

And Then There Were Nuns author Jane Christmas

DON ERMEN, OTTAWA SUN

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Author Jane Christmas wrote about her experience of living as a nun in the book, *And Then There Were Nuns*. Photo courtesy of Melanie Gillis

Just the title of the book is enough to get your attention.

And Then There Were Nuns.

It might not resonate with those readers too young to know the Agatha Christie novel this title plays off, but for a certain age of readers, you can't help but look twice.

Canadian Jane Christmas has always wanted to be a nun. Bad enough that when her long-term partner Colin proposed, she put her engagement on hold to embark on a year-long visit of four convents in Canada and the UK, where she now lives.

The following is an edited interview with the author.

Q. What's the fascination with being a nun?

A. I don't know what the fascination was. It's something that just calls to your heart and soul. And in my case it was something from my teenage years and it just kept percolating through my life. And then when I really did have the opportunity, it came up loud and clear again. And it went, 'I guess I got to do this.' I was getting tired of the craziness of life and the business and it seemed so empty. I wanted more in my life. I was sure there was more purpose in life.

Q. Someone tried to give you that purpose by proposing. How did that go over when you said you wanted to be a nun instead?

A. (Laughing) Don't you have those times when you're waiting for something to happen ... and in a way I thought it was a

test. Okay, I wanted to be a nun and God said, okay, so what if we throw this into the mix that you get a proposal and what you gonna do then. It was like two timing God in a way.

Q. What was your answer and what was the reaction?

A. I said yes initially. And then when I flew back to Canada from England, I phoned him up and said, okay, I got to tell you about this. Here's something that is in my heart and it's been in my mind for a long time. There was a deep intake of breath on the other end of the phone. He's a gentle person and he was fine about it. I kind of thought he accepted ... it a little to quickly and I'd thought maybe he didn't really want to get married. (laughs) But he knew this was something that I wanted to do and needed to do and he figured if I needed to do it that badly, I better do it now.

Q. You've been married twice before. So the desire to be a nun doesn't interfere with your need to be married. On the surface, some might think those are opposite goals.

A. Both are calls, both are important. And they're sacred institutions and sacred pacts you make. So as one person explained to me, both options are good. It's where you feel most authentic and comfortable. I'm the type of woman who wants it both ways. I want everything. I really felt I needed to pursue it. I had already been married so I knew what to expect. ... I'm at an Anglican convent now and there are a number of nuns who have been married.

Q. Is there one overriding feeling of what the past year has left you with?

A. I think the one impact is the issue of the rape that I had to confront. That reared its head. So there was making peace with that. It wasn't like I was cured or anything like that but it got out there and it created some peace within me. But the other one was discovering the great power of silence. And how important that is in our lives and how bereft we are of silence these days. We're just surrounded by noise and often we just want to run away and hear ourselves think but often we just run away to places where we're further distracted. It was a great discovery and great healing sort of thing for myself and my own peace of mind. Like a lot of people I often talk about wanting to get away from it all and isn't it funny the place here I was truly able to get away from it all was in a convent.

Q. Do you fear we might not know how to be silent?

A. I think there is a real problem with that it's an age thing as we get older. We grow in wisdom and we grow to appreciate silence. When we were in our teens and 20s, we were off to rock concerts. But as you get older, you start to appreciate silence. We all have a breaking point. I think it will come to everyone eventually. I look at my kids and ... I wish they would discover silence. But they won't. They are in the phase of life where they are busy and need to make these connections.

Q. After doing this, is the desire to be a nun out of your system or was it really more of a desire to self explore?

I think it's a bit of both. It's not out of my system. I understand my place in the system, I'm not meant to be a nun, but now I can be around nuns. I interact with them all of the time. I stay in touch with them. I do work for them. In my regular life, I go to church a couple of times a week. I subscribe to the Church Times so I read up on things. The church, or church matters, or faith matters, are very central to my existence. Before I had to keep it away from people because people think you're a Jesus freak or something like that if you talk about it. And now I can do it unabashedly and I don't give a shit (laughs)

Q. Did living in a convent give you insight into marriage?

A. Anyone who's thinking of marriage should spend some time in a convent because you do learn good listening skills. I think I'm a better partner now because of this experience. I do believe I listen more, I really try to be more patient as well and more understanding. I think it's part of our life. My husband is perhaps not as religious as I am but we go to church together. I realized how important it is to have a partner who has a sense of faith.

Q. Is the third time the charm?

A. It better be. God, I'm not going through this again. This is just embarrassing. I would never have thought I would be married three times. But life happens. I think we all grow from those experiences and I'm still friends with my previous

husbands and they've all met my new husband. So I'm blessed with a very good family and support system.

donald.ermen@sunmedia.ca

Twitter: @donermen

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