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Artist Turns “Designs by a Desperate Mom” Into a Thriving Business of Encouragement

Jan Hurn’s world was turned upside down in March 2002, when her husband left the expectant mom with no means of income to support her two young daughters Hannah and Alex, and soon-to-be-born daughter Adeline. So, with a baby coming in October, Jan’s prospects were bleak. But out of necessity, the desperate mom proceeded to find a way to provide for her hurting family. And she prayed.

In a September 2002 preliminary court hearing the judge painted a gloomy outlook for Jan, saying she was going to lose her car and would have no real assets. She also added a mandate that as soon as the baby was born, Jan had to figure a way to take care of her three young children.

Jan turned to working countless small jobs to help pay bills; including painting houses and furniture, planning weddings, cleaning houses, parking cars and even walking dogs. Though she was struggling to make ends meet, she was blessed to be able to stay in her rental house ironically located on a street called Country Club Circle, but not without a lot of help from many unexpected sources.

As she continued to work tirelessly to support her kids, many communities pitched in to lend a helping hand. A home group at a friend’s church in Arkansas held a garage sale; with \$2,000 in proceeds going toward helping Jan buy a dependable automobile, since she lost hers during the divorce process. A car dealership in Fort Worth threw in a matching gift to fund the balance on the car. She was shocked and extremely thankful when the dealer arrived at her house and handed her the keys to this huge surprise.

Another encouraging event occurred when a women’s group at her church threw a shower in November for newborn baby Adeline; presenting Jan with a money tree. The shower provided over \$17,000 in much-needed funds. The support that was coming from every side provided one overwhelming blessing after another for the needy family.

Out of a grateful heart, Jan designed her first *Peace of Paper* artwork, hand-drawn note cards as hostess gifts to the many women who had blessed her with the baby shower. The note cards featured a cross illustration with the scripture quote, “May the Lord Bless and Keep You”, which was exactly what had been occurring in Jan and her young family’s life. But the blessings didn’t stop there.

Though going through a divorce made for an extremely difficult 2002 holiday season, Jan continued to be thankful for the help she received from so many. That Christmas, local church members banded together to provide Christmas gifts for all three girls. It provided great comfort to Jan to know that her girls would have a full holiday despite the circumstances.

Encouragement came again, from the group that threw the baby shower, in the form of very positive feedback on the note cards she had made. In fact, many requested that they pay her to make personalized cards for them to give for the holidays. It sparked the early beginnings of possibly doing more with the little illustrated notes and cards Jan loved to create.

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In January 2003 the divorce was finalized. Though the event was painful and emotionally draining, Jan's hopes were not crushed as she continued to move forward with her life.

A college friend provided another boost of hope to Jan's life by providing finances to cover a nanny in the home for two-year old Alex and baby Adeline. This allowed Jan to continue to work. Added assistance came from a mom from 11-year-old daughter Hannah's elementary school, who took her to Sam's Club to buy school lunch supplies for her daughter.

The following year, after being encouraged by friends who enjoyed her custom notes and stationery, Jan flirted with the idea of supporting her family with her designs. A friend offered the ultimate support by helping fund start up costs like printing and packaging for the fledging business, which she named *Peace of Paper*. She also penned the tagline, "Designs by a Desperate Mom™" to convey the true origins of the business.

"God truly blessed me beyond anything I could have imagined", says Jan. "So many people pitched in to help my girls and I get on our feet and move on with our lives."

Slowly the business began to grow with new designs and added product lines; all designed, packaged, and distributed out of her home. Jan continued working side jobs as the focus on *Peace of Paper* increased; with more orders coming in.

A few years passed and Jan cautiously considered dating again. She read a book titled, *How to Get a Date Worth Keeping* by Dr. Henry Cloud and decided to attend a church service at Fellowship Church in Grapevine, Texas. The church was known to have a vibrant singles ministry of like-minded Christians. But friends kidded her after the service, saying, "She had just hung out with all of her old married friends." But later that same evening Jan met a handsome and kind-hearted man, named Mike, who loved and accepted her unconditionally. Eight months of dating and many pre-marital counseling sessions later, the two were married.

Mike, who had not yet had children, adapted very well to instantly having three daughters and loved them as his own. Jan said, "Mike took on so much including three girls, a ton of debt and all the baggage that comes with divorce, but he took it all in stride." The marriage was just one more blessing that came into Jan's life following a very difficult period.

Jan continues to watch *Peace of Paper*, which was birthed out of desperation, grow into something truly meaningful. "I started the business as a way to make ends meet and express my gratitude. Now it provides hope and inspiration to myself and countless others", said Jan. "I hope that everyone who gives or receives a *Peace of Paper* card or note, is touched and encouraged. The business was founded with the intent to convey blessings and thanks. I just want to keep it moving forward and see how many people can be inspired by what I love to do."

Fort Worth-based *Peace of Paper* offers simple, touching and heartfelt stationery products for all occasions. Each design is hand-drawn by owner Jan Hurn, who is continually inspired by her children and her faith. For product inquiries, go to www.peaceofpaper.com.

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