

## Pass It On®...

**Sometimes the Wrong Direction is the Right Way.** *How a wrong number, a wrong text and a mix-up led to long-lasting friendships.*

Life can be unpredictable, and some of those turns enrich us in ways that wouldn't have happened if we were all as perfect as an Instagram post.

Twenty years ago, Gladys Hankerson, who lives in Florida, dialed up her sister in Maryland for a chat. Or so she thought. But she misdialed the area code and reached Mike Moffit in Rhode Island.

Mike says Gladys was a bit embarrassed but very sweet. Gladys loves her sister and, of course, tried to call again a few days later — and made the same mistake on the area code. Mike answered again and recognized Gladys' voice. They had a nice chat and laughed about it.

Before long, Gladys started calling Mike just to say hi. And Mike began to call Gladys just to check in. Then one day, Gladys' son called Mike to tell him a close family member had passed away. They realized their friendship had deepened — and it carried on for 20 years.

"He's a very nice person," Gladys says of Mike. "I love him to death." They finally met when Mike was on vacation with his family in Florida and decided to stop by her house. "He made my day," Gladys says. "I hugged him, he hugged me, and we took a picture."

Across the country in Arizona, in 2016, Wanda Dench sent a text to her college-aged grandson inviting him to Thanksgiving dinner. But she got the number wrong and reached Jamal Hinton. When Hinton asked who had sent the message, Wanda sent a picture of herself.

"You're not my grandma," Jamal texted back. "Can I still get a plate tho?" Wanda replied: "Of course. That's what grandmas do ... feed everyone!" And for six years, Jamal has celebrated Thanksgiving with the Dench family.

For this group, 2020 was a tough year. The small family gathering was also to honor Wanda's husband Lonnie, who had recently passed away from COVID-19. It meant a lot to have Jamal there

to remember Lonnie. "We're more of extended family and, best of all, friends," says Jamal.

In yet another community, Robert's wife asked him to drop some books off at a local elementary after a book drive. When he carried the books to the classroom on his lunch hour, the teacher mistook him for one of the volunteer tutors.

"Thank you for coming," the teacher said. "Isabella is struggling with comprehension and is a grade level behind. Here is a book and her worksheets."

Robert thought, "What the heck, I have time. I'll just sit down and help." Robert, an artist, sketched out drawings of words and illustrated their meanings. Isabella was delighted.

"I think that's when the light went on for her," Robert says. For a full year, Robert tutored Isabella on his lunch hours. Her reading comprehension quickly caught up and then shot past grade level. "It made my day, seeing her learn so fast," Robert says.

Sometimes life puts us in places where we are supposed to be. Whether we were headed that way or not, we just need to make the best of it.

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