

A Child Called 'It'

Jack Canfield, in his book *A 4th Course of Chicken Soup for the Soul*, tells the story of Dave Pelzer, who knew how to keep a promise.

His mother was an alcoholic. Not only did her condition cause her to neglect her children, she also became cruel and abusive while drunk. She beat and burned Pelzer, and forced him to live in their cold, dark, dirty garage. She treated him like a slave and only fed him when he could perform his endless list of chores to her satisfaction.

That didn't happen often. It was a rare day when Pelzer came to school clean or dressed in adequate clothing. And when his second-grade teacher tried to intervene on Pelzer's behalf, his mother chose to punish him by changing his name to "it." She never called him anything but "it," and she forbade the other children from calling him by any other name.



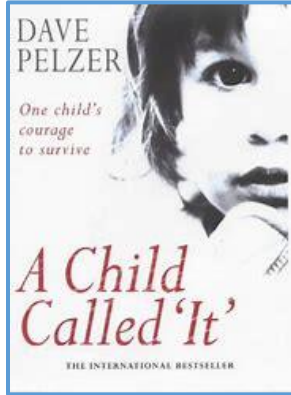
The only thing that kept Pelzer from total and complete despair was the kindness of his teachers. They treated him with respect and caring. Compliments from them were like food for his soul. At night, as he sat in that cold, dark garage, he pictured the faces of his teachers. This mental imagery gave him his only measure of comfort. In fact, he believed it was the only thing keeping him alive.

Pelzer remembers the day of his rescue with total clarity. On March 5, 1973, he was in the fifth grade. A few courageous teachers, the principal and the school nurse convinced Child Protective Services to step in and remove Pelzer from his home. That day, as the authorities came to take him to his new life, the whole staff of the school lined up to give him a hug.

As each person held him, he tried desperately to imprint the moment in his memory forever. He had never known love like that before, and he didn't know if he ever would again. Before he left, this little fifth-grader made two solemn promises to his caring teachers: One, that he would never forget them and their kindness to him. And two, he would do everything in his power to make them proud of him.

Twenty years later, Pelzer stood before his old teachers at Thomas Edison Elementary School to thank them for what they did, and to give them something special. It was a book – Pelzer's own book entitled *A Child Called "It."*

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Today, Pelzer is an author and motivational speaker. In 1994, he was honored with the Outstanding Young Person of the World Award, sponsored by Junior Chamber International, and he was chosen to carry the torch in one stretch of the 1996 Olympic Torch Relay.

His story offers two important lessons: (1) the value of a promise made and a promise kept, and (2) the power of kindness to change a life.

Love is patient and kind (1 Corinthians 13:4 ESV).

– Beecher Hunter