

Who am I?
(In a Nutshell)

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52 years old (9-17-54)

I grew up on a farm, the oldest of eight children. By the time I was eight and one-half years old, number seven was born. When I was 17 $\frac{1}{2}$, a senior in high school, my youngest sister was born.

Few people my age have had the fortune to experience a one-room country school, but I attended Coon Creek Country School (near Sutliff, IA) for the first five and one-half years of my education.

I graduated from Solon High School in 1972.

I worked my own way through college at the University of Northern Iowa in Cedar Falls and graduated in English education.

I taught English for four years at Bellevue High School in Bellevue, IA.

I married my best friend Jim Humston on June 11, 1977. We will celebrate our 30th anniversary this summer.

I resigned from teaching to become a stay-at-home mother.

We moved to Iowa City in 1981 when Jim became an Iowa City firefighter, which is still his profession.

We have three children, aged 23, 25 and 27.

In 1990 (when I was 35 years old) I developed a chronic illness called Myofascial Pain Syndrome, similar to Fibromyalgia. It still impacts my life.

Currently, I am a writer and frequent volunteer at my church.

I am honored to be able to be a part of the Legacy Letter Project. I have lived a rich, interesting life (at least in my estimation it has been) and feel privileged to pass on some advice to anyone who's willing to read it. ☺

By Mary Jedlicka Humston

So, here it is!!

You can change. While hard to believe now, I was quite shy as a child. Before entering high school in the late 1960's, I realized I didn't want to be hindered by the limitations of shyness any longer. I pumped up my self-esteem by losing weight and letting my hair grow. With these physical elements taken care of, then came the next part of my plan. When my freshman year began, I made myself talk to different people. I'd be sincere when I'd say: "You had a good answer in class today." "Nice dress." "Great game last night." It wasn't easy, but gradually it became more comfortable. I know it sounds like a fairy tale ending, but I knew I'd come a long way when I was voted Homecoming Queen my senior year.

While there are still times shyness overcomes me, I well remember how making changes helped the inner me emerge and blossom. That single decision impacted my life in more

ways than I can possibly imagine. We can change. We really can.

"How will you know if you don't try?" My mother posed this question to me when I was in high school. I planned to run for Student Council President, but when one candidate threw her hat into the ring, I considered withdrawing. Why? Simply put, I thought she'd win. Mom's question made me consider one of my own: would I have regrets if I didn't at least try? I thought I might. So, I ran in the election and won. That bit of advice has encouraged me to try many things I might've otherwise been afraid to do.

Despite sounding so cliché, it's true: a good marriage is worth its weight in gold. My husband and I were friends for three years before we started dating and fell in love. Prayer and our faith played crucial roles in our decision to marry.

However, let there be no mistake: **MARRIAGE TAKES WORK.** Wrenches are thrown into the "happily ever after" future. Challenges occur. So do rifts. Hurt feelings. Sadness. Tough times. Financial difficulties. Illness and accidents.

Marriage isn't always a piece of cake, but, when all the ingredients are blended well together, a marriage enriches and satisfies beyond words. My husband and I will

soon celebrate our 30th anniversary. I can attest that it only gets better with each passing year.

The love of family is a blessing. Make it a priority to spend time with your family. Laugh. Create memories. Cling to each other in sorrow. Support each other. Play. Pray. Create your own catch phrases. Build and maintain traditions. A strong family life can get you through many trials. If you don't have this within your own biological unit, look for it elsewhere: neighbors, classmates, colleagues, church groups. To slightly rephrase a popular expression: "Family: It does a body good." A good one really does.

When big decisions enter your life, be sure to research the pros and cons. Read extensively. Pray. Talk to others who've faced the same situation. What did they do? Why? When you've assembled all the facts, then my advice is to follow your heart. While this is important in many areas of life, it became crucial in how my husband and I parented.

Follow your heart. We prayed for guidance that we'd know what was best for our family and wouldn't worry if it went against the grain. Following this maxim allowed us to parent the way we felt was right for **our** family. Sure, we

made mistakes. Every parent does. But, by following our hearts, we had less regrets.

So, it gave us the courage to get by on one income so I could be a stay-at-home mom. For me to breastfeed our babies far longer than was popular at the time. To not let our babies cry *it out* during the night. To allow our young children in bed with us when they needed to be. To take our babies and toddlers with us almost everywhere. To let our kids make *messes* when they *helped* us bake, rake leaves, do dishes or any other task. To have our son wait a year before starting kindergarten because of an early summer birthday. To permit our first-grade son to get his ear pierced. And, on and on and on.

Never underestimate the power of faith and prayer.

Each provides peace and comfort; direction and support; life-giving strength and reassurance. There'll be times when trauma and tragedy strike, and you'll be hard put to understand WHY. Do you become bitter by sad circumstances or do you try to become better despite them? How you respond will be a true test of your character.

Kindness can go a long way. I've had many kindnesses extended toward my family and me. A smile. An encouraging word. A compliment. A homemade meal just when needed. I believe receiving and giving out simple acts of kindness

can make the difference between a rich life and a depleted one.

Treasure your friends. What would life be without them? Make cultivating friendships a priority and this will also make your life richer.

Stop and smell the roses. Life's too short not to appreciate the world around you. It's as plain and simple (and as difficult and complex) as that.

Make time for nature. I strongly encourage you to incorporate nature into your daily life just as you do eating and sleeping. Fresh air and exercise are great benefits to being outdoors, but the soothing of the soul and the unexpected gifts in nature provide so much more. How can you not be touched by seeing eagles in flight? The magnificence of the Mighty Mississippi River? Salmon fighting upstream? The vast oceans? Rainbows? The common sparrow? (No, that's not a typo). The Badlands? The redwoods? Nature offers countless treasures. Don't neglect or overlook them.

When in doubt, have a cup of tea. Enough said!

Thanks for allowing me the opportunity to share these aspects of my life. Good luck in the future to you all.