

The Vintage Voice

Serving The Church Pension Fund's Family of Beneficiaries

■ November 2007

A Thanksgiving Story

Nancy R. Duvall

Doris is a young employee of the firm where my daughter works. For a time, Ann was her supervisor, but when Ann received a job upgrade, Doris was no longer under her supervision. They remained in touch, with Doris regarding Ann as an older and kind advisor. Gradually, Ann learned of Doris's background.

When Doris was a little girl, she was sexually abused by her uncles, and still bears the scars of cigarette burns on her arms. She was raised by her grandmother, until the abuse caused authorities to place her in foster care. Determined to make something of herself, Doris finished high school, where she joined the ROTC unit and the track team. She was awarded a scholarship to attend a small college in our town, and earned her degree.

Somewhere along the way, she met a young man and had a child with him. Their little boy is now four. She is no longer with the man, for he too, turned out to be an abuser. He is a good father, but not a good husband. For the last five months, he and his family have kept the child in Atlanta, where they live. She agreed that the child would be better off with his father until she could find another apartment, in a better neighborhood, with better schools than where she lives now. She is saving money and looking for a safer place so that her son can come home to her and begin kindergarten at a good school. Doris had not been able to visit the little boy because her old car was not trustworthy to take out of town.

And here begins a wonderful Thanksgiving story.

On Thanksgiving morning, Ann and her family came to our house for dinner. She brought several dishes to add to our repast, as did other members of the family. She also brought a story which she told through her own tears and to which we listened with our own tears of joy.

Ann said that Doris's goal all fall had been to travel to Atlanta on Thanksgiving to see her son. Given the condition of her car, everyone in the office was skeptical that she would be able to go.

But, Ann said, several weeks ago, Doris called her present supervisor, Mary, to say that she had a flat tire and was stranded by the side of the road. She asked if someone could come get her. Mary agreed that she would come. When she got there, she and Doris limped along the road to a gas station where the tire could be fixed. Seeing the terrible condition of the tires as they were being changed, Mary told Doris that she would like to buy Doris two new tires. Doris, unwilling to take help and wanting to pay her own way, refused. The tire was patched and the two drove to the office.

As soon as she got there, Mary headed for Ann's office. Closing the door, she said, "What on earth can we do to help Doris with her tires? She would not let me pay for some new ones, and all four are in awful condition." Ann agreed that Doris would not accept money from them. They needed a plan.

Mary said she knew a good auto mechanic who did not charge as much as the dealerships. He could supply tires. The two women worked on a story that Ann would present to Doris. She would say that this mechanic was a friend of hers and owed her a big favor. He wanted to put new tires on her son's car because of the favor she had done for him. They would tell him that Doris's car was Ann's son's car, and he would put on the tires "free." That was the plan. They decided to tell the boss about Doris's need, and he said, "I will be glad to pay for the tires."

Ann presented the story to Doris, who said that if this was at no cost to Ann, it would be wonderful to have new tires. And so the next day, Ann drove Doris's car to get new tires from the "friend who was a mechanic" whom she had never seen before. On the way there, Ann realized that the brakes needed replacing, as well: *there were no brakes!* When she returned to the office, she went to see the boss again and explained the situation. He said, "It won't help her to have tires but no brakes. I'll pay for those, too."

Returning Doris's keys, Ann told her that the car would have to go back again because the mechanic had not had time to balance the wheels. And so, the next day, Ann took Doris's car back to the shop and new brakes were installed, the wheels balanced, and all was finished. Ann told Doris the mechanic said the brakes were bad, and so he had fixed them for free. Doris was thrilled. The two supervisors and the boss were pleased that the plan had worked.

A week later, Doris asked Ann, "Mrs. B, if I give you the money, do you think your friend could replace my car's right axle? I have been told it is about to break." Ann conferred with Doris's supervisor, who called the mechanic. He promised to charge only \$175 to fix the axle, instead of the \$350 quoted by someone else. Ann reported this to Doris, who gave her \$175 and the keys to her car. When Ann got to the shop, she told the mechanic that he could not charge them a penny more than \$175 because that was all they had. He not only fixed the right axle, which was about to break, but also the left axle, which was just slightly better. Everyone breathed a sigh of relief.

On Thanksgiving morning, Ann received a call on her cell phone. It was Doris, saying, "There is someone who wants to speak to you." The next sound was of a sweet little voice, saying "Happy Thanksgiving, Mrs. B. Thank you for helping my mother come to see me." She had made it to see her son in Atlanta for Thanksgiving, with a little help from her friends.



Nancy R. Duvall lives in Columbia, SC, with her husband, Charles F. Duvall, retired Bishop of the Central Gulf Coast. She is grateful for the daughter who lived the story above, and for the many responses she has had from previous articles. Doris now has her son living with her and he is going to a good kindergarten. The names of Doris and her supervisor have been changed to protect their privacy.