

# SACRIFICES

By Donna R. Jensen

Three years ago, in my late fifties, I was inspired to new levels of creativity and depth of living, by Michael J. Gelb's book, *How to Think Like Leonardo da Vinci*.

Did you know that intelligence can be developed throughout life? I have expected to get better as I age, and nothing about being average appeals to me. Deepak Chopra points out that the average human being has about 65,000 thoughts a day and that sadly, tomorrow, 95% of those thoughts will be the same. Let's do better than that.

As I studied da Vinci, I discovered that I could not draw because I never really looked at things. As I began training my eye to "really" see, I found that I desired to see more, including places and things I'd never seen before. An urge to go to foreign lands was taking root. I had ventured from Punxsutawney, PA to take a job in New York City that I'd found through the internet and was teaching school ten miles away from the Trade Center when it was struck down.

Searching the internet once again, a position teaching kindergarten in Taiwan caught my eye. I knew nothing about Taiwan, not even its location, but somehow, I thought, "This is it!" The first thing I needed to do was to consult God about it. At the age of twenty-nine, I'd had a dramatic conversion to Christianity and immediately began to serve God. All these years, the United States had been my mission field. Was that about to change?

After praying, I had a wonderful peace about applying for the position. But... then my mind went to work on it. I was having serious doubts by the time I fell into a restless sleep.

When I awoke in the morning, I was very uneasy. There was no way I could do this. I couldn't afford to keep my apartment. What would I do with all my stuff? Immediately the answer came. You could give it all away...

The school year in Taiwan had already begun with no one to fill the opening. After receiving my inquiry, the pastor called to interview me. Before our conversation had concluded, I was hired, with my promise to leave in six days. There would be no time to do anything else but give my things away. I thought about people I'd known who had lost everything in a fire or a flood. They were given no opportunity for choices.

When I realized that I could stay home with my "stuff" or get rid of it and possibly be used by God somewhere else, in a greater way, my "stuff" didn't seem so important. That made the decision simple. There was no heartache over what was discarded. Of the things I'd collected in my life, I knew it was my memories that were most important, and I'd be taking them with me.

I have moved many times in my life, and sometimes the choices of what to keep and what to discard were overwhelming. One time a I packed to move with my four young children from North Carolina back to Pennsylvania in a mini-van, pulling a six by nine tandem UHAUL, I broke down

in tears as I studied several items I held in my hands. My sixteen-year-old daughter Allyson, took them from me and told me to sit down for a while. Because of her help, we made it.

Now my belongings were distributed among my children, friends, and some people who happened along. My daughter Melissa kept my books for me.

From a two-bedroom apartment full of stuff, I downsized to what could be carried in two seventy-pound suitcases. And the airlines meant seventy pounds each and not some odd number like sixty-three and seventy-seven. At the airport I had to step aside and even out the weight before my bags could be checked.

Prior to my decision to live in another country, I had to talk it over with my grown children. I'm very close to all of them. It had been just "us" for many years as I raised them alone after their father died. My eldest daughter Melissa said, "Go for it!" The others didn't feel that way about it. My son David hesitantly asked, "If anything happens to you, will they send you back?" I assured him that a round trip ticket had been purchased for me and that I could return home anytime I chose. April, my youngest daughter, twenty years old with a job and her own apartment, saw me off at the airport. Bravely she held her emotions at bay, and let me go to start a new life so very far away.

The day I boarded the plane for Taiwan it was the anniversary of 9/11. From Pittsburgh to Osaka there were only a handful of passengers. It was not a popular day for Americans to travel.

During the nine months I was in Taiwan, the war broke out in Iraq and we lived first hand through the SARS epidemic. There were alerts when Americans were warned to keep a low profile and a suitcase nearby in case of the need to evacuate. One day while in the Laundromat, I thought I was being shot at. I heard a loud bang, bang, bang, nearby and was about to flatten myself on the floor when I realized what it was. Firecrackers! The Taiwanese set them off regularly to scare away evil spirits.

It's not true that they speak English everywhere. I frequently had to pantomime or draw pictures of items I wanted to buy. Most Taiwanese are desperate to learn English and many times attend Church services to that end, and in so doing find Jesus.

I taught the only adult English Sunday school class at our Chinese church and it was held in my Kindergarten classroom. A Chinese woman who helped me carry some items I'd purchased to the school, complimented me on all the teaching aids I had and how appealing the room was. When she discovered that I'd purchased all the items myself, she was amazed.

"You make a big sacrifice to leave your family and your country to come here, and then you spend your money on us as well. That is truly showing us love." She put her hands together in front of her, the way Asians do and bowed saying, "I honor you."

John C. Maxwell in his book, **THE 21 MOST POWERFUL MINUTES IN A LEADERS DAY**, makes dramatic statements about the need for sacrifice to reach the heights that God has for us. First nothing is a sacrifice unless it costs you something. You can only give up what you possess.

Ironically when Moses was young, he thought he was strong, but he really wasn't. Only as an older man, humble before God, was he of any use to God. If you are willing to look at yourself honestly, admit your weakness, and humble yourself before God, He will be able to use you.

Life is filled with trade-offs. But you can trade up only if you have something to sacrifice. It takes incredible stamina to keep giving up. The greater the calling, the greater the sacrifice. The higher you intend to go, the more you will need to give up. For everything you gain you lose something. Of course, I'm not speaking of sacrificing your values, your self-respect, or your family.

Sacrifice is never painless, even when we try to maintain an attitude of gratitude and a giving heart. If a temporal sacrifice will bring an eternal reward, make the trade.

You will experience time when fear will try to get the better of you. Understand that ripe opportunities are never completely devoid of fear.

*“Dear God, give me the heart of a giver. Help me to understand your timing, to see what I should sacrifice for the sake of those I serve. And if the best sacrifice I can make is to step aside and allow someone else to lead, give me the courage and the heart to do that. Amen”*