



Walking on Water:

An Exercise of Faith for the Unemployed

BY SANDRA A. EGGERS

"When you get done with your shift, I'd like to see you," said the general manager as he poked his head into the studio.

My heart skipped a beat. What was wrong? Was I being reprimanded? For what? It didn't look good.

I finished my two-hour shift "working the board"—cueing up commercials and managing the satellite feed—for KXEL Radio AM 1540. I signed out on the log. Went to the GM's office. Knocked.

"Come in. Sit down," he said. "I'm really sorry to have to do this." His calm, dark brown eyes reinforced his message. "But I'm going to have to let you go. Effective end of today."

With those dreaded words, God pushed me into the unemployment line, along with many others. According to the *Statistical Abstract of the United States* for 1992, there were 70,000 unemployed in Iowa in 1991. There were 8,426,000 unemployed nationwide. In that year and in 1992, Congress extended unemployment benefits. This move was a testament to both the length of time people have been out of work and their sheer numbers.

Perhaps you were also one of them.

And now, so was I. Even though I hadn't felt challenged in my position as copywriter/radio operator for more than a year, I was still unhappy about having my position eliminated. I always expected I would be the one saying good-bye, leaving for a better position. God know I tried, carefully submitting resumes and going on interviews. But nothing came of that. And now this.

Well, at least I had my unemployment check. To collect it I had to contact at least four businesses in person each week. That was difficult, since people in my profession did not do cold calling; rather, they submitted resumes. However, I had no choice if I wanted my money, so I made my calls.

Then, about a month later, August 1991, I was hired to write promotional copy for a special newspaper supplement. This tabloid promoted a local hospital's renovation and would appear in the *Waterloo Courier*, a mid-sized daily newspaper.

The free-lance project was fun. I had always enjoyed writing promotional copy.

My mother-in-law could tell how I seemed to enjoy the work, just by hearing my voice over the phone.

The hospital received compliments on the supplement, which certainly pleased my client, the *Courier*. I then wrote copy for more of its supplements.

It was good to work in print again, after writing for radio for more than two years. What's more, free-lance work didn't jeopardize my unemployment check.

However, I'd rather not live off the government. So I also worked very hard to find full-time employment. Not only did I make contacts in the Waterloo/Cedar Falls area, but I also applied for positions in Cedar Rapids (an hour's commute in one direction) and considered positions in Iowa City (about an hour and 45 minutes away).

Unfortunately, none of these positions opened up. The sticking point: I didn't have my bachelor's degree. It didn't matter that I had seven-plus years of writing experience. Nor did it matter that I was also a university student, currently taking courses for credit toward my degree. I needed that piece of paper now to prove

I could do what I had been doing all along. As unfair as this game seems, I was prepared, since I also wanted to finish my degree.

So that first year, along with my making unemployment contacts, sending resumes in response to open positions and doing occasional free-lance work, I also hit the books. I wanted to complete the bachelor's degree I had started more than 10 years ago.

By God's grace and blessing, and with the support and encouragement of my husband, I did. I graduated May 14, 1992, with a Bachelor of Liberal Arts degree from the University of Iowa, much to the joy of my husband and son and the happy astonishment of my parents.

Now I was set. I felt certain it wouldn't be too long before I would be working full-time in a challenging job with a comfortable salary. Not only did I have my degree, but I also had more than seven years of writing experience. It wouldn't be long now.

Well, I was wrong again. In job interview after job interview, I was frequently one of the finalists—several times the finalist—only to have the job offered at the last minute to someone with the exact qualifications the company requested.

Beginning to despair, I began applying for positions outside my field. I can remember one such occasion, when I interviewed for a sales position in a local cellular phone company. Even though I didn't have sales experience, the manager interviewed me. He explained that my cover letter sold him and added that maybe I should consider going into business writing cover letters.

For that position, I interviewed twice more. It then came down to two candidates: a male with sales experience and

ie. The guy with the experience got it.

No matter what I did or how I did it, I never got a job offer. Several times I received job counseling, at both the state unemployment office and at the local university. According to them, I was doing everything right. What I didn't realize at that time was that God was trying to tell me something. Time and time again, God was trying to get through my thick Polish skull that He had other plans. Of course, I didn't listen; my plans were better. (Yeah, right.)

Spring became summer; summer, fall. It was now more than a year since my position had been eliminated. And still no job. Then, in January 1993, eight months after graduation, an opportunity to be a free-lance correspondent for the *Courier* came up. During the past few months, I was finally coming to realize that maybe free-lancing was where God wanted me. I liked doing free-lance work. However, I'd always seen free-lance writing as a side activity. It seemed, however, God disagreed.

I'm really sorry, but I'm going to have to let you go. Effective end of today.

Now *that* was scary. I would not have the stability—the regular paycheck—I craved. I'd have to go out and solicit business. I'd have to manage all my own deductions and tax payments.

Finally, I relented. I said, "OK, God, if free-lance is what you want for me, I'll do it. But *You'll* have to provide the opportunities."

Hah! I laid it right on the table with Him. I had Him right where I wanted

Him. Or so I thought. (Actually, I was too chicken to step forward in faith entirely. I wanted God to move first.)

And you know what? He did. From the newspaper position, He also opened other jobs—work for a quarterly publication, and most surprising of all, a call from a national company headquartered in Des Moines. It was more than a year since I had corresponded with them. And now they wanted me to fill in for a direct mail copywriter who was going on maternity leave.

God does open His storehouse of blessings. From writing more magazine and newspaper articles, to writing a banking newsletter, to writing direct response advertising for that Des Moines company (my work now a budgeted item for them), God is providing.

God is also meeting many of my other needs, needs that are even more important than that free-lance paycheck. By my being on my own schedule, I have more time for our 10-year-old son, Karl. I'm available to do things with him during the days of summer vacation. Now that school has started, I kiss him good-bye and greet him when he returns. I am privileged to hear all about the fourth-grade tears, tests and triumphs while sharing cookies and milk. That's a great blessing, indeed, an opportunity not granted to many women these days.

As I write this, my son is revving up the make-believe motors of his Matchbox cars, as he plays in my study. It's wonderful to spend such close time together.

By my earning a living at writing, God is also fulfilling the desires of my heart. Since my childhood Girl Scout leader, after reading one of my short stories, predicted I'd be a writer, I've always written in some medium or other. While writing was not my first career choice

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during those days, it was always a close second.

As I stop to marvel how I've been blessed, I humbly thank God for His gracious provision.

Does this mean that I never doubt? No, I still do. Countless times I find myself worrying, wondering if I will get that next assignment. I sometimes let the waves of doubt swamp my boat of faith.

But through it all I try to remember Apostle Peter, as he and the other disciples cowered in a storm-tossed boat. In the wee hours of the morning, after fighting wind and waves for hours, they were exhausted, despairing. Their situation seemed hopeless.

Then, peering into the distance, perhaps to check weather conditions once again, the disciples think they see something. A figure, walking on calm water. It can't be. They rub their eyes. The figure is still walking, coming closer to their boat. Suddenly it strikes them. Remembering a folk tale, they know this figure in the midst of a storm could only mean one thing: a ghost portending disaster. They cry out in fear. All is lost; they're doomed.

But the figure calls out in that familiar warm voice girded with authority: "Take courage! It is I, don't be afraid."

Then impetuous, faith-filled Peter blurts out, "Lord if it's you, tell me to come to you on the water."

There he was, walking on calm seas, unaffected, while the tempest of the nat-

ural world raged around him. It was the power of Jesus' word, not the natural forces, that kept Peter afloat.

But then Peter took his eyes off Jesus and saw the raging wind. Fear froze his heart; he panicked. Peter began to sink, crying out, "Lord, save me!"

And Jesus reached out His hand and caught Peter, saying, "You of little faith; why did you doubt?" (Matthew 14:22-31 NIV) Therein lies the lesson.

When I fix my eyes of faith on Him, trusting in His Word, I walk on the placid waters of His grace, untroubled by life's storms. I try not to worry about my human needs; I let God know about them through prayer. I try not to forget all that He has already done; I thank Him for His blessings. And His peace, one that exceeds any power of any human mind, guards my mind and heart in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:4-6 NIV)

So as I walk on the waters of paycheck uncertainty in this profession called free-lance writing, it's comforting to know that my Lord is there, strengthening my faith and ready to extend a loving hand should I begin to panic. Together we will make it. If I just trust in Him.



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