

FATHER DONNA

By Donna R. Jensen

My new Catholic friend Theresa and I shared a love of music. She played the piano and I sang. We would go on for hours as her mother and sisters joined in from time to time.

“Donna,” Theresa commented as we finished a show tune, “I’m going to invite Fr. O’Shea to sing with us tomorrow night. He loves music, and boy can he sing!”

I was intrigued with the idea. I’d never had a conversation with a priest, let alone sung with one...

Fr. O’Shea was a delightful man! Graying, in his fifties, he radiated a kind of humble sweetness. Theresa and I broke into applause as he concluded “Old Man River” in his rich bass. Our song fest ended when Mrs. Rubus invited us to the kitchen for coffee and some of her marvelous Polish pastries.

The conversation became animated as Theresa’s five younger sisters joined us. After a lot of good natured fun, I mentioned that I was thinking about working my way around the world as my brother had. To my surprise, Theresa said she might be willing to go with me, and Fr. O’Shea said that he thought it was a good idea. Piece by piece, the mold I tried to fit Fr. O’Shea into broke away as the real man emerged. I liked what I saw.

In a few months my temporary teaching job ended and I decided to return to California where I had been raised. Plans for a trip around the world were put on the shelf.

Another move, another job... This wasn’t what I wanted! My life’s ambition was to be a wife and mother. I was twenty-nine and beginning to think of myself as an old maid.

My resume looked like a tossed salad. Once I mastered a job, I lost interest and went on to something new. Where was “Mr. Right” who would take me away from all of this?

Never in my wildest dreams did I imagine that the emptiness I felt inside would be filled by God when I received Jesus as my Savior. Through the witness of a teenage girl on my latest job, I attended a revival meeting that changed my life. Five months later I was enrolled in Bible School, entering at midterm.

At the end of the semester, I returned to Pennsylvania to visit my family. Of course, Theresa and I got together for another jam session.

“Donna,” Theresa said, “I sure could use your help with the talent show Fr. O’Shea is doing with our parish kids. Got any time to spare tomorrow morning?”

“As a matter of fact, I do. Sounds like fun.”

I wondered if I’d have a chance to talk to Fr. O’Shea and how he’d feel about what I was doing. As a Catholic, did he even think that I as a Protestant was a Christian? Would he be offended that I, as a

woman, would dare to even picture myself filling a ministerial role that was filled only by men in his church?

After helping some kids with some snappy Charleston dance steps, I worked with another group on a song from OLIVER called, "Consider Yourself". One of the lines went, "Consider yourself, part of the family, consider yourself one of us."

Fr. O'Shea walked up as we finished. Nodding to him, I told Theresa that I really needed to go.

"Before you leave, Donna, you'll have to tell Fr. O'Shea what you're doing!"

"What are you doing?" he queried.

As I looked into his kindly face, I replied with some hesitation, "I'm studying to be a minister."

With a twinkle in his eyes, he held out his hand and said, "Well, consider yourself one of us!"

His warm response and quick wit put me at ease. Feeling a tug on my sleeve, I turned and looked down into the inquiring face of Theresa's youngest sister. We all had to laugh as she asked, "Does that mean we're going to call you Fr. Donna?"