

My Story..... When The Phone Rings, Answer!

On March 13, 2006, I received a frantic call from my friend JoAnn, who lives in Texas. She was very upset and crying. I was one of the first people she chose to call. JoAnn and her husband had just returned from a hospital in Houston. She started with, "Craig (her son) has been killed in a car accident." She explained to me that upon arriving at the hospital, she and her husband were informed that Craig was brain dead. As a result, they donated five of Craig's organs to individuals in desperate need. I supported her during this sad time, and I was asked to attend the Life Gift Ceremony honoring Craig. At the ceremony, I witnessed many heart-warming situations and felt a compassion to reach out. My opportunity came the following Christmas, when JoAnn asked me if I could design an ornament in honor of Craig, that would be appropriate to give her family and present to the Life Gift Association. Off The Press Printing, our family business of 25 years, had gone into laser engraving and the previous Christmas we gave everyone on our list a lasered ornament. From this, JoAnn got an idea to design an ornament.



Without hesitation, I agreed. We created the beautiful teardrop ornament pictured to the left. Several months later, my husband's father passed away. I created an ornament in his honor, and presented it to the Hospice Center In Joliet, Illinois. Since then, we have been receiving calls from people and organizations in different parts of the United States. We have created many ornaments for businesses, churches, organizations, and families. I left a previous secretarial job to continue this venture in Craig's honor. I now donate my ornament designs to non profit organizations. They purchase the ornaments and then resell them at fundraisers.

Ring... Ring... Ring...

It was very late at Off The Press, the phone started ringing. I was really too tired to answer, I was on my way out the door, but something told me to take a minute for the person who was desperately trying to contact us. Upon answering, I was confronted by a woman asking if I would consider donating the printing of a silent auction book to the "Without Warning" Alzheimer's Caregiver's Association's 1st Annual Gala. Instantly I knew this would be costly and time consuming. I did not know this woman, but decided to listen to her story. They needed my help, and she was quite desperate. During our conversation of nearly two hours, I suggested the idea of designing an ornament for the occasion. Off The Press donated the books for the silent auction and "Without Warning" purchased custom ornaments to sell at their Gala fundraiser.



I was invited to attend the Gala and be one of their guests of honor. I was informed there would be two people attending that were very interested in speaking with me regarding the design of an ornament for Leeza's Place. I would meet an advocate from the facility in Joliet, Illinois. Leeza's Place is co-founded by Leeza Gibbons (the journalist), together with Dr. Jamie Huysman, and sponsored by Provena Saint Joseph Medical Center. I brought samples to the Gala and spoke with Kathy Miller, the Leeza's Place advocate, regarding the design of an ornament. I hoped she would contact me to create a special ornament for their organization.

When Phones Ring... Doors Open

This time I made the phone ring. I called Kathy Miller at Leeza's Place to see if I could show her some drawings of a possible ornament. We agreed on a time to meet and soon I was walking through the door that would change my life forever. We created an exquisite ornament, but what glistened before my eyes was a facility that arose my curiosity. In this elegantly decorated and warm environment, I saw wonderful things happening. Leeza's Place reaches out to caregivers in a way that touched my heart. Through education, empowerment, and energy, Leeza's Place offers an intimate and safe-setting environment for caregivers. Many of the people who use this facility are looking for support. I had been wanting to give back to the community and I knew I could share my talents here. I asked Kathy if I could volunteer on a part time basis one day a week to contribute to those in need. Soon, I was working as a part-time employee through the Leeza Gibbons Memory Foundation.



Kathy wanted me to teach a class, "Painting to Music", knowing I had an art background, but I really felt I needed to do something more significant. I have always wanted to write the story of my life and came to her with the idea of teaching journal writing classes. She could not believe what I was suggesting. Leeza's Place had always wanted to promote journal writing, but it never really had taken off at any of their locations. I tried to put together a program, finding there really was not any material at the library or book stores that could help me with this task. This may be why it never was started at any of the other locations. As a result, today the classes are a wonderful success! I wrote the book "Journaling, The footprints of your life..." to help me through the venture of journaling my life story. Now I use this book as a tool in the class at Leeza's Place. Many people who find relief at Leeza's Place are looking for a way to open the door and get out of a situation that has them trapped. At Leeza's Place we open that door for many, but what I have found is that the door swings both ways.

Through the recipient that received Craig's heart, the "Without Warning" group that asked for help, and Leeza's place that energizes the caregivers, many doors have been opened to me. I have stepped through the threshold, and I have now found a place to give my heart.