

THE WAY FORWARD

by Judy Jackson, Forster, NSW.



ROAD CLOSED

“ Do not doubt that you too can be the person to help, listen and offer that comfort. ”

The focus since Easter and Jesus' crucifixion is all about his Resurrection and the doubts held about how this happened. Thomas needed proof, "seeing is believing", apparently. We can all confess to having been a Thomas occasionally.

In 2016 I decided that the proceeding year I would retire from paid employment, so that is what I did. After announcing this to my employer and others around me, I was constantly asked "and what do you plan to do with your time". Not really being sure of this, having my doubts, I declared that I was going to give more time volunteering and giving back to others. I had no idea what that would really look like into the future, but that is what I told every one.

I had been volunteering since 2003 with Red Cross as a Telecross caller, requiring me to phone one or two people each morning to check up on their well-being. During this time I also accepted the training into the Emergency Services area of Red Cross, providing PFA, physiological first aid, during and after disasters. Although I had never been deployed in this role, and doubting I would ever be required to use this training, I kept in touch with the local team. Slowly the lives of other team members changed and they drifted away. So who would have imagined that since 2019 we would experience one disaster after another in Australia alone?

Early February 2019 I was deployed to Townsville to assist in the recovery work for the floods that followed the cyclone season. I worked with teams and individuals from all over Australia, who like myself, gives their time to assist others, which have been caught up in a disaster. It is both rewarding but humbling to witness so many stories and lives of those who are really lost in the process of paperwork, red tape and rebuilding. I am really privileged to be a part of the journey of these people. The people who really have doubts about what they are to do, where are they going and what does the future look like for them. I see a lot of "Thomases" amongst them, who really need the reassurance that all will be OK.

Not to stop there, in late 2019 my own local area where hit with devastating fires, and again I was required to assist within the evacuation centre. This is where you really see the community get together to assist others. We had people come in to offer food, toiletries, clothing, and bedding. Others came to offer to walk dogs, feed animals and just talk to others who looked like they were on their own. Organisations such

as Anglicare and Salvation Army all become part of this centre, feeding and offering spiritual support for others. This is when I know Jesus has been resurrected and the proof is all around me.

Into 2020, and I had just began to assist in the outreach programme, whereby Red Cross attends local markets, homes, and other community groups to gauge and assist the physiological recover of the community. This was all halted too quickly, due to COVID. So, again, I am back on the phone, calling both fire affected areas and people in hotel quarantine.

2021, now, I am back in both evacuation and recovery centres for the North Coast floods. Although sad as this all is, we had a young girl arrive at our evacuation centre very excited that it just happened to be her 9th birthday and she had been brought into the centre at ten past 12 in a big SES truck. She was so excited and was not going to let the fact that she was to now sleep for two nights in a hall with several other people, including her family, and accept assistance from others.

Although these disasters may have happened in the past the ongoing work to rebuild and to accept that this has actually happened goes on for some years after. It is the accumulation of disasters that really affects people's spirit, and is the cause for many to belief that they have now been forgotten and not worthy of further assistance. We all still need to ask, "how are you going" and then really listen. Do not doubt that you too can be the person to help, listen and offer that comfort.

My life is so full, but so rewarded with the ability to give my time to others. Every day I receive, people from all walks of life, their stories, thanks and gratitude. How blessed am I that I don't doubt, he walks amongst us, every where.



COMING IN MAY - MORE VOLUNTEER STORIES FROM MEMBERS AROUND AUSTRALIA