Voices of Sisters
Spirituality



As illustrated by Sr. Terri Laureta: "I braked every three seconds, jolting my frame, and causing near collisions with my companion."



by Sr. Terri Laureta

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I was gifted with a lesson about changes in life several years ago, when asked to play (i.e., coerced into playing) a monstrosity of a bass drum for a community band. I learned, quite abruptly, that the bass drummer does not hit the drum at the same time the rest of the band is playing. The drummer is supposed to "anticipate."

You mean like, read minds? I asked myself. In truth, it means playing the drum before the director gives the rest of the band the correct time with her baton. Anticipating beats? I understood why, I just didn't understand how one could do it without getting dizzy! I finally did manage to get the technique mastered.

An outstanding challenge of playing the bass drum presented itself at the annual Oktoberfest downtown. Having never been at this kind of an event, I was pleasantly surprised by the number of polkas that are part of German culture.

Every polka required an enthusiastic band, and that included the essential bass drum. Of course, the bass drummer was to play a constant beat in every measure of every dance. *This is fun!* I said as I thumped away happily.

About several months later, I noticed that I had difficulty hearing and understanding the discussions at our dining room table. The audiologist informed me that I had lost some hearing in my left ear (the ear closer to the bass drum whenever I played).

I knew it was because of the loudness of the drum. A hearing aid was prescribed. I am grateful that I can still hear, with a minor deficit.

More recently, during a visit with my relatives in Hawaii, I managed to fall several times (most of it due to my failing to see an obstacle right in front of me) and hitting the back of my head (same spot!) having failed to see an obstacle directly behind me.

One accident occurred at the airport, several hours before it was time to board the plane and fly home. My 45-pound suitcase slid off the agricultural check ramp and fell against me, knocking me flat on my back, onto the concrete floor.

It was bad enough that I attracted attention from a growing number of travelers at the airport. The medical aide at the airport insisted on wrapping my head with several feet of bandage. The amount of bandage could have been used to wrap a mummy.

I imagined I looked like a wounded soldier as quizzical and/or pitying looks of dozens of onlookers passed by. I thought I'd humor them by looking as pathetic as I really felt.

The ambulance finally arrived and sped through the entire city of Honolulu to the hospital. The ride was memorable. The head EMT kept asking me questions like "What island are you from?" "What school did you attend?" "Do you have any pets?"

I didn't understand the purpose of her "nonsensical" questions and was getting annoyed. I was waiting for her to ask me what color were the chopsticks that I used at dinner. I eventually realized her tactic: keep the patient conscious.

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I understand that a loss of balance may afflict us as we age, but I think the number of falls I had contributed to my present struggle with balance — especially since it seemed like not many people my age are using walkers, rollators or canes. I have all three devices in my bedroom.

Shopping for food in a large market on Saturday requires nerves of steel. I could not walk well due to a foot condition, with only a cane to keep me upright and moving. My friend and I decided that driving a motorized cart would be helpful for me. *What a great idea!* we agreed. The question was: *How do I operate it?*

For those of you who have driven these vehicles with ease, allow me to share this anecdote:

The instructions about operating it made me apprehensive. Panic raced up and down my spine. "I can't drive this!" I protested.

Unlike driving a car, one has to let go of the lever to stop the seemingly innocent cart. I braked every three seconds, jolting my frame, and causing near collisions with my companion. Frustration and absolute fear were developing.

Other "drivers" confidently breezed past me. Children were racing up and down the aisles, with no regard for the speed of the carts and the danger of being hit by one.

To make matters worse, when I needed to back up, a loud alarm blared from the inner workings of the cart. By the time I reached the middle of the store, my nerves

were so shot I limped off the cart, said in a nervous and loud voice to my friend, "I'm walking. You drive!"

She gave me a look of pity, gingerly mounted the cart, and slowly drove down the aisle. She turned around, looked at me and said, "No license for you." She kept her left foot on the floor, with the intention of "braking" when necessary.

I was too tired to correct her technique as I trudged to the checkout counters alone. Amazingly enough, she was already at the front of the store, waiting for me. I appreciated that she didn't snicker and/or wave her arms in triumph.

One of my prayers of acceptance as I get older is sharing my sense of humor. I am thankful for the example of the other senior sisters with whom I live. So many suffer from more serious ailments and disabilities than I do. They, too, are inspirations for my prayer of acceptance.

I look with excitement at the new possibilities for personal growth and change in myself that these changes present.