

# A Baby's Hug

We have entered the new year, the second day of 2009. Before we get too far removed from Christmas 2008, however, you should read the following story. It was supplied to me by Marilyn Farran, R.N., Citrus Region director of clinical services. Its origin is unclear – one source indicating that its author is unknown. While we cannot vouch for its authenticity, its lesson is obvious – particularly for those of us in Life Care, Century Park and Life Care at Home who are in the people business.

*We were the only family with children in the restaurant. I sat Erik in a high chair and noticed everyone was quietly sitting and talking. Suddenly, Erik squealed with glee and said, "Hi." He pounded his fat baby hands on the high chair tray. His eyes were crinkled in laughter and his mouth was bared in a toothless grin as he wiggled and giggled with merriment. I looked around and saw the source of his attention. It was a man whose pants were baggy with a zipper at half-mast, and his toes poked out of would-be shoes. His shirt was dirty and his hair was uncombed and unwashed. His whiskers were too short to be called a beard, and his nose was so varicose it looked like a road map. We were too far from him to smell, but I was sure he smelled. His hands waved and flapped on loose wrists. "Hi there, baby; hi there, big boy. I see ya, Buster," the man said to Erik.*

*My husband and I exchanged looks. What do we do? Erik continued to laugh and answer, "Hi."*

*Everyone in the restaurant noticed and looked at us and then at the man. The old geezer was creating a nuisance with my beautiful baby. Our meal came, and the man began shouting from across the room, "Do ya patty-cake? Do you know peek-a-boo? Hey, look! He knows peek-a-boo."*

*Nobody thought the old man was cute. He was obviously drunk. My husband and I were embarrassed. We ate in silence; all except for Erik, who was running through his repertoire for the admiring skid-row bum who, in turn, reciprocated with his cute comments.*

*We finally got through the meal and headed for the door. My husband went to pay the check and told me to meet him in the parking lot. The old man sat poised between me and the door. "Lord, just let me out of here before he speaks to me or Erik," I prayed.*

*As I drew closer to the man, I turned my back, trying to sidestep him and avoid any air he might be breathing. As I did, Erik leaned over my arm, reaching with both arms in a baby's "pick-me-up" position. Before I could stop him, Erik had propelled himself from my arms to the man.*

(more)

*Suddenly, a very old, smelly man and a very young baby shared their love and kinship. Erik, in an act of total trust, love and submission, laid his tiny head upon the man's ragged shoulder. The man's eyes closed, and I saw tears hover beneath his lashes. His aged hands, full of grime, pain and hard labor, cradled my baby's bottom and stroked his back. No two beings have ever loved so deeply for so short a time.*

*I stood awestruck. The old man rocked and cradled Erik in his arms, and his eyes opened and set squarely on mine. He said in a firm, commanding voice, "You take care of this baby." Somehow I managed an "I will" from a throat that contained a stone. He pried Erik from his chest, lovingly and longingly as though he were in pain. I received my baby, and the man said, "God bless you, Ma'am. You've given me my Christmas gift." I said nothing more than a muttered thanks. With Erik in my arms, I ran for the car. My husband was wondering why I was crying and holding Erik so tightly, and why I was saying, "My God, forgive me."*

*I had just witnessed Christ's love shown through the innocence of a tiny child who saw no sin, who made no judgment; a child who saw a soul, and a mother who saw a suit of clothes. I was a Christian who was blind, holding a child who was not. I felt it was God asking, "Are you willing to share your son for a moment?" when He shared His for all eternity. How did God feel when He put His baby in our arms 2,000 years ago? The ragged old man, unwittingly, had reminded me, "To enter the Kingdom of God, we must become as little children."*

What a remarkable story! Sometimes, it takes a child to remind us of what is really important. We should remember who we are, where we came from and, most importantly, how we feel about others. The clothes on your back or the car that you drive or the house that you live in do not define you; it is how you treat your fellow man that identifies you. I am glad to work for a company with associates who understand and practice this truth.

– Beecher Hunter