



Jerry and the J's Of Johnson's Creek

By Deborah Wassenberg

5. What If I Don't Want to Forgive?

'Hey kids!' Jerry yelled across the Town Hall, but the children were not listening to him. They were chattering with one another and laughing. He looked at Jandi on the keyboard. 'It's hard to get the kids to pay attention tonight,' he said.

'They're all excited about the Church Fete tomorrow,' Jandi shrugged. 'You can't blame them. Remember how much we looked forward to it each year?'

'I spent months saving up my pocket money for it,' said Jazz. She played a riff on her bass guitar but still, the children took no notice.

A clash of cymbals caught everyone by surprise. The hall went quiet as Jericho played a drum solo. He ended it with a thump from the bass drum then looked at Jerry with a smile.

'You're welcome!' he said.

'Thanks, Jericho!' said Jerry. 'Hey, that's Kid's Church for this week,' he told the children. 'We will see you at the Church Fete tomorrow! God bless you.'

The noise in the hall grew even louder. Some children were leaving. Some were staying because their parents were setting up stalls. Church members were arriving with boxes overflowing with donations.

Jax, the J's sound engineer managed to thread his way through all the people to the stage.

'We better load out quick,' he told the band. 'Every bit of space in this hall is needed for the fete tomorrow.'

'I know what for,' said Jandi. 'Trash and treasure on the left side of the hall, cakes, slices and jams on the right side and second-hand books up here on the stage. It's always been the same.'

'Yeah, well there have been some changes this year.'

'What?' said Jazz. 'Not cool.'

'Still the same stalls,' said Jax. 'But the new fete committee chairman has decided to move things around.'

'Oh, boy,' said Jandi. 'I'm sure that didn't go down too well with the old committee members.'

'So what's different?' asked Jazz.

'Trash and treasure on the right side of the hall, books on the left side and vinyl records, DVDs and CDs up here on the stage.'

'Where are the cakes going to be?' asked Jericho in a worried voice.

'Cakes, slices and jams have been moved outside under a new marquee. And we've been asked to set up on the green between the hall and the Church. We'll play at 10 am, 12 noon, and 3 pm.'

'What's a green?' asked Jericho. 'Is it better than a purple or an orange?'

'No, Jericho,' laughed Jandi. 'A green is the name for a shared patch of grass.'

'It's what we used to call the paddock,' said Jax. 'It's been renamed by the committee chairman.'

'As long as there's cake I don't care where they put it,' said Jericho as he leapt up from behind his drum kit. But his knees knocked his floor tom, and he fell backwards, just missing his seat. He landed on his bottom. Still clutching his drumsticks in his hand, he waved them in the air.

'I'm okay!' he said.

Jandi quickly left her keyboard to help Jericho stand up as the rest of the J's began unplugging leads and winding them up. Jerry was kneeling on the stage disentangling cords when he felt a tap on the heel of his shoe. He turned around and saw a little girl who wanted him.

'Hey, Sarah,' he said to her. 'Have your mum and dad arrived yet?'

Sarah shook her head. 'I have a question,' she said.

Jerry stopped what he was doing, turned and sat on the stage with his legs dangling. The rest of the band stopped loading out so they could hear the question, too.

'Okay. What is your question?' asked Jerry.

'What if I don't want to forgive?' said Sarah.

Jerry looked over his shoulder at his bandmates who all looked back at him blankly.

'That's a good question,' nodded Jerry. 'How about I find out the answer and tell you next week? Is that okay?'

Sarah nodded. 'Okay,' she said, and she ran off to the other side of the hall.

'Whoa,' said Jerry.

'I know who can answer that question,' said Jericho.

'Reverend Mac!' they all cried.

'Okay, J's' said Jerry. 'We'll catch Reverend Mac at the Church Fete tomorrow!'

Reverend Mac was sitting delicately on top of a slim piece of timber. One of the sheep station owners had rigged up a 'Dip the Shepherd' fete attraction using a cut-down water tank and some western Queensland ingenuity. A large target was to the side of Reverend Mac's head. Townspeople paid for three balls. If a ball hit the bullseye, the mechanism released a spring, and the board that Reverend Mac was sitting on gave way, dunking him in the 'sheep dip'.

Jerry and the J's joined the crowd around the attraction.

'Hey, Reverend Mac,' called Jerry. 'I have a question for you.'

'Now?' asked Reverend Mac eyeing the farmer who stepped up to the line holding all three balls. 'I think you'd better ask me quick, Jerry.'

Thwack! The first ball missed the bullseye.

'What if I don't want to forgive?'

'You mean if you don't feel like forgiving someone who has hurt you?' asked Reverend Mac. 'Well, if you wait until you feel like it, you'll never forgive them.'

Thwack! The second ball just missed the bullseye.

'Forgiving someone is a choice you make,' the reverend said, 'and for Christians, it's not optional. It's something you have to do.'

Thwack! The ball hit the bullseye. The spring released the board and down went Reverend Mac into the tank full of water. The crowd cheered and gave the farmer a pat on the back. Reverend Mac bobbed up and wiped the water from his face. The volunteer reset the board and Reverend Mac climbed back on while another member of the congregation grabbed three balls, eagerly awaiting his turn to throw.

'Matthew 18:22,' yelled Reverend Mac. 'Jesus said to forgive not seven times but seventy-seven!'

The following Friday night at Kid's Club, with all traces of the Church Fete cleared away, Jerry was back on stage sharing with the kids.

'Hi everyone,' he said, 'last week Sarah asked me a really important question. What if I don't want to forgive? Forgiving someone for hurting you is not a choice. Forgiving is something you do whether you feel like it or not. Jesus asks you to forgive because He knows that it's the only way for you not to become bitter and resentful. He knows it's the only way you'll have peace in your life. Remember, Jesus knows exactly how it feels to be hurt. We forgive because we have been forgiven. If you start to replay what happened over and over in your head, pray for the person who hurt you. Ask God to help them and ask Him to help you, too.'

Jerry smiled at his bandmates.

'One, two, one, two, three, four!' He began to play. 'Come on, everybody. Let's praise the Lord!'