

It's the Little Things



ANDREA JOHNSON/Editor

I was sitting in choir practice, a youth pastor's wife in a fairly large church. A friend was telling me the story of one of the other choir

members. She had met her husband, a dynamic Christian, at Bible college. They had fallen in love, gotten married, and had children. Then he backslid into an immoral lifestyle, which led to a divorce. *How horrible*, I thought, to marry someone you thought was a Christian and then have them walk away from their faith – and you. But then it happened to me.

Trying to parent on the best of days can be trying and tiring. Parenting when you are in an emotional, mental, and financial tailspin can be even more challenging. I worried how the trauma would affect my kids. And I truly thought their memories of me would be the words, "Hurry up, we're going to be late!"

I felt guilty a lot. Guilty for rushing them so often, guilty for falling asleep reading to them, guilty for being impatient, guilty I couldn't provide what they needed – but mostly, guilty I couldn't keep our family together.

Our church did everything right. They counseled us, invited us for meals, befriended my children, helped out financially, and listened – for hours on end. Often it's the "little" things people do that stick with you.

I had met Mark Beery, a sports writer, at our church singles group. The singles group was always awkward for me. Most of the group had never been married. Some were widowed. Understandably, not all events were convenient for those with kids, and I couldn't afford babysitters.

Mark and I didn't have much in common, as

evidenced by our food choices. He once joked that we could actually be shopping in the same grocery store at the same time and never run into each other. I didn't know him well yet when a group of us went out for ice cream after a ball game. Philip, my son, wanted to spend more than I felt I could afford. He was young and didn't understand. Everyone else was getting "big" treats. So my son threw a mini fit and sat at a table by himself, letting everyone know how "mean" I was. Not knowing what else to do, I let him stay there. Mark quickly surveyed the situation, and, instead of sitting by the "eligible" girls in the group, calmly took a seat across from my son. They talked a bit and Phil was quickly back to himself, chatting away.

Assuming Mark would judge me for my parenting skills, I asked him about their talk. He said, "Oh, after he told me what was wrong, I said, 'Well... the way I see it, your mom is trying to be both a mom and a dad. You know, she does have it kind of rough, so, you might want to cut her some slack sometimes.'"

No criticism – either on my parenting skills or my son's behavior. Just a casual "man-to-man" talk from an "uncle." Often, when Phil got in moods such as this, I would let him call one of my brothers. The long-distance rates were worth the attitude change. Usually the guys didn't talk "about" anything "important." But the "talking" was important.

Today Phil is grown and works with youth at our local YMCA, investing in the lives of other kids. Sadly, due to an undetected heart defect, Mark is no longer with us. His legacy, however, lives on.

Andrea

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