

Devotion

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LIFE

Life is full of twists and turns,
Some hard-aches and pains,
From which we learn.
Sometimes it might be hard and seem unfair,
But the one thing we know is that God is there.

You may not be able to see him,
touch him, or stare,
But the one thing we know is that God is there.
Without a shadow of a doubt, I know this is true,
Because I've had hard times and
He's brought me through!

I always kept the faith and never gave up.
I just kept on moving and didn't get stuck.
So if you still have doubts and just don't believe,
Just say a small prayer and then proceed.

~Mary Harris

WITHOUT JESUS

Without Jesus I don't know
Where I would be.
For when I was lost
He came to me.

I was in the darkness
And out of my mind.
That's when He came and said,
"You're going to be fine."

I had a lot of pain
And I was full of fear,
That's when He said,
"I am here."

The overwhelming peace
I can never explain.
I know now it was Him
Who took all my pain.

~Paula Mitchell

THE CANDY WRAPPER

He wanted to step forward but the girl in the next line would notice him. He reached into his pocket and feeling a candy wrapper, he pulled it out. It read "You're special!" Yes! The girl in the line next to him was very special, maybe the most special girl Jake had ever seen!

He didn't see her face, but her hair was long, curly with big curls, and strawberry blond. Actually, more orange than blond. He had never seen hair like this. Strawberry blond hair... he'd seen a lot, and, orange too. Old women dye their hair blond to hide their gray, and crazy girls color their hair orange. But not her. Hers was the only hair in the world of this color, with this style and, oh, that movement when she took a single step forward.

The girl didn't cross her arms. She held a paper, maybe a check, with both hands. She held it delicately with her fingers. Watching her from behind he could see she was beautiful!

The perfect time to hand her the message would be the moment it was his turn to step to the counter. Thus, she wouldn't see his face, as he hadn't seen hers. He held the wrapper with both hands this time and read it again. What would be her reaction when she read the wrapper? He read it again, and again. He read it eleven times and got confused. He must be kidding himself with this idea of handing her the candy wrapper. How foolish! Who in the world wastes time creating foolish phrases for candy wrappers?

The girl moved her arms. It was different this time; she looked impatient! She lifted a hand to her chin... or to her cheek. Then she finally crossed her arms. The line was taking too long to move! What the heck! That's why nobody likes

to go to the bank after holidays. Was it possible that no one could see there was a wonderful girl waiting in the line? It was the kind of girl who probably had a very busy life and a lot of things to do. She wouldn't have time to wait. She wouldn't even have time to read foolish stuff and wouldn't understand the meaning of a candy wrapper carrying the message "You're special!" Probably, she didn't even have the time to think of how special she was and how perfect her hair was.

Jake knew this kind of girl who would never look at him and never even look at anyone. She knew, yes, that she was special, but she had more important things to do other than to notice how special she was. He knew that; he was not stupid!

And what was this old hag behind him looking at during all this time? Surely she had already seen that he didn't stop for a second to think of the girl from the line next to theirs. Anxiety and nervousness came upon him. He couldn't make a move, but certain determination was pushing his courage to the surface. He took hold of his bravery and decided to take action. He wouldn't give in like this!

The old hag worked at the same school where he finally concluded high school three years ago. She was the cleaning lady. She always watched him from a distance, as everybody does everywhere he goes. He felt she could see all his imperfections. She knew he was a stutterer, and for this reason plus the ugliness, he never got a girlfriend in high school, or elsewhere. He needed to take action, but due to the fear of his own impulsiveness, he didn't trust himself around many people.

He placed the wrapper in the old hag's hand and asked her to hand it to the girl with the nice hair from the other line as soon as he left the bank. He didn't want the girl to see him. If there was a sensible reason for that candy

wrapper phrase, it was that the special girl could be distracted from the routine and boredom of the day for a while, just to know how special she was. He left the bank in a hurry thinking he finally did something brave in life and happy because she would never know the dummy who did that.

In less than one year, Jake and Marina got married. The cleaner read the candy wrapper phrase and told the whole story to the girl, because Marina was special. She was blind and couldn't read. With the help of the old woman she found Jake's house and wanted to know him. And she also wanted to meet his family.

Today, Marina's love is helping Jake see how special he is. And every day Jake realizes, in fact, how special he is... how special Marina is, how special the old hag is, and... how special may be the person who made the phrase for the candy wrapper.

~Ellen C. Valvassori

MY LIFELINE

Lindsey

Nineteen years old
Spunky, smiling, giving
Reminds me of myself when young
Daughter

Samuel

Seventeen years
Athletic, strong, polite
Always makes me laugh when I'm down
My son

Children

Special people
My frustration at times
Different personalities
Lifeline

~Tonia S. Jones

I AM THE MOTHER OF A NINE-MONTH-OLD BOY

I am a mother of a nine-month-old boy.
I wonder if he knows he fills me with joy.
I hear the way he cries, and
I see the way he looks in my eyes.
I want him to know he is my world.

I am a mother of a nine-month-old boy.
I pretend it's just me and him in the world.
I feel so grateful that he is my son.
I touch his cheek with a kiss goodnight, and
I worry until he wakes in the morning light.
I cry because I am filled with joy
To be the mother of a nine-month-old boy.

I understand he is my baby for life.
I say I want to be a good mother and wife.
I dream that he will stay little forever.
I try to teach him to be clever.
I hope he makes it far in this world.
I am a mother of a nine-month-old boy.

~Heather Holscher

MY DARLING DAUGHTER

I loved you before you were born
The bond between a mother and her child
Feeling your presence within me
Growing stronger everyday

Counting down the days
Thankful for every new morning
Bringing you closer to this world
Closer to the love I have for you

My little daughter
So tiny and new to this world
Depending on me to show you the way
Keep you safe and protected

You are my everything
My reason to live each and every day
Watching you grow into a beautiful young lady
Thank you for blessing my life

~Erin Nealey

MOTHER'S BIG BED

It all started years ago. What I can recall of that bed ... it all began when I was a little girl. We didn't have a real nice home to live in, but it was our home. We all had to make the best of it. I was just a little girl. I didn't understand about being poor or not having everything I wanted. We had a television. We had electricity, no running water or indoor plumbing. We had to go outside to an outdoor toilet. We had to carry out water from a well hole back to our house. We had to use that water to drink and for dishes, bathing, and laundry. Some days when it would rain a good spell, Mother would catch water in tubs beside the house. It fell off from the roof. She said that was for her washday, and we'd have enough to wash our hair in it. It made our hair soft and shiny.

There were eleven of us children, two brothers and the rest sisters. My mother's bed was a full size bed. Most of us girls slept with mother in bed. We only had two bedrooms in our house. The boys slept in their own room. The girls all slept in mom's room, and my two sisters slept in another big bed across the room. We had enough room for those beds and a few dressers. I liked sleeping in mother's bed. It was fun at times to sleep in her bed. At first, it was only my smaller sisters and mom and me, but mom was going to have another baby soon in May, so we had to be very careful about kicking in our sleep. If our feet got in her face, she would just move them over away from her. She always made sure we were covered up well at nights. At least, she thought we were, but sooner or later one of us would kick the covers off and we'd get cold again, so mother would try to cover us up. I don't know how she did it with us in her bed, but she put up with us. It was warm in her bed. We had a lot of blankets on the bed. That way if someone kicked off the covers, we'd have a blanket to put on us.

We played on that bed. We jumped up and down on the bed. We used the bed for the safe point when we played tag or hide and seek, or mom would chase us around the bed. She let us jump to see who could jump the highest from the bed. Well, one day she put a stop to it. My sister and I were jumping, and I fell to the floor too hard and bit my tongue. It started bleeding bad. My sisters got really scared about what might happen to us for jumping on the bed.

See, mother and dad went shopping for groceries, and my oldest sister was not supposed to let us do it. Well, we did it anyway. So we didn't get to jump on the bed anymore. I learned my lesson real quick. We still had the fun on that bed. We thought of other things to do on mom's bed. We hid under her bed. We took dad's flashlight and made designs or hand puppets with it till dad came looking for his flashlight, and we'd have to give it up.

Mother's bed was where we always laid if we got sick or to take a nap. If we got into trouble, we'd cry there on her bed. Mother always made sure we were clean before we got into her bed. She'd make sure our feet weren't dirty. She didn't want us to get her clean white sheets or the blankets dirty. Her sheets always smelled so fresh from hanging outside on the line. I could smell them today.

Mother always made sure we said our prayers at the bed at bedtime before we got into bed. I miss those days; those were great memories of my life. I'll always cherish them, and I tell my grandchildren about the bed, how lucky they are to have television, games, VCRs, and DVDs, but especially how lucky they are to have their own rooms and their own beds.

Now when they come to my house, they want to sleep in my big bed. So they do, and just like Mother, I always wake up to make sure they are covered up so they'll stay warm and cozy.

I used to ask my mother how she ever put up with us all in that bed. She'd just laugh and say, "Didn't have much choice!" But she enjoyed having her babies close to her and she knew, someday, we'd all grow up and have our own children and grandchildren, and they'd probably be sleeping with us. That sure is the truth!

~Brenda Carroll

A FAMILY'S LOSS

My grandmother was diagnosed with Alzheimer's in 2006. She slowly started to lose her memory. The medicines the doctors prescribed didn't help her much. She couldn't remember where she put things; she started hitting people and accused them of doing certain things. She was acting like a young kid again.

In 2007, she woke up in the middle of the night screaming and yelling that something hurt. We took her to the hospital, where the doctors informed us that she had a massive heart attack that blew a quarter-sized hole in her heart. The doctors gave us her options. They could do the surgery, and there would be a fifty/fifty chance she could die on the operating table. If she survived the surgery, the Alzheimer's would progress rapidly. She would probably live her remaining days as a vegetable. My grandfather decided not to do the surgery, so we took her home.

She lived her last three days at home, but before she passed away, she remembered where she was and knew all the people who were there to see her.

She passed away on August 20, 2007. My grandfather visits her grave every weekend. He is grieving so badly that he set up a shrine in her honor in their bedroom. I ask myself why God took her from us, but deep down in my heart, I know it was her time to go to heaven. And there are times that I feel her presence.

"Grandma, we love and miss you dearly."
Love,
Your Grandson

~Victor Taylor

MY SPECIAL PERSON, BRITTANY

The person who has influenced and shaped my life is my precious daughter, Brittany. She changed me from a wild and crazy teenager to a loving and responsible mother.

When I was a teenager, I thought I knew it all. School was just another headache. My parents didn't know what they were talking about. I used to think I was right and everyone else was wrong. I lost sight of all the important things. I no longer had the dream of completing high school or even going to college.

At the age of fourteen, my life started its downward spiral. My parents divorced, and they were going through their own emotional turmoil. This event in my teenage years had a negative influence on me. I started drinking and doing things I shouldn't have done. This went on for a few years. I had no sense of direction. At this point, my life was about to take a drastic turn.

I was tired of living that way. So I pulled it together, found a job, and started living a better life. I met a man whom I am still with to this very day. Soon after, we had our daughter, Brittany. She truly changed my life. Things were no longer about me. I never knew one person could love another one so much. From then on I became a mother she could be proud of. Brittany is fifteen years old and a blessing in my life. She shows compassion for others and has a kind and gentle spirit. She has a bright future ahead of her.

Because of Brittany, I stopped thinking of myself all the time. My focus was on someone more important, Brittany. She still influences my life every day. Since she will be graduating from high school in a few years, I think it's only appropriate that I

get my GED. I want to show her that it's never too late to accomplish your dreams.

~Gloria Philhower

LOVABLE

My family is so far away from me, but in many ways they are close to me. My daddy, mommy, brother and sisters love me no matter what mistakes I make, and I love them just as much. They are the best family and the most important people to me.

My father is the best dad anyone could have. He is the smartest human being I know. He gives his life for our family. If there is anything my family needs done, my daddy does it. He builds tables, he makes jewelry, he does everything. He is the "Jack of all Trades"! I like to remember my childhood when my dad told my brother and I good-night stories and at the end he fell asleep. On a lot of mornings at breakfast he starts us out with jokes, funny faces, or stories about his life. He understands everything. **He is just lovable!**

My mother is an angel; she organizes everything. She is so strong; she protects me and my siblings. She takes care of four kids, her husband, and one dog. If I want something or my brother and my sisters want something, my mom makes sure it happens. I enjoy the time with my mom when we go for a walk with our dog or I sit on the couch next to her. She cares about everyone. She is sensitive to everyone's feelings. My mom is a positive person; she teaches me that we can have a good world and life. **She is just lovable!**

Anne is special to me because she is my oldest sister. I'm so happy for her, she has a really nice boyfriend and they are expecting a baby together. I hope she gets married to him, but it's scaring me because she has her own family now. She is very careful because she is afraid to lose one of us. She is different from me, but I know if I have a problem or questions, I can go to her and talk about it. Anne is pretty and elegant. Her feelings are warm. **She is just lovable!**

Julia is my older sister and my best friend. I spend a lot of time with her; she's crazy, a risk taker, and athletic. It's really difficult for me to pick one activity that we enjoy doing together more than another because there are so many, and I enjoy all of it with her. Julia and I talk about boys, go clubbing and hiking. Sometimes we start laughing about something and we can't stop. By the end we don't remember what we were laughing at. She is a really good friend. **She is just lovable!**

Maximilian is my little brother. He is so sweet, funny, creative, clever, friendly, and shy. Not a day passes where he hasn't said something funny. He has a lot of ideas in his brain. If I need help from him, he helps me no matter if it is money or something else I need. Max loves to work on his car and scooter. Every day he has new ideas. I think I have to look after him because he is my little brother. In my heart I know he is a good guy and does the right thing. **He is just lovable!**

I'm grateful for my parents. They enjoy sharing life together and with us. My parents are my heroes, my idols! I'm very proud of my family, and I look up to all of them. I'm the luckiest person in the world because these days it is not usual to receive so much love and happiness from a family.

~Lena Ritter

MY LOVE

The first time that my husband, Rada, and I ever talked with each other was three years ago on the telephone. He had seen me in a video picture at his aunt's in Boston, and he told his aunt that he loved me. His aunt is my cousin's wife. When my aunt heard his feelings, she called Cambodia and told my family the news.

My parents agreed to let me talk with Rada and also to talk to his parents. The first time we talked on the phone it was hard to understand each other because I only knew a few words of English, and he only knew a little Khmer. But he called me every weekend, and we began to understand each other a little more.

One year later, our parents decided to arrange our wedding. Rada and his father would have to travel to Cambodia for the wedding.

January 5, 2007, was the first time my husband and I met face to face. We were both shy and quiet. Luckily, we fell in love with each other. Even if we hadn't, we would have married anyway, since our parents had arranged this wedding for us and had made a lot of preparations. I wouldn't have wanted other people to look down on my family. A day later, Rada gave me a wedding ring to keep until our marriage. I took him to the store to buy clothes for the wedding.

January 10, 2007, was our wedding day. Carrying a bouquet of beautiful flowers, my husband-to-be walked a long way to my home. We both felt happy and nervous. A Cambodian wedding lasts a day and a half. A monk has to come visit us. Our parents must prepare a lot of food, and we must invite all our friends and relatives to the wedding.

Two days after our wedding day, we all went to Battombong Province, which is my father-in-law's homeland. We stayed there two nights and three days. We traveled to several other exciting places together too.

On January 25, 2007, Rada and his father went back to America, but I had to stay in Cambodia and wait until I could legally join him. During this time we emailed each other every day and called every weekend. Eight months later the U.S. Embassy approved me to live with my lovely husband in America.

When I arrived here, I felt so lonely. It was quiet here, not like in my country. Our house didn't have a lot of people living in it like our house in Cambodia. When my husband didn't have to work, he tried to make me feel better by taking me places where he thought I would have fun.

Rada is a good man. He loves me so much. He takes care of me and never makes me angry or sad. He also loves and cares about my parents; he even sends money to Cambodia every month to help support them.

Now I am used to living here. Four months ago, I gave birth to a baby girl. Her name is Boraliyah, which came from my husband and I putting our names together. Our love is stronger than before. We have plans to visit my homeland again when our baby is three years old.

~Bormey Hing

INSEPARABLE LOVE

When I was about twelve years old, I found Maggie-May as a puppy running along the fence row at our farm. Someone had dumped her off and made sure to put her over our fence. When I found her she was covered in mud; it was packed so hard into her fur it looked like that was the color of her coat. My mother even told me to stay away from her because she thought that Maggie-May was a coyote pup, but I picked Maggie-May up and carried her to the house; I asked my mom if we could keep her since we hadn't had a dog in awhile. She allowed me to keep her. I gave Maggie-May a bath to clean off all of the packed-on mud. After she dried off, she was absolutely adorable! Maggie-May was black and white, perfect markings; she looked like a small Akita mix.

Years passed and Maggie-May grew up into a wonderful adult dog. She had a very sweet temperament, very quiet and calm. Maggie-May was just a joy to have around the farm. One summer I came home from school and Maggie-May ran up to greet me. Following behind her was a huge black and brown dog. When they approached me the black and brown dog began growling at me. I began to get a little scared, but I stayed in the same spot. I slowly reached toward the ground and picked up some gravel and I threw it at the dog. I began yelling at it, telling the dog to get away. He wouldn't leave, and he just sat there looking at me. I then ran toward the house and when I got inside I told my mom about the dog. She said that she had seen him too but didn't get too close to him.

A few days later the dog appeared again. This time he just came straight up to me while wagging his tail. He stopped right in front of me and just looked at me. I was puzzled; I had never seen a dog that would just come up to me and just sit there looking at me. I laughed a little and then I told the dog,

“Well, Beast, you’re a strange dog.” I then reached out to pet him. “Beast” as I called him, stayed at our farm for days. He would follow Maggie-May around all day and wouldn’t leave her side. Maggie-May and Beast would groom each other, lounge together in the shade, and even take naps side by side; the pair was inseparable. After a few months had gone by, Maggie-May had eight puppies. All were black and white, solid black, black and brown, or solid brown. When the puppies were weaned and old enough to find new homes, we posted a “Free Puppies” sign. The puppies were all in their new homes within two weeks of the posting. Maggie-May and Beast were still an affectionate pair, walking around the farm together.

A few weeks passed by, and one night my mother and I went to the store. As we were walking out, I saw a picture of Beast on the notice board. Along with the picture it had a note saying, “Lost Dog Comes to the name Sampson. Please call if found.” When we got home my mom called the owners and told them that their dog, Sampson, had been at our house for awhile. They said they were going to come out to get him that night. When they arrived, we all talked for awhile. My mom told them about Sampson's and Maggie-May's puppies. They were shocked that the dogs had produced puppies already. They said they felt bad about the little accident between the dogs. They offered my mom \$100.00, but my mom turned it down. They apologized and then loaded Sampson into their truck and left.

Sampson showed back up at our house about a week later. He was happy to be back with Maggie-May. We called Sampson’s owners and told them that he was at our house again. Within a few hours, they showed up and told my mom that they were taking Sampson to get neutered. They thought that should fix the issue with him running away. Sampson didn’t come around for nearly a month, and we figured that he was gone forever. My whole family liked Sampson after we

got to know him. He was a very intelligent and friendly dog. When someone pulled into our driveway, Sampson would greet the visitor with a loud grumble which sounded like a growl. People were afraid of him since he was so big and seemed to be growling (that explains what he was doing when I first met him). My family began to miss Sampson; so did Maggie-May. She would aimlessly wander around the farm and was very uneasy about things. Maggie-May just wasn't herself without Sampson by her side.

Just when we thought we would never see Sampson again, he showed back up with stitches still intact. Maggie-May and Sampson were once again happy together. My mom waited about a week to call Sampson's owners to let them know that Sampson was back at our house. This time when my mom called Sampson's owners, they said, "We're not coming back out to get him; he obviously is happier at your farm than with us. We are tired of going back and forth when he just keeps running away. We thought that having him neutered would fix the problem but it didn't." So we kept Sampson. Maggie-May and Sampson were glued to each other still. They were in love, and it was so sweet to watch them. Weeks and months went by; still the two were together always. Until one day when Maggie-May mysteriously disappeared.

After Maggie-May went missing, Sampson was crushed. He just lay about, sleeping all day. He was obviously depressed. I wondered how Maggie-May could have left without Sampson noticing or without him following; it just didn't make sense. I was sad that my dog had left, but I was even more upset for Sampson. Sampson did next to nothing for a year. He barely ate and barely walked around the farm. He acted as if he were afraid to move in case Maggie-May showed up and wouldn't be able to find him. I tried to cheer Sampson up. I started taking him for walks down our country road, and I tried to offer him treats and toys. I even talked my mom into allowing Sampson to come into the house. Still Sampson was

like a broken-hearted zombie. After a little over a year of taking Sampson for walks, he started to brighten up. Sampson began acting like the big guy that my family had fallen in love with.

My whole family really did fall in love with Sampson. He was a character! Sampson was a German shepherd and Rottweiler cross, so he was real big and stocky. He liked to jump up to greet us when we got home; he greeted us with his signature grumble. Sampson enjoyed any type of attention – from belly rubs to being saddled up like a horse (one of my friends decided that the saddle would look good on him). Sampson became a member of our family. We loved him, and he loved us. If we were outside and Sampson wanted to go inside, he would come up and lightly grab one of our hands and pull us to the door of the house. He was one of the most intelligent dogs I have ever met.

My grandfather even became greatly attached to Sampson. My grandfather bought a John Deere Gator one year, and every time my grandfather went somewhere in it, Sampson rode shotgun. My grandpa enjoyed driving around with Sampson next to him; they became good buddies. Since my grandpa couldn't walk too well, I think that it was a comfort to have Sampson with him at all times and I think Sampson knew that.

Sampson lived with us for years after Maggie-May disappeared, but I think he still waited for her to come back home, which she never did. Sampson stayed with us until he died in 2006. He lived a long life and was one of the lucky dogs to find true love. Sampson not only found love with Maggie-May, he also found love within my family. We welcomed him into our home and loved him as if he had always been a part of it. Sampson will always be remembered as the best dog we have ever had, and he is still to this day, greatly missed.

In loving memory of Sampson "Sammy."

~Carla Watkins