

By Carol Holden

When Fr. Mark asked me to say a few words on what St. Mark's means to me, I really struggled with what I was going to say. Not because I couldn't think of anything to say, but because there was so much I wanted to say, but not enough time to say it all. After thinking about it though, I've decided to tell you a story. I'm going to tell you my Story.

My story started about 5 years ago. The Director of Nursing at the school where I teach came up to me one day and said: "Carol, find us a day school where we can take our nursing students to observe the children. They only see sick children, and I think it would be good if they observe normal, healthy children at play". So I said, "I think that's a really good idea. I'll get working on it."

So being the savvy, computer wiz that I am – I opened up a phone book, went to the section on day schools, and just started going down the list with my finger. It stopped on a line that read: "St. Mark's Episcopal Church and Day School." I didn't know anything about it, didn't even know where it was, but that's where my finger stopped. I called the number, and a very nice lady by the name of Susie Kenny answered the phone. I explained who I was and what I wanted, and she said: "Sure. We've never done anything like that before, but sure, bring your students in." And so, over the next few months, I brought several groups of nursing students here to the day school, and we observed the children at play.

I had no further contact with the day school after that, until about two years later, my husband out of the clear blue, said to me: "Carol, find us a church we can go to. I remember church music being really nice, and I want to listen to the music." So I said "OK". Now, mind you, this a decision from a couple who could have counted on one finger, the number of times they had been to church, any church, in the previous twenty-some years of their marriage. I said to him – "You know, I think I remember that there was an Episcopal Church connected to a day school that I brought my students to a couple of years ago. We could go there." So the following Sunday we came here to Church. And the music was beautiful. We continued to come every Sunday over the next few months.

Then one day, he announced to me that he wasn't happy, that he was leaving. He was leaving me, he was leaving Los Angeles, and well, to make a long story short, a few days later, he was gone. I never saw him again. About a year and a half later, I heard from his son that he had died. A few days after he left LA, happened to be a Sunday, and I had to decide – do I come here to St. Mark's alone or not? I decided to come. Now, I haven't made too many good decisions in my life, but when I decided to come here on my own that day, that was by far the best decision I have ever made in my life. So I came here to the 10:00 service, and afterwards, I went over to the coffee hour. There I met a very lovely lady by the name of Elaine Loke. She introduced me to a couple of people – Isabelle and Ella May. Then she suggested I go back into the kitchen area, because there was someone back there that she thought I should meet. That person turned out to be Monique. It didn't take long for Monique and me to become good friends. What a gift! Since then I have met many wonderful friends. Over the course of the next several months, I joined: The St. Laurence Guild, The Fellowship Guild, ECW, Music Guild, the Choir, and just about everything else there is here to join! Be careful – that's what happens when you hang out with Monique!

It wasn't long after that my daughter was diagnosed with cancer. We didn't know if she was going to live, or for how long she was going to live – still don't. It's a day to day, week to week kind of thing – some good days, some not so good. But through all of this you were there for me, and my family – and still are.

When my grandson was so sick – in and out of mental health hospitals, in and out of drug and alcohol rehab centers – still is – you were there.

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Last week, when my granddaughter was baptized here at St. Mark's – that was one of the happiest days of my life (she's my little "Episcopal" now) – all of you were there to share in my joy.

And when, a few months ago, I became so depressed that I could barely get out of bed in the morning – Fr. Mark was there for me, as usual, helping me pick up the pieces, one by one, and put them back together again. Thank you, Fr. Mark. And all of you were there too.

It has taken me a long time to get here. I used to think I had all the answers. Not only did I not have the right answers, I didn't even have the right questions!

After worshipping with you week after week, and praying with you day after day, sharing meals with you, attending Adult Education, and listening to the wonderful sermons of Fr. Mark, Deacon Susie and all the others, I have learned one thing. St. Mark's is not a church. St. Mark's is not a place I go to. St. Mark's is a relationship – a very loving, caring and sharing relationship between me and you, and God, and all of our neighbors out there. How beautiful – how utterly, utterly beautiful!

I have been given a gift. A gift I don't ever want to lose, and so I will continue to support St. Mark's. I will continue to give money, because I think it's important. I wish I had more to give. I will continue to serve, because I think that's important. I wish I could do more, because I want this gift to thrive, to flourish, and to grow. I want us to grow. I want us to grow if not in numbers, then in spirit, so that those doors back there will open wide, and we can show our neighbors just who we are, and what a beautiful gift we have here to share with them.

So, to answer Fr. Mark's question, "What does St. Mark's mean to me"? What do all of you mean to me? Everything!