

## The Shelter of Friendship

*By Mary Jane McCormick*

I entered the convent at age 17. Eighteen years later, I 'leaped over the wall,' wanting independence yet terrified of how I would achieve this new reality. My family was there with just enough support to plunge into the frightening freedom I had chosen.

Driving to my first date at age 34, I was clueless of social expectations and naive regarding men. Within months, I fell in love 'hook, line and sinker' and took on the role of wife and stepmom. Balancing marriage, family and a nursing career did prompt feelings about having jumped from the frying pan into the fire.

I was blasting through life, climbing corporate ladders while desperately seeking for who I was supposed to be. Tensions became unbearable and while love was still somewhat intact, I filed for divorce.

With a deep sense of failure, the web of new friends caught me and kept telling me, "You'll be OK!" "You'll land on both feet."

A few years later, I met the 'man on the boat' working tirelessly with men caught in alcoholism and drug addiction. "Now I can have it all," I thought, a marriage and a ministry. I dove head first into his world of service. We worked night and day with people social service professionals had 'kicked to the curb.' We witnessed miraculous recoveries with an intervention process that really worked. I had found my place in life. But an affair threw us off course. Another woman decided she wanted my man. My life became a daytime soap opera. Shocked and shattered, I dove off the boat, convinced I would be living on the streets.

Once again, friends reached out with just enough encouragement and emotional support for me to pick up the pieces and move forward.

I found stable work in hospice care, which pulled me up short and put my life in perspective. After stabilizing emotionally and financially, I bought an RV and hit the road. At each stop, I was compelled to write in my journal. My life was insisting on pouring out on the blank pages.

I drove and wrote, drove some more and wrote. I ranted and raved about my childhood. I poured out the guilt and shame of failed marriages. I wrote down the bones of my life.

I visited friends along the way; those friends who had given me shelter from the insanity in my life and the crazies within me. With some, I was able to share new perspectives of who I was and who I was becoming.

A plaque that hangs in my living room says, "Friends are God's way of taking very good care of us." It reminds me every day that honest and loving friends continue to be my life's most precious and unexpected bounty.