

“Not Going Is Not an Option”

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I grew up believing in fairy tales and loved stories that ended “happily ever after.” Even when I got polio in 1953 at almost 6 years old and spent most of that year in the hospital, I still believed that everything would work out for the best. I met my “knight in shining armor,” we got married and had three wonderful boys.

John retired in 2005; we sold our home, bought an RV, and headed out. The plan was to travel south in the winter and head north in the summer. We hoped for many more golden years even with my post-polio syndrome causing some problems. Our plan was a good one, but as I have learned, “when we plan, God laughs.”

Early in 2006, John was diagnosed with an aggressive cancer that had metastasized. Now, I became the caregiver as he got progressively worse. We stored our RV and moved in with my parents in Florida so they could help with John’s care. It was a really stressful time for all of us.

John rallied a little after about the fourth round of chemotherapy, so we made plans to fly from Florida to Seattle. It was important to John that I would be settled with one of our boys, and our son had bought a house with a separate suite for us.

Friends and family became very important as John’s days on earth counted down. I saw him hanging on as our 36th anniversary approached on Sept 12. He seemed very pleased to have made it, but my heart was

breaking knowing it would be our last one. He died four days later.

The grief I experienced was intense that first year. Even now, three years later, it comes and goes. You just have to allow yourself plenty of time. I also believe it is best not to make any drastic changes that first year, if possible. My life had changed almost entirely since our move to the Pacific Northwest, and that wasn’t easy for me. It’s a beautiful area, but not where I ever expected to end up. I joined a church and attend a great Bible study group. My new friends are very supportive and very dear to me.

Without John, I wondered how I would ever be able to travel. It is harder now, but not impossible. I was able to go to Hawaii, and I’ve visited old friends from high school and college in Pennsylvania. I attended the 10th Post-Polio Health International Conference at Warm Springs last year. I love spending time with PPS friends in Branson, Missouri; Arkansas; Wisconsin; and Vancouver, Canada. I am blessed

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Jann in Washington with Mt. St. Helen’s in the background.



In Old San Juan, Puerto Rico.



On an accessible pier on the Ohio River.

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to be able to visit my parents in Florida for a few months each year.

Last summer, we made my mother-in-law suite even more accessible. I now have a lift for my car so that I can load my scooter. I also have a travel scooter that folds up, but I am not using it as much as I probably should. As I get braver, this too will get easier for me, I hope. I do not like to travel alone and go with friends whenever I can. But, for now, not going is just not an option. ▲

Recommended Books

Sands, Jennifer, *A Tempered Faith* (2003), *A Teachable Faith* (2006), and *A Treasured Faith* (2009). Three inspirational books from a 9/11 widow. www.jennifersands.com.

Krumroy, Jeri, *Grief is Not Forever*, (1985).



Jann and her travel scooter in Chicago.



Jann and tulips.

- ▷ Advancement, he helped bring government leaders and transit officials in Toronto together to develop a public transportation program for people with disabilities, and in 1977, he represented the Mayor’s Committee at the White House Conference on Handicapped Individuals.

Moving to the United States in 1978, Stothers joined the *San Diego Union*, where he rose to executive financial editor and later became the newspaper’s ombudsman. He left in 1992 to become editor of *MAINSTREAM*, a national news and lifestyles magazine for people with disabilities. In 1998, he took on additional duties as Deputy Director of The Center for an Accessible Society and helped advance the Center’s goal of focusing national media coverage on disability as a public policy issue.

Stothers is a principal of Exploding Myths, Inc., a media enterprise company headed by his wife, Cyndi Jones, also a polio survivor and long-time advocate for disability rights.

Joan L. Headley, Executive Director, PHI