

# HOW WE MET

## *A short story sharing the personal testimony of Jeff Borden*

The first time we met I was eight years old. I wasn't aware of then what the future held for our relationship, but was sure that it would be good...it just felt so right. We hung out off and on for the next 6 years or so, most often we'd meet a couple times a week to do something special.

Although the time we spent together was good, it seemed like something was lacking. As is often the case in young relationships, it was my failure to understand that I shared responsibility in our relationship in order to ensure the growth and maturity necessary for its survival. Consequently, in large part due to my selfish needs and unreasonable demands, I fell away from the one who had professed such a deep love for me.

Several years passed, and although I hadn't forgotten my first love, that memory was a faint whisper fogging a corner of my mind. I had matured physically over the years, but had remained a mental and emotional child for the most part. The years of our separation found me exploring the world on the dime of the US Military, but in retrospect the cost to me had been incredibly high in terms of the skepticism and cynicism that had clouded my heart and my mind. I received an honorable discharge from the Navy in 1983 and returned to my childhood home finding the open arms of my family, and not too surprisingly, the open arms of the childhood love I had met thirteen years earlier. I embraced my old love, knowing for sure...in my heart, that we could make it work this time. I felt on all accounts this was the right thing to do, but the years of separation had brought another lover into my life that competed for my affections. I fought the tug-of-war in my heart daily for what went on for months, ignoring the pleas and the wooing of my first love until I could hear them no more. Time continued to pass, as it does...and in my daily grind, I forgot the promises and the purity of the one that had loved me so deeply. I continued to chase my other love although it had become painfully clear there was no real devotion to the relationship from either of us. It seemed both of us had the tendency to be drawn toward desires of the moment and our affections were easily swayed by a "twinkling eye" or the adrenalin laced excitement of a forbidden romance...cheap perfume luring me away from my true affections.

Reality can be very abrupt the way it shakes the dreamer awake and I received a very severe rattle in January of 1986. My mother had become pregnant in the summer of '85, and approximately nine weeks early to her projected due date, had gone into labor. Despite the best efforts of the doctors attending her, they were not able to postpone the birth of my youngest brother. I was notified of the circumstances and gravity of the situation on the morning of January 25<sup>th</sup>, 1986. I joined my family at the hospital only to find that I was unable to enter the room where my baby brother was engaged in a struggle for his very life. Because of his underdeveloped immune system, he had been placed in a sterile environment. Dejected, but understanding, I returned to a common area with other relatives where I was presented a photograph of my youngest sibling. As I gazed at the image, the world around me began to close in...ambient noises of the world around me began to grow strangely silent; this little boy, Jonathan, measuring slightly longer than a Bic© pen was teetering on the cusp of life and death. As my mind reeled in a state of primordial confusion trying to make sense of the fairness of it all, I sensed a presence about me. The presence was familiar, sort of like the way memories are aroused by a smell or a song. Before I had reason to identify the presence, I was awash in recognition. It was the one! Here I was, emotionally ragged and mentally filthy, still reeking from the scent of another lover...yet in my moment of great need, here was my faithful love embracing me as though I had never abandoned our relationship. It was in that waiting room I recommitted myself again to my long-trusted friend and love knowing there were challenges to overcome, hills to climb, and valleys to cross during this reconciliation of our relationship. Days stretched into weeks, and weeks to months as we grew together, climbing the hills, crossing the valleys, and overcoming the challenges to our relationship as my brother too, grew stronger.

I wish I could say this was the happy ending of the story, but alas, I cannot. Old habits are hard to break and as I began to get comfortable in our relationship again, the same old demons of our past started to surface. I was constantly asking for more of my needs to be met, but I wasn't willing to put forth any effort to do anything for my other half. The more that I fed this selfish attitude, the more I felt I was the one that was being wronged and began to feel indifferent toward my love. I started seeking out my old haunts in order to get "my needs" met, and not too surprisingly, I was quick to pick up right where I had left off before. It was no time before the

cacophony of instant gratification had drowned out the quiet sobbing of my faithful love to the point where I was no longer troubled by the guilt of giving up again so easily.

Our separation this time was a little different; I felt as if I had matured to the point where we could still be friends. In a figurative way, I kept a photo of my old love in my wallet often speaking fondly to family and friends about our relationship. In many ways it was as if I weren't talking of a failed relationship, but more in terms of an old friend that had moved away or perhaps even passed away. Months passed; slowly turning into years and as I began to survey what legacy I would leave for my life, I was able to take stock of lessons learned and wisdom gleaned from my mistakes. I started to understand the folly of serving my own needs and began to be haunted by a recurring dream. The dream would always take the form of me, in some fashion or another, chasing what was perceived as happiness...it could take the form of the perfect job, the perfect car, my ultimate dream home, winning the lottery or any other of a thousand and one "perfect" scenarios. The problem with the dream was that I always woke up...only to realize I was still in pursuit of myself...doomed to the same fate as the mongrel mutt that unceasingly chases his tail in a state of absolute and utter frustration without ever gaining the cognizant knowledge of realizing the futility of my chase. This remorseful state of existence continued for a several years until I found myself once again being chased by the one I now referred to as my "old friend."

I was invited to a concert one evening at the bequest of this friend and somewhat begrudgingly decided to go. I wasn't aware of it at the time, but my friend had arranged a meeting of sorts with their Father and another close friend. We arrived at the concert, and interestingly enough, happened to be a celebration held in honor of my friend. As the celebration reached a crescendo, something very odd happened...I recognized the voice of my friend's Father. The voice took center stage and I couldn't hear the music anymore; the other persons at the concert seemed distant and out of focus. My "eyes" began to focus on an image that was clarifying in my mind, and a voice I recognized as the Father's began to speak saying to me, "Son, I know you and I've known you since before you were born. It was I that created you and formed you in the womb of your mother. I did not form you without purpose, but to fulfill a role specifically designed for you." At this point the mental image became clear and I saw a curtain opening; behind it was a

sea of faces...some I knew and many I did not. The Father said, "It's not all about you, Son...you weren't created for your own enjoyment." It became painfully clear to me at that point. All the persons that I had encountered since leaving college and persons I had yet to encounter were behind the curtain; people that I should have influenced in a positive way. The testimony and legacy of my life had been one of self-worship and gratification. The only fruit I had borne were thistles and thorns...and those only on my best days. The agony of my heart breaking at that moment exceeded any pain I have ever felt physically or emotionally in my entire life. My mind began to swirl at the moments and memories of the previous years...the example and lack of leadership I had shown my sons, the loneliness I created for my wife, persons that should have heard and seen the message of Love in my life and on and on and on...I began to weep without control. During that "cry of cleansing", I made a commitment; I committed to the Father, my God, that I would "crucify" me then and there. I would only be resurrected on His authority. I would die to self so I could truly say "I have been crucified with Christ and it is no longer I that live, but Christ that lives in me." I would be the husband and father the Bible instructs me to be. I would bear fruit for Him as I was created to do. I would worship Him and develop a relationship with Him as He has designed for us all.

It is probably clear by now, who this love of my life is. If it is not, I'll say it out loud... it is and always has been, JESUS. He never left me and His faithful promise is that He never will; it was always me that turned away. Although my track record is blighted and riddled with pock marks, in His eyes I am as clean as clean can be. I'm covered you see, by His love. I understand now what I could never get right for all those past years...it's not about me. Christ doesn't live to serve my needs, I live to serve Him and His creation...This wonderful epiphany has set me free...free from chasing myself, free from chasing the trappings of this life and most importantly free from the bondage of sin and death. If you are not free, you can be...you see, The Truth, Jesus, is chasing you as well. Turn around, open your arms, embrace Him and let Him catch you too.

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