

I'll never forget what his mother told me as he was getting ready to go off to college. Tommy and I had been friends for many years; I remembered him from long ago when he showed me to my class at Vacation Bible School. He was a year or two younger than me, but the age difference never got in our way.

I was a senior in college, though, when he began as a freshman. I had gone through the summers to get finished more quickly, though I'm not sure why I was in such a rush. We decided to room together, and that meant I had to stay on the freshman floor. This was the lowest floor of the high-rise dormitory, but it turned out to be a lot of fun. We had a lot of great adventures there, most of which would never be repeated to his mother, who in all seriousness had said, "Now don't teach him any of your tricks."

I don't know what she thought of me, but it didn't sound good. I naturally said that I would try to take care of him, but I know that there wasn't a great deal of confidence in her mind about it.

Tommy was an outstanding singer, and was a member of the A Cappella Chorus. I loved to sing, but was never in that kind of league. Nevertheless, we would sing together many times as we rode the hour or so it took to get to school. We usually sang hymns, and we would ad lib as the spirit moved us. Especially on songs like "Were you there", and "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot." There was something special about expressing ourselves through the music.

The year after I graduated, I became very interested in learning more about the world (ironic, isn't it), and began to keep a journal. I wrote in it faithfully every day, making sure that I filled a page. It's been thirty years now, and I decided to read it again to see how much I had changed. I knew that the thirty years had matured me, and given me a much different perspective on the value of things than what I had as a young man.

In the first few pages, I found a very interesting note. I had gone back to the school to make a technical presentation for my advisor, and Tommy had asked me if I could give him a ride home. We sang to pass the time, as we had done so many times before. And that night I had written the following in my journal:

"Took Tommy home, we sang most of the way. A very peculiar thing happened, though. On one of the songs Tommy started crying. I don't know what it was that triggered it."

I guess I thought that there was something wrong. But now I know that there can be a tremendous upwelling of emotion when we allow ourselves to fully experience something Good. In the past thirty years, I have felt it many times and am not ashamed of it. I think that many people work very hard to suppress it, like they might a sneeze. But God wants us to feel the power of our lives and relationships, and most especially in our relationship with Him.

I don't think I taught Tommy any of my tricks at school, but if I did then he taught me a much better one. He has been kind enough to let me sing with him from time to time, at funerals and such, but now I am in a much better position to appreciate what he knew a long time ago: you must be free to express your deepest emotions. You just can't keep it all inside your heart.

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