

## WHAT AM I GOING TO DO WITH THIS *MESS*?

Sometimes in life we are faced with the unexpected. In an instant, BAM!, our lives are changed forever. It could be the loss of a job, a serious illness, or the death of a close relative or friend. Or, if you were my aunt, it could be the car accident that leaves you paralyzed for the rest of your life.

Can you imagine that?

In my aunt's case, her "mess" occurred back in 1966. An intelligent and attractive woman, my aunt was poised to graduate from college—with honors—when her neck was broken in the crash.

How do you think you'd react if this happened to you? I can honestly say I'm not sure I'd have handled it with as much grace as my aunt has over the years. My aunt, you see, didn't quit. Rather than let her lack of mobility stop her, she steamrolled ahead—enjoying a satisfying career in social work, influencing laws that impacted her local community, and even getting inducted into Delaware's Women's Hall of Fame!

I recently attended the retirement party that celebrated my aunt's 38-year career. It was inspiring—especially as I finally got to hear her speak openly about the mental, emotional, and physical challenges she overcame in order to live a full life.

After the accident, doctors told my aunt she would never move again. But after she was sent home, for around-the-clock care, she willed herself to sit up. Once in a wheelchair, her father kept up her momentum by building a ramp—challenging her to make it to the bottom.

In front of all the guests gathered at her party, my aunt recounted the number of times she rolled herself to the ramp, looked down, and with visions of falling would say, "I can't do this."

But she eventually did find the courage to do so—and then to earn a master's degree, get married, and even become a mom. Clearly, over time, my aunt figured out what to do with her "mess."

Based on what I heard her share that evening, here are three things we can do when we have a "mess" on our hands:

**Maintain a positive attitude.** My aunt has always been described by others as never having a bad day. It's true. She always greets people with a smile and words of encouragement. And according to those closest to her, even when the accident first occurred she didn't ask, "Why me?" By choosing not to become angry or bitter, my aunt has been able to maintain the sparkle in her eye that glowed so brightly before her accident.

**Be willing to help others.** My aunt is also known for going above and beyond to help others. She always gives people permission to be their true selves. She is able to love them, despite their weaknesses, and to continue to believe in them no matter what they do. I'm told that, even as she lay in that hospital bed after her accident, she unselfishly served as an interpreter for doctors who were treating a Spanish-speaking patient.

**Take advantage of opportunities.** As my aunt's attitude so clearly shows, we hold the power of how we view and react with life. We can love or hate, serve or be selfish, move or stand still. So choose to open the doors of whatever opportunities present themselves. Your positive spirit will brightly illuminate your path, leading you to the treasures that have been set aside *just for you*.

S. Renee, *The New Edge in Motivational Speaking*<sup>™</sup>, is an image consultant, motivational speaker, columnist, and author of *There Is More Inside*. For booking information: [www.srenee.com](http://www.srenee.com). To comment on this article, go to the message board of our online resource center: [www.thereismoreinside.com](http://www.thereismoreinside.com). Copyright © 2007 by S. Renee Smith. All rights reserved. No part of this article may be copied or reproduced without the written permission of the author.