

## DO YOU FEEL LIKE GIVING UP?

Donna R. Jensen

The phone rang. Hurrying from the rear of my apartment before the answering machine picked up, I grabbed the receiver, “Hello?”

Muffled sobs escaped my youngest daughter’s lips on the other end of the line as she tried to control her voice. “Mom, I don’t even feel like I want to live anymore...”

Pain gripped my heart. Suicide had been a malicious enemy to my family. Two of my half-brothers, and a half-sister, had taken their lives, and a younger brother had attempted suicide. Now April, my baby, twenty years old, was telling me this, standing on a corner in Pittsburgh at a pay phone, four hundred miles away.

“Hmmm,” I breathed. “Honey, I just came from a prayer meeting where I asked God to minister to those who felt hopeless. I didn’t know I was praying for you. I’m so glad you called to tell me how you’re feeling.”

Her response was inaudible over the roar of a passing truck. Pausing, she waited for it to move on down the street. “I’m so lonely, Mom. I really miss you.” She broke into sobs.

Tears filled my eyes. I should have given her more thought, written. I always seemed to be so absorbed with the thing at hand. Family and friends that were out of sight had always gotten the short end of things.

In late August, I had moved from a small town in Pennsylvania to New York City to take a teaching job that I’d found through the internet. I had begun to sell my stories and had recently completed a novel. I expected to write in my off hours. But there were no *off* hours! My workload was overwhelming, leaving me exhausted and frustrated that there was no time for anything else. I’d even neglected reading the Bible and praying. By Thanksgiving, I had a better grip on my job and was getting back to where I should be spiritually.

April had completed a very difficult year in the Job Corps and had gotten a good position as a secretary in a medical center. Now her employer would pay for any further college she wanted.

Unsure about where her romance was going and with no family near, her emotions hit bottom.

A very feisty young lady, she had struck out on her own at the age of seventeen. Sharing an apartment with two girlfriends, she worked and finished high school. Her two older sisters had dropped out, but April was determined to graduate. And graduate she did, even though she struggled with a learning disability.

Life had been hard for all of us. A troubled marriage had caused our family to break up three times. When my husband left for the last time, we never heard from him again. Three years later he died. April was nine then. By the time she was twelve, she was exhibiting bouts of uncontrolled anger. Since my efforts to help her spiritually weren't working, I took her to be evaluated by a psychologist. He said there was no problem.

When, she was fourteen, she started to smoke and use bad language. The next year, when I unknowingly awakened her one afternoon, she had a screaming fit, attacking me with her fists. More stunned than hurt, I thought she must be on drugs to act like that. She was uncontrollable and ran from the house, breaking from my hold on her. I called an ambulance, fearing she would hurt herself. A youth worker from mental health came and said we should probably have a drug test done, but she didn't need to be hospitalized.

After a dramatic conversion to Christianity at the age of twenty-nine, I'd served the Lord with all my heart, searching for answers for myself and others. I had lived my faith in front of my children, but one by one they had all gone astray. April was my last hope. And now that hope was gone. I felt like a failure as a wife, a mother, and a Christian. If I couldn't make a difference in the lives of my husband or my children, how could I help anyone else?

For about a month I stopped trying, sinking into depression. I didn't do the things I knew to do to help myself. Finally, I realized that the only life I have any control over was my own. I could counsel and love and support and surround others with prayer, but I couldn't cause anyone to make godly choices. A little wiser, I picked myself up and got on with my life.

I reminded April over the phone now, that there were places we'd have to go by ourselves sometimes, but we were never alone. How well I knew that. My mother, whom I'd cared for in my home for seven years, died three months after my husband left. Never had I experienced such a feeling of being alone. When I had to undergo

some grueling tests in the hospital as an outpatient, I began to feel sorry for myself, wondering if I'd be able to drive home. "Lord," I said, "I know you're always with me, and that's what makes it possible for me to go on, but I sure wish there was someone here right now with some skin on their bones, to give me a hug."

A short time later, I was sitting in the hall in one of those stunning hospital gowns, waiting to see if my x-rays had turned out when a technician approaching from behind me reached down and gave me a hug in passing. *Wasn't that nice*, I thought. I didn't even realize the significance of what had happened until after I got home.

"Mom," April continued through her tears, "I just need someone to put their arms around me and tell me everything's going to be all right."

"Then let's do that," I replied. "Pretend you're sitting here on my lap with your head on my shoulder. Can you feel my arms around you?"

"I think I can," she sniffed? "Mom, would you sing to me?"

"Sure, Honey, what shall I sing?"

"Sing me that song you used to sing when I was a little girl."

"Which one was that?"

"Something about letting the sun shine in."

"Ohhhh, ok." Softly I sang into the telephone. Miles away in a big lonely city, with traffic clamoring and an occasional stranger passing, April and I talked and prayed. Now? She's going for counseling because she knows she needs it. I've sent her the Bible she requested, and my hope for her remains in God.