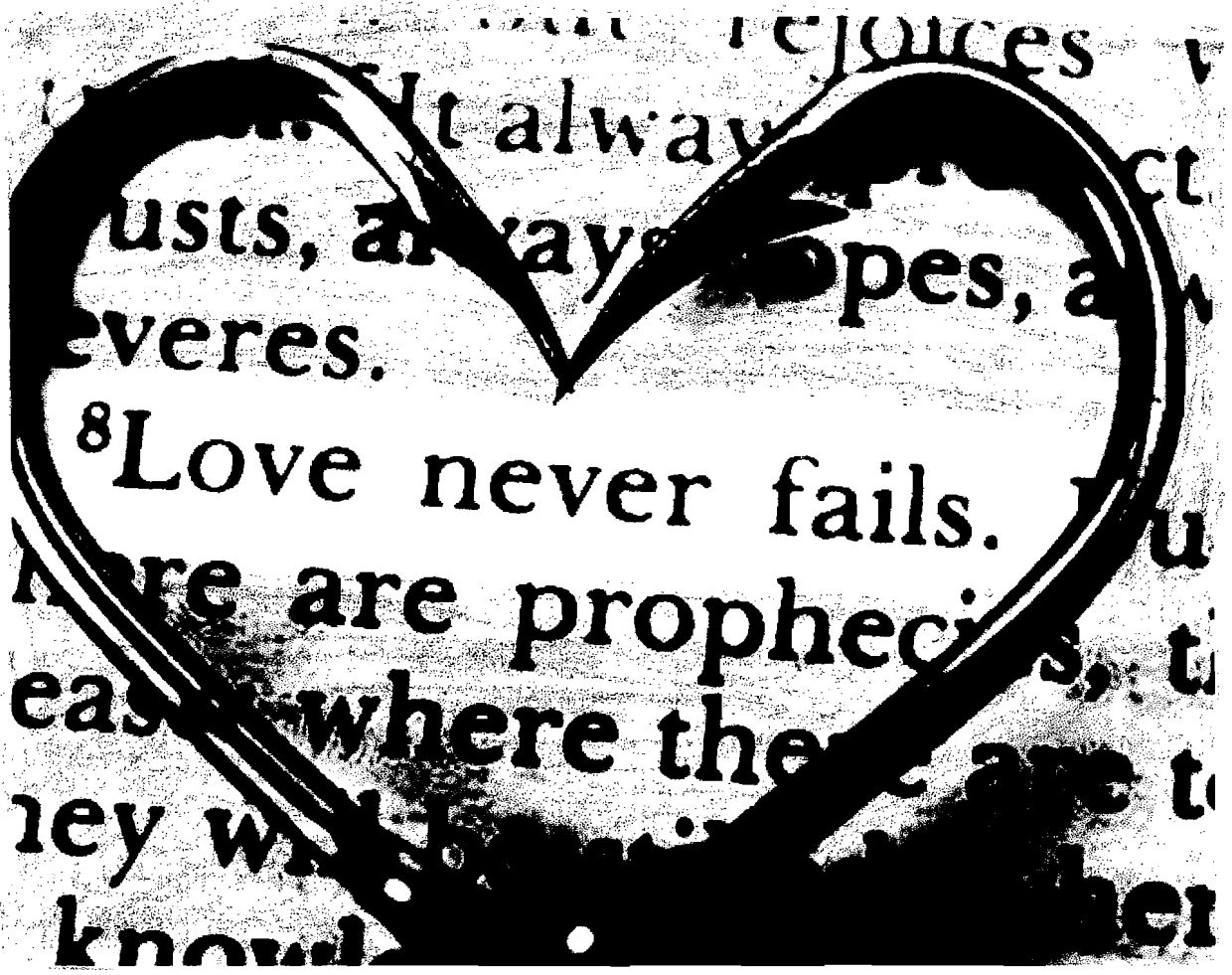


**LOVE**



"It wasn't easy, but it was worth it."

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**September 22, 2012**

## **It Starts At Home**

I believe my 11<sup>th</sup> grade Physics teacher was wrong. She and the entire scientific world would have us believe that the fundamental interaction known as a strong nuclear force is the greatest force that exists on earth, but I've never seen it, gravity, a tsunami or any other natural force do what love can do. Love is such an indescribable action that no two people in this world could or would ever give you their understanding of the word with identical emotions, tones or experiences behind their definition. Personally I find it hard to even explain how love affects my life on a daily basis, but I know that its potency makes it stronger than anything science can come up with.

I was only three when I witnessed my first example of love. My brother Anthony and I were settling into a stranger's home after we were taken away from our parents and placed into foster care. A brief investigation alleged that only I was in any real danger and so after only a few days the social workers came to offer Anthony, who was five years old at the time, the opportunity to go home. By 2011 only 11% of children nationwide spent five or more years in foster care (AFCARS) so no one expected that little boy to give them the response he gave on that day causing him to spend over eight years in the system. In a fervent manner he assured them that nothing and no one would separate him from his sister, that he would never leave me alone and that he would be staying in foster care in order to protect me. I grew up remembering that response and wondered if there would ever come a day when I could generate even half the love that that five year old did. Years later when we returned home to our biological parents, the opportunity would present itself to me but it would take years for me to recognize it.

For years my pastor would preach that, aside from salvation, the most valuable thing in life is our family, and that it is within the confinement of our homes that the most love should be

shown. I can recall so many occasions when I show love or kindness to a stranger, like when I give my seat to someone on the bus or when I give my tokens/tickets to a child at an arcade, but none of those moments quite compare to when my affections cause my family to smile. It is their warmth, their support and their joy that drive me to succeed in life and so when troubles prevent them from smiling, I find it most necessary to tell them I love them. Yet there are times when, in the words of Honey Seltzer, a Huffington Post journalist, even the most meaningful 'I love you' fails to provide any comfort and is simply "an expression [that is] as insignificant as 'See you,' or 'Talk to you later'" (Seltzer). I realized that unfortunately when times become so overwhelming and difficult, mere words will not be enough to change the atmosphere of my household from a negative to a positive one.

On one such occasion I was beginning my senior year of high school when someone stole thousands of dollars from my mother and all hope she had of buying a house was stolen from her as well. The family was distraught and we couldn't fathom who would break into our home and specifically steal bits and pieces from that hidden pile of money yet take nothing else. As we pondered the situation the hours were passing too slowly for comfort, but then all of a sudden time stood still to me. The clock stopped ticking the exact second that my father's hand harshly met the side of my mother's left cheek. This slap occurred in an effort from my father to stop his wife from beating their son with an umbrella. My parents both reacted to the information quicker than I could process it, but as the secondhand began to circulate once more I realized that my brother had stolen the money. I have never seen tears form as fast as they did in my mother's eyes that day and as she cried my own eyes began to water up as well. She was extremely upset at my brother but she was more appalled that my father, her husband of many years, would lay a

hand on her in their thieving son's defense. As the tension between family members built up I realized that an uphill battle was upon me.

As parents and caretakers, my folks have always struggled financially and the years we spent in foster care only further hindered their ability to be proud of their parenthood, but this situation created an unbearable impression. My mother was inwardly sick of my brother's face and my father was torn between protecting his son and justifying his actions, but we all agreed that if Corrie ten Boom, a Dutch-Christian who survived a concentration camp, could forgive a Nazi guard and shake his hand forgivingly (Canfield, 4), then we could surely forgive our own flesh and blood. I actually believed that we could grow strong, move on and get over the situation as a family but my brother had not even allowed a month to pass by before he stole money again. They shipped him off the next morning to live with my aunt, the one who takes care of all the troublesome children, and for the very first time I had to wake up to find that my brother and I were separated. I found myself instead waking to the tears of a mother, the cursing of a father and the quietness of what was once a vibrant and joyful home. I too was saddened by the turn of events but out of the four of us only I still managed to smile, and because I was the only bit of light left within the Wong household, I knew it was up to me to make things brighter.

As the youngest member of my family I never saw it as my responsibility to take care of them, only to be taken care of, but I was now entering into a new routine where the love I had for them would empower me to take care of things. I needed guidance and while I could not find help in any secular form, it was in the *Holy Bible* that I finally found encouragement: "Let us not become weary in doing good for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up" (NIV Galatians 6.9). With Anthony gone, I had double the amount of household chores to do after a full school day, law team practice and play rehearsals but I knew doing the right thing

meant pleasing my parents and letting my brother know that someone in our family still loves and forgives him. Philosophers believe that society “regards morality as being concerned primarily with minimizing the...pain...that all human beings can suffer” (Gert) and accordingly I found that the only way to please my parents, do good deeds and express my love was to focus on minimizing my family’s suffering. Sometimes I did what I thought was right and they ignored my efforts or yelled at me for seemingly no reason, but I would simply nod politely, cry in my pillow at night and wake up every morning determined to do everything in my power to prevent my father from cursing and my mother from crying. Though it was and still is a painful task I never grow tired of loving my parents, encouraging my brother to live a meaningful life and trying to make them all proud of me because if my family isn’t strong, I am not strong. If I give up on the hope of a happy household (like they were giving up back then), then there would be nothing to stop my house from feeling empty, no matter how many of us live there.

Anthony eventually returned home and I eventually helped my parents realize that it is important to love the family members we have been blessed with (no matter how they may bruise us) because they are our daily starting point. If we can take the experience of loving our families each morning and use it to love everyone else throughout the day, then no matter how ugly situations may get the world can be a beautiful place. Without the support of those most near and dear to us, we would be living in a world of true darkness, so while I still struggle to keep the peace at home, I must remain persistent. If I want to keep being a light in this world I have to forgive, I have to intentionally do good for others and most of all I have to love them no matter how difficult they make it. I too have made mistakes in this life but my family has loved me anyway and that often makes me wonder, where would I be if my family, foster families, friends and even complete strangers had not shown me an ounce of love? Where would you be?

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