

Forgiveness and the round-the-clock resurrection

By Monica Clark
NC News Service

This time the binge had lasted for weeks.

This night Donald again staggered home long after Charlene had seen the last of their seven children to bed. When she finally heard her husband stumble to the couch in the family room, relieved he wasn't going to crawl up the stairs and into bed beside her, she decided she wouldn't put up with the agony any longer.

The next morning she confronted her husband as he drank coffee and prepared for work. It was a common occurrence, but this time her words had a ring of finality that jarred Donald.

"Since you continue to choose the bottle over everything else, I'm taking the kids and leaving," he heard her say.

Inside, Donald knew she had stayed longer than he could have expected. He'd hurt her deeply and wounds in the children were starting to show too. But he decided to make a final plea.

"I'll meet you at the counselor's this afternoon," he said.

Charlene had been seeing a therapist for several weeks even though Donald had refused to join her.

"Let's give it one more chance," he begged.

She agreed, not because she thought things would change, but to be able to say she had done all she could to save the marriage.

As Donald drove to the appointment later that day, he made a firm resolution never to drink again. But he knew that another key element was needed if there was to be a reconciliation. Charlene would have to forgive him for 15 years of abuse.

What happened that afternoon is described by the couple as "the beginning of the miracle." Donald confessed his sorrow and his determination not to drink. He asked forgiveness.

Charlene saw a hint of difference in the words this time. She felt compassion and a flicker of love. If he could surrender his mistakes, she'd try to let go of her pain.

During the weeks that followed, they slowly found their relationship coming back to life.

Remembering that tortured time now 20 years past, the couple liken their recovery

to resurrection.

They tell of a sense of peace which is theirs, a result of forgiveness.

Can a parallel be drawn between this story of alcoholic and marital recovery and the resurrection of Jesus? Perhaps. For the image of the tortured Jesus offering forgiveness from the cross is a familiar one.

As a child, I was always nervous about the afterlife. I thought that all my indiscretions would be exposed during the final judgment and I would be humiliated.

But when I think of heaven now a much different picture emerges. I think of an exuberant celebration. Having asked forgiveness, I am rewarded with joy; even my failings become part of the redemptive festival.

I liken it to the renewed burst of hope I feel when I've confessed a mistake and receive a friend's forgiveness. Or when I've stopped holding on to a hurt and offered forgiveness to a friend.

That's what Donald and Charlene continue to experience as they forgive not only the pains of the past, but the present hurts that occur in any relationship.

And they know that their peace is a bit like what they will possess much more fully when they join the eternal community of the forgiven.

(Ms. Clark writes for *The Catholic Voice* in Oakland, Calif.)



Eternal Easter

Changing times: going through the right door

By Joe Michael Feist
NC News Service

I became fully aware that my surroundings, and therefore my life, had changed drastically when I started noticing the signs on restroom doors. Conspicuously absent were "Damas" and "Caballeros" and "Cowboys" and "Cowgirls." Instead, in a seafood restaurant, I was faced with the unenviable choice of "Port" or "Starboard." I don't know which was which.

In January my family and I joined the approximately 5 million Americans who pull up stakes and move each year for job-related reasons. In our case we left the relaxed pace of a medium-sized Texas city and settled in a major Eastern metropolitan center.

The differences in lifestyle we encountered were immediate and obvious, if not overwhelming. We learned about

shoveling snow from sidewalks and sledding down ice-covered hills. We faced commuter rides and subway systems. We complained about the higher costs for almost all goods and services while we marveled at the grand historic sights and cultural opportunities.

But more important than all the visible changes — the climate, the geography, the cost of lettuce — were the changes taking place in each of us. We were undergoing a profound transformation that would affect all aspects of our lives.

In our own ways, I believe, we each experienced a sense of exhilaration. For myself, there was the excitement of a new job and new challenges. My children, seeing ice skating for the first time, were determined to join the fun.

At the same time there was that persistent fear of the unknown. I was afraid of getting lost in the city and afraid of looking foolish as I struggled to get a subway

farecard. At times I was afraid that I had made the wrong decision in moving. And I was afraid that I might fail.

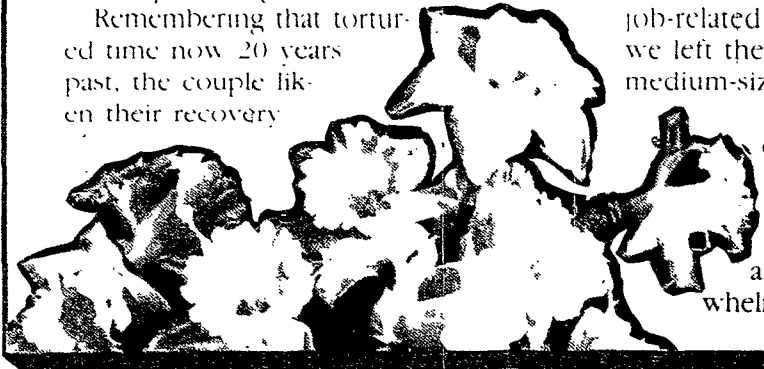
We also experienced the pain of separation from our extended family and friends back in Texas.

We had to make adjustments in order to succeed. We had to adapt. My 5-year-old daughter met a new kindergarten teacher who had a different style and different priorities. I had to contend with a different job description and workplace structure.

Most apparent of all, perhaps, was the realization that we had to rely on each other for strength. Our individual welfare depended a great deal on our unity as a family.

In reflecting on our recent transformation, I was struck by the similarities in what we underwent and how the apostles must have felt after Jesus' resurrection.

Jesus' first followers had to adjust quickly to monumental change — the death and resurrec-



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