

THE CALL TO RUN

It was about 7:30 P.M. My husband and I had just finished dinner.

Like many nights at our household, I was sitting at the kitchen table grading papers. The life of a teacher doesn't end with the school bell.

When the phone rang, my husband answered. I heard a lot of “uh-huhs” and then, “Well, I don't think I'm interested, but I think there's somebody else here who might be.” He was grinning at me. “You've been talking to the wrong Hartzler.” With that, he handed me the phone.

On the other end of the line was our longtime friend, Bill Day. He was an insurance agent for years before his retirement and now enjoyed gardening, taking walks with his wife, and supporting his political party. What he said stumped me. “Would you consider running for state representative? As you know, our current representative is retiring, and we need someone to run who's willing to serve the people of this area. I asked your husband, but he declined and suggested I talk to you. The committee thought of you, too, but thought you wouldn't give up teaching to serve. Will you run?”

My mind swirled with a thousand thoughts. *I can't do this. I just got my Master's degree and I'm making a difference where I am. I don't know a thing about running. I wouldn't know where to start with a campaign. We can't afford to run for office. That takes a lot of money. Politics is an ugly game with a lot of mean people. I don't want to enter that fray.*

Yet amidst it all, I also remembered. My mind went back to the front sidewalk of my childhood home where I was making mud pies. I was nine years old. I was talking with God and asked, "God, what do you want me to be when I grow up? Where could you use me to serve you and help people?"

Of course I wanted to be a wife and mother, but was there something else He wanted me to do? I thought about being a doctor and then said, "No, too much blood!" Then I thought about being a lawyer and quickly ruled that out. "Too much arguing!" Then the idea of being a state representative came to mind and I smiled, "Yeah, that would be a way to serve you, Lord."

I went on with my life, grew up, got married, and became a teacher. Yet over the years I felt drawn to the political process, preferring to watch the evening news or read the newspaper to learn the latest public policy action of elected officials over watching popular sitcoms. I shared with my husband my childhood thoughts but always assumed that if I ever really did run for office, it would be after I had retired from teaching or after we'd had children and they were out of the house. Not now.

Then a surprise. I found myself saying to Bill, "Well, I do remember as a child thinking it would be rewarding to serve God and others by being a state representative. I shared the idea with Lowell several years ago, and we've joked about when I would run for office 'someday,' but we've never really taken it seriously." Then the thoughts of the realities of campaigning came to mind. "Really . . . I can't. I just completed my Masters degree and am enjoying teaching and . . ."

Bill gently interrupted, "Would you at least consider it? Would you pray about it?"