasn't driven her back yet!" another would respond.

And so the conversations would go, evening after deliciously stress-free evening.

Watching *Auntie Mame* again proved to be a reality check for me. As a public-school teacher, a writer, a wife, a mom, and an active volunteer at my church and in my community, I have a full life.

But, am I living? Am I eating at life's banquet table?

If I'm honest, I must say no. My life is scheduled to the minute most days. I rarely take time to sit on our front porch (though my husband just gave me new outdoor furniture for my birthday) and read or chat with neighbors. I constantly look at the clock and tick off to-dos, even on the weekends.

But now, I'm pausing. I'm questioning some of my choices, wondering how I can return to living.

What would Mame or Toodie do?

I'm confident they would power down any smartphone in their vicinity and fill their lives with people, books, art, travel, music, and fun.

They would squeeze the joy out of each day.

They would see life as the gift it is and intentionally give their mirth to others every day.

As Mame advises numerous times in the movie, "Live! Live! Live!"

Okay, Mame. I'll try to do just that.

But first, I need to eat something. This sucker is starving! 🍷

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