

GIVING IT ONE MORE TRY

By Donna R. Jensen

When I was sixty, the title of a story came to me but it has taken until now, at the age of seventy-two, for me to have gained the knowledge to write it. The title was, “What Do You Do, When You’re Almost Done?”

What I did first was to leave a small town in Pennsylvania to teach third grade in New York City. I found the job online, which was a wonder in itself because I first started using a computer when I was fifty-six. Heading for Queens, my van was loaded to the hilt with all I felt it could safely hold. I had mailed twenty-five boxes of books ahead. My undergarments and night clothes were the last to be packed. I laid them here and there around everything else making use of all the left over space. As I walked around the load, giving it a final inspection, to my dismay, I found a package of pantyhose plastered against the side window, proudly announcing it was Queen Size! I decided not to tear the load apart to get it. Perhaps I needed to be humbled.

The next fall on September 11, 2001, the Trade Towers were attacked. I was called into the hall by our principal and told about it. She asked me not to give the children all the details. When I re-entered the room my students could see that I had been affected by something and asked what was wrong. I told them that a plane had crashed into a building down-town and let it go at that. All day we heard the sirens of rescue vehicles. Children were picked up by their parents as they could get there. Prior to this, being alone, I’d wanted to be a part of a group who could help me in the time of some disaster. In the middle of all this though, I was one of the strong ones helping others.

The next year, on the first anniversary of 9/11, I landed in Taiwan to teach kindergarten. Again I’d found the job online and had a contract for the year. What an amazing adventure that was! While I was there, we went through the SARS epidemic and the war broke out in Iraq.

Returning to the United States that summer, I wondered what next? What could top the last two years? I guess life doesn’t need to top what came last. My next move was to a rural community where I was the supervisor and head teacher in a small Christian school. Six of my grandchildren were among my students.

While there I married a retired minister. I’d been a widow for seventeen years. Sadly, I was only married six days when I found I’d made a big mistake! We were together two months when I had to leave and go to a shelter. I wanted he and I to go for counseling. His reply was, “I *am* a counselor!” Two weeks later he filed for divorce and moved another woman in with him.

The hardest part for me was having to tell all the people who cared about me that it was over. They had been so happy for me. It all turned out okay. Because I wasn’t devastated, we all moved on. I’m not saying that it didn’t affect me. I felt very lost and unsure of how to proceed with my life. I found two quotes from Bridges and Transitions that said it all. The first is, “Before we can find a new something, we must deal with a time of nothing.” Fortunately that “time of nothing” didn’t last long. And then, “An ending...followed by a period of confusion and distress...leading to a new beginning.”

From there I went to stay with my son and help with his children, ages one, two, and seven when his wife left. Since they did not get back together I gave up my apartment at the end of three months, stored my things, and made the transition more permanent.

Two years later it was time to move on. I stepped out on faith and rented a storefront to open a Christian drop-in center. I needed another \$50 a month just to meet my bills and whatever else was needed to operate the center and live on was beyond that. I had planned to sleep on the couch at my son’s house and use his shower. All of my belongings were being used in the center and I had no money to rent a place to live. Just then it became necessary for David to move four miles away. That actually

left me homeless.

I called all the ministers in the phone book and wrote letters asking them to come and look the center over and see if they could use it as well. No one ever came. The Lord kept it afloat for nearly a year and then I gave it up. It was never my intention to do it alone.

As I packed again, an apartment in a government subsidized building was offered to me. After two years, I've been elected president of the Resident's Association. I view it as an opportunity to serve and hopefully be an encouragement.

Presently I teach 3rd-5th grade girls in our girls club at church. When no young women volunteered I asked if I might be allowed to do it.

In September I began volunteering as Chaplain at a large nursing home here in town. I was once their director of activities so I'm involved with that too.

Last year my first novel was published. I was so pleased. I decided to look for places to speak and sell the novel and my short stories. I wasn't sure if people would still find me an interesting speaker. I had done some speaking in the past. An invitation came to address about fifty ladies who operated a charity in a near-by town. I decided to judge my present ability to speak by the outcome of the event.

A friend came with me and helped me set up my writing display. I really needed a podium but there was none. We were in the church basement. Eyeing the counter that jutted out into the room with refreshments, I told them I'd like to use it to lay my notes on and moved over to it. Without thinking about it, I soon was behind it. What a blessing that turned out to be!

All was going well. They seemed moved by what I was saying and I had their full attention. Then it happened. I felt a strange sensation like something was tangled around my ankles. I glanced down as I continued to speak. There lay my skirt on the floor! Inwardly I gasped... *what should I do? How can I pull it up? If I let it lay there until I finish someone may pass me to enter the kitchen and wonder why I had taken my off my skirt.* Thank goodness I was wearing a slip! All these thoughts were rushing through my mind as I continued to speak. *I've got to tell them what has happened* I thought and pull up my skirt. I stopped and said, "My skirt fell off." A buzz started around the room.

"What?"

"What did she say?"

"Did she say her skirt fell off?"

At first they wondered if it was a trick. Was it part of my message?

I continued, embarrassed. "I'm so sorry! I don't know why it fell off." Then I laughed and bent down to retrieve it. Relieved, they laughed with me. A lady minister that I know was there. She laughed the hardest putting her hands to her mouth with a look on her face that said she was so glad it hadn't happened to her! I interjected a funny story about another author and her embarrassing moment and went on with my talk. My friend told me I'd handled the whole thing very graciously. I got a nice thank you card from the president of the organization that I saw her write *after* I spoke. She said I did a great job! They also paid me generously. *What a thing to have happen.* I groaned inwardly as we packed up and left. *I can never tell anyone about this. If people ask how it went I'll just tell them, not very well.* However, as I spent a sleepless night thinking about it, I decided it was a story worth telling.

I must keep trying, working on the opportunities placed before me. And when it's done, it's done.