

BY LINDA IRWIN

... about wondering if that is all there is

It wasn't just a job. It was me. It was a career I loved. It lived with me, became part of my family; in fact, it was an all-consuming multi-tasking, wonderful responsibility. And I had to retire! My MS would not allow me to handle the work that needed to be done. Physically and cognitively I was no longer able to meet its many obligations.

I thought I was irreplaceable. No one else could do my job. Without me, my program was going to fold up and die. No one else knew all the little details that went into running it. Oh, my career! But I had no choice.

I was now a **past** coordinator and teacher. I was a **former** full-time employee of my beloved school district. I was retired. Everything that used to matter was in the past. What would my future title be? What could I do to fill the void? Is that all there is?

For a while, I was busy with the sale of the house we had lived in for 34 years. The excitement of moving to a brand-new condominium, complete with new neighbors and a new community, occupied my attention. We'd

have a main-floor laundry, skylights, plenty of space, a den for my hobbies, cathedral ceilings. We would get settled and become part of our adopted city. Then I'd think about my future.

When I did, the big question loomed: What was out there that I would enjoy doing and be able to handle with my MS? Shopping, cooking and ironing were at the very bottom of my list.

I consider myself blessed to have a warm home, a loving and supportive husband and family, great friends and neighbors, and a caring church family. But what could I do with all of that? Could I find something that would give me a new identity? Could I be "something" again?

I looked in the newspapers for volunteer opportunities. There were some that were interesting, but I would have to be a "consistent" volunteer ... every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. Could I depend on my MS to lie low three days a week? Having MS is like living with a question mark! I knew I had to include it in my planning because it would be there whether I wanted it or not. If I volunteered,

would there be substitutes in case I couldn't be there?

I chewed, digested, thought, prayed, looked, and listened. I told people I was interested in doing "something." I waited for that "something" to come along. I needed that "something" to come along. I had to have a new identity, title, or career. Is that all there is?

A year passed and I still wasn't "anything." My life was lacking a purpose. Why was I here? What could I do? Is that all there is?

One morning I was reading the daily newspaper. At the end of Section A were the obituaries, and I recognized the name of an acquaintance. She had been ill for quite some time. I read about her life, and there it was:



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"She gave of herself to others. She enriched the lives of those she touched. She left this community having given it three children whose lives, in turn, enriched hers. Her smiles and her caring lifted the hearts of others. We are all richer for having had her in our lives," the newspaper said.

She didn't do anything spectacular, but the words "gave," "enriched," "smiles," and "caring" were her titles. They had been her career. I remembered a quote that goes something like this: "People won't remember what you said. But they will remember how you made them feel."

This was something I could do! I could try to enrich lives around me with smiles and caring. A loaf of nut bread. A hand-written note. That silly greeting card I made on my computer. These things could be

the spark that helps someone through a rough day.

Is that all there is? Oh, no! Life takes on meaning when you give to others. In helping others, I help myself. I can know I tried. Today making computer greeting cards for people helps me maintain my sanity—and life is good. ■

Linda Irwin works at her newly chosen career from her home in Northern Michigan. She makes her cards with the help of Hallmark Connections, Greetings Workshop software.