

Story of a Changed Life—Barbara Holton

I lost my mom this past autumn. I miss her so much. But, that's just the end of the beginning of this story. This is my 14th Easter at Redeemer. I want to tell you about how I got to where I'm standing now.

I love New York City. When I was in high school, in a *very* small town in New Jersey, I used to skip school, take the bus into the city, take the A train downtown, stand in the middle of Bleecker Street and swear (sort of like Scarlet O'Hara in *Gone with the Wind*: not the hungry part but the fist to the sky part anyway) that someday I would live here. I would engage with this city, own it, love it, – and it would love me back. And so, the first chance I got, I came here to live. My parents gave me a Study Bible. I studiously ignored it.

I thought I was starting my real life. I would live in this amazing apartment in the village, find answers to the big questions, work at jobs that really interested me, and fill my life with colorful characters.

Here's how that went: A fifth-floor walk-up. Amazing only in that it could be so old and noisy and well, buggy - and still be so expensive. Colorful characters? Lots of them but "colorful" usually meant high. All the big questions boiled down to one: "how am I going to pay the rent this month?" There were lots of what I call "fringe jobs" and I wasn't always proud of how the rent got paid. When I went to see my parents they would loan me money and ask if I'd found a church. My mom would say "stay in touch with God; put God in front of everything else", but I was busy being urban and hip.

This, incredibly, went on for years. (I'm always surprised at how fast things go but how long change can take.) A lot of my colorful friends died of AIDS or drugs or despair. My personal life was chaotic. New York clearly didn't love me back and I felt lost and empty but I kept waiting for something to change. My mom, on the other hand, got a little more proactive. Her Women's Fellowship Group was raising money for a Presbyterian church that was trying to get a foothold in New York City. It was called Redeemer.

My marriage fell apart; a sister and two friends died and nothing in my life made sense. One night I dropped to my knees in an illegal sublet that I was about to lose and I asked Christ to forgive me and lead me to something bigger than my life. I prayed all night, and in the morning I called my mom and said "tell me the name of that church again?"

There are people (and sometimes places) that God puts in your life to nourish you, protect you, and hold you accountable. My mom did that. My Redeemer family does that. Sometimes even New York does that. I try to keep God in front of everything.