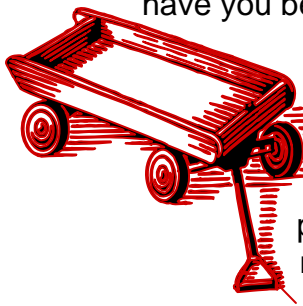


Empty Bottles for Mom

When Everett Alvarez Jr. was given only 30 seconds to prepare a five-minute speech, he quickly thought back through his life. He recalled a time when he searched through his neighbors' trash for empty soda pop bottles to turn in at the corner grocery store for a penny each.

All day, he carried bottles to the store in his red wagon until he had a small mountain of coins – just enough to buy a card and a candy bar. They were surprise birthday presents for his mother. When he returned home, his mother demanded, “Where have you been? I’ve been searching everywhere for you!”



As his mother continued her questioning, Ev blubbered through his tears, “I was collecting bottles to get you these.” He handed her the unsigned card and the candy bar that had nearly snapped in two in his pocket. His mother then began to cry as she proudly placed the gifts on a window ledge so all the neighbors might see.

Ev’s speech spoke to the hearts of his audience – a group of fellow prisoners of war who had spent time at the infamous Hanoi Hilton prison camp in North Vietnam. For many of the men, it was the heritage of sacrificial family love that was their “suit of armor” – the “why” that enabled them to survive years of nightmarish torture.

Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8).

– Beecher Hunter