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They Loved Us

By Janette Blackwell

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Our parents called them "the Bible Club girls," even though Hazel Simonton and Jean Clark had strands of grey sprinkled through their dark hair by the late 1940s. That's how people referred to women, especially single women, back then.

Every Wednesday after school, the Bible Club girls came to our church in the Bitterroot Valley of Montana. The pastor had built a fire in the cast-iron furnace in the back corner of the church, but the building was still bitter cold when we arrived at three-thirty. We perched on the first two rows of cold wooden pews, little kids with rubber boots, winter coats leaking dirty mittens, stocking caps, and, frequently, cold sores and runny noses, which noses, if they were wiped at all, were wiped on the dirty mittens.

Miss Simonton and Miss Clark knew all our names. And remembered them forever. We could meet them in a store in Missoula ten, fifteen years later to be greeted by name and flooded with love.

Because they loved us. Truly did. And we warmed to that love the way little plants do to sunshine.

After the class session was over, Miss Simonton and Miss Clark asked, "Who needs a ride home?"

A forest of hands went up. Mine usually didn't, because Mamma usually sat in the back of the church, ready to take all children from around Willow Creek. But sometimes she couldn't come, and I was one of the children who piled into the Bible Club girls' little car. I sat up front, as I got carsick, and six or seven children crowded into the back, poking and pinching each other. "Who's closest?" Miss Simonton would ask.

"Me," a hand went up. And we were led through mile after mile of icy dirt road with ruts frozen into place, past cold, forlorn farmhouses and barns and bare trees and chilly looking cows and horses with long winter coats, while the snow-covered Rocky Mountain peaks looked down at us in the deepening

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gloom.

"Turn here," a little voice would command from the back seat, as the car jolted and jumped and skidded over the roads. "And here."

Gradually the crowd in back dwindled. Until there were just a little girl and a little boy. A freckle-faced boy with tears streaming down his face. "Why is he crying?"

"Because he's lost," said the little girl solemnly. "He doesn't know where he lives."

"Do you know where he lives?"

"Nope."

"Does anybody in here know where he lives?"

"Nope." (The little boy began to sob deeply and hopelessly.)

"Don't cry, sweetie. We'll find your home."

Not the highlight of the little boy's week or theirs, but eventually, after hours of travel, the little lost boy was home again.

Why did they do it?

Not for money. They came West from New Jersey with just \$40 per month pledged to them. But their idea was never to get, but to give. The things they did, they did for love: the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Which love they poured out on all of us, year after year.

They died in the 1990s in Montana, which had become their true home. Shirley Rasmussen Downing describes Hazel Simonton's death:

"Cathy called me in Arizona and told me that Miss Simonton had just passed away . . . on the hospital heart floor. At 4:00 A.M. she spent ONE HOUR talking with Miss Simonton, as Miss Simonton wanted to tell her about me — the Daily Vacation Bible School years and helping at camp, all the many, many verses I had learned at Bible School, and the Bible drills I had won.

"Then, after her long visit with Cathy, Cathy left for a bit, returned to check on her, and she had died."

How like her to die thinking of one of her children — for we were all her girls and boys.

Her family back East sent a nephew to represent them at the funeral. He arrived at the church early and was seated in a front pew in the almost empty auditorium. He had said he couldn't give a speech, but the pastor didn't know that and called on him. He bravely went to the front of the auditorium and turned around. And gaped to find the church now packed, the balcony filled, and people standing at the

rear.

All the little boys and girls Hazel Simonton and Jean Clark had loved all those years had grown up and had children and grandchildren, and hundreds of them were there that day to show their love and respect.

Because Hazel Simonton and Jean Clark loved us. And we loved them right back.

Janette Blackwell is the author of a Christian mystery novel and a hilarious cookbook, "Steamin' Down the Tracks with Viola Hockenberry," to be found at

How Do I Love Thee?

By Louise Morganti Kaelin

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I was recently having a conversation with a client about relationships and we uncovered an interesting fact: Sometimes, the way we need to show love isn't the way that others need to feel love.

I'm sure there are many books written on this subject, but we came up with a simple way to find out how the other important people in your life get to feel loved. Just pay attention to how they show love to you.

For the most part, we know what makes us feel loved, so we assume that is true for everyone else. When we encounter others we love, we show them our love by what works for us. Most of us don't even think about, let alone talk about it, so it's not surprising that we don't 'get' that there are different ways to show and feel loved. Some examples might be:

- (a) Physical demonstration, lots and lots of hugs
- (b) Small gifts or 'necessities' that say 'I was thinking about you when you weren't in my face'.
- (c) Saying, frequently, 'I love you'.
- (d) Asking pertinent questions about your day, how you're

feeling, what you think about things, etc.

(e) Working their butt off to provide the other person with stability, security, food, shelter.

Here are some ideas to make use of this information:

1. Once you notice how they are showing love to you, and you know how you show love to them, try an experiment. Within a half hour period, show them love in two ways. First, show it your normal way and then within 20 to 30 minutes, show them love the way you notice they show you love. Check out the reaction from each. Which one seemed to be felt deeper? Which one got the biggest smile? Wow! Just think what it would do to your relationship if you always got that

biggest smile!

2. Either share the experiment or tell the others in your life what really makes you feel loved. Unless it's pointed out to us, most of us don't get this 'intuitively'. Why sit around waiting for them to figure it out when you could be feeling loved? After all, you needed someone to point it out to you!

3. If the other person shows their love by working their butt off to make your life better, I think the simplest way to have them feel love is to acknowledge what they do and how much you appreciate it.

4. What makes me feel loved might be different depending on who the person is (a parent vs a spouse, for example)

5. I probably need all the different forms of being shown love at different times, depending on what I'm experiencing at the time. However, there is one that is dominant, that will do the trick most of the time.

6. It is possible to experience the shift of 'knowing' that you are loved to 'feeling' you are loved. And feeling that you are loved may be one of the greatest tonics ever.

(c) Louise Morganti Kaelin. Louise is a Life Success Coach who partners with individuals who are READY (to live their best life), WILLING (to explore all options) and ABLE (to accept total support).

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