

CHAPTER TWO



**PUT YOUR
HEART ON**

The Power of Love

by Saydi Eyre Shumway



Saydi Eyre Shumway grew up in London and Salt Lake City as the fourth of the nine children of best-selling parenting authors, Richard and Linda Eyre. She went east for college and grad school (Wellesley College and Columbia University), and met her husband Jeff while working in DC. They've lived in the Boston area ever since. After earning an MS in social work, Saydi worked with disadvantaged expectant mothers for many years.

While she fondly remembers extensive travel and adventures across Africa and Asia during her growing up and single years, Saydi's latest big adventures have included a trip to Target with four peevish children to see what kind of diapers are on sale. Saydi loves running (especially when it doesn't involve running after her kids) and is also a professional photographer in her precious spare time. She blogs at bostonshumways.blogspot.com.

I am constantly *doing* for my family. Mostly I'm doing things out of love, but I doubt my children always feel loved as I frantically move them through our daily routines. It's homework, dinner, chores, potty, hands, teeth, pajamas, book, prayer, song and bed. I breathe a big sigh of relief once I finally get those bedroom doors closed without further protests.

Then eventually, after I finish cleaning the kitchen, folding laundry and paying bills, I sneak into their dark rooms to cover them up. There they lie, angelic and heavy with sleep. In those quiet moments, without the busyness of life cluttering things up, I always feel that powerful mother-love well up inside me.

I remember the funny things they said and did during the day that I was too distracted to stop and savor. I think of the promises I made but never kept. That book I never read or that new Lego creation I never looked at. As I watch them sleep and reflect on the day behind us, I get a little glimpse of their world, how hard it is to navigate and how much they need the security of my love wrapped around them.

I stand by their beds and squeeze their little hands or stroke their foreheads or press a kiss hard on their cheeks in an attempt to stamp their little beings with all the love I was too preoccupied to dish out during the day.

I can empathize with this mom's story:

My four-year-old daughter and I have a little ritual we do together when I really need her to listen to me. We call it "putting your ears on." Before I tell her my important information, I ask her to put her listening ears on, and she pretends to grab imaginary ears and put them on. It works wonders! But, as motherhood often goes, this little trick of mine sort of backfired one day when I was reminded how wonderfully clever our children can be.

This same four-year-old was howling in the backseat of our minivan. Although she had just eaten her ice cream cone, she wanted her little brother to give her some of his. I tried reasoning with her, but I guess I wasn't being particularly empathetic. Finally she said in her most serious tone, "Mom! I think you just need to put your heart on!"

- Danielle Monson

Love is the most powerful force we have as mothers, yet how often do we move through our days without putting our hearts on—forgetting to feel and express the love that really is at the core of all we do?

Love and Affection is Every Child's Most Basic Need

After graduating from high school, my courageous and crazy parents packed us up—me and my six siblings who were still living at home—and we flew to Romania to volunteer for one month in an orphanage. Following the reign of Ceaușescu, who banned birth control in hopes of building a bigger and stronger empire, Romania exploded with children. Mothers who were unable to care for their children were forced to hand them over to institutions with the hope that they would at least get fed. The children did get fed, but because the institutions were so overcrowded and understaffed, they were not held or nurtured.

When we arrived at our little orphanage, we spent the entire day trying to satisfy one desire. The children wanted to be lifted up and held. They screeched, “Sus! Sus!” (Romanian for “Up! Up!”) over and over as they ran up to us. We would pick them up, one by one, squeeze them tight for a second, then put them down, and they’d scramble to the end of the line where they would wait patiently for their turn to be lifted up again.

They were desperate to be held and touched and loved—even for a second. Touch was something most of them had lived their entire lives without—something they were starving for. Many of them had not been born with any physical or mental problems, but they were suffering from developmental and physical delays simply due to a lack of individual attention and love.

Love is critical to child development. Study after study links proper brain function and development to touch, love and affection. Children adopted from institutions where they have had adequate attention and affection, but severely inadequate physical nourishment and medical attention, often recover quickly with a few months of infant formula and the care of a good pediatrician. In contrast, infants who have spent significant time in institutions where they have been emotionally neglected, but physically cared for, can take years, if not a lifetime, to recover from the trauma.

In the 1920s, New York pediatrician, Dr. Henry Chapin, reported an alarming death rate in children under two who were placed in institutions across the United States that provided adequate food and shelter, but no emotional nurturing. Dr. Chapin concluded that children need to be held, carried and caressed in order to not only develop properly, but to survive.

Neurologists have found that love and affection fosters brain development by releasing hormones essential to building proper neurological connections.

In his book, *Biology of Love*, neurologist Dr. Arthur Janov states, "Hugs and kisses during critical periods [of child development] make neurons grow and connect properly with other neurons." Essentially he says that you can “kiss [a child's brain] into maturity." Love can affect brain development and behavior right up through the teenage years.

Children and teens who lack proper touch, love and affection show significantly decreased attention span, decreased self esteem, problems with addiction and an impaired ability to relate to others and navigate loving relationships into adulthood.

All these studies, statistics and thoughts about love and its immense power knock around in my head as I think about my job as a mom. I feel the weight of my children's need to feel love. Not just any love, but *my* love. How well am I loving my children? How can I more deliberately put to use the powerful force of my unconditional "mother love"? The kind of love that will give them strong brains and emotional intelligence, and help them feel secure and happy. Love that will enable them to go into the wide world and wield their own powerful love for good.

Recognize the Love that Motivates Your Mothering

With four small children it's easy for me to focus on getting things done rather than on loving. Love is not "productive." I can't check "loving" off my to-do list. Because love is process-driven and impossible to measure, loving doesn't even make it onto my list.

At its core, mothering is motivated by love. By recognizing love as the explicit motivator behind what we do, everyday, mundane tasks suddenly become meaningful. There are whole seasons of my life as a mom where I've forgotten this and have lived as if motherhood were about getting laundry done, or putting healthy meals on the table, or having a clean house, or making sure the kids are in the right schools. Sure, all these things are important, but only if they are rooted in love, and only if my family feels loved as I do them.

This year, after our traditional Christmas Eve dinner, I was pregnant and exhausted and frustrated by the seemingly impossible tasks that all need to happen at once on that 'magical' night. My sciatic nerve was shooting pains down my leg and more than anything, I wanted to just sit down and enjoy the tree and the fire.

As I went around slamming things into place, putting toys together, wrapping the last lingering presents, cleaning up and prepping for breakfast the next morning, it hit me that my attitude was preventing me from feeling the love that actually motivated the work I was doing. I was feeling resentment rather than love towards my family as I made my way through my work.

I realized that, for weeks, I had been resenting my children because they were in the way of all the things I had to do to pull Christmas off. I needed to flip my thought process and recognize that my love for my children and family was in fact the reason for all these tasks.

This was a big epiphany for me. My never-ending lists of things to get done won't go away until my kids are long gone. But if I can go about these tasks recognizing the love

that motivates them, the spaces that were filled with bitterness and resentment can instead fill up with a powerful and compelling love.

Love Changes You

The magic of this realization is that when we perform our mothering duties with love, rather than resentment, the power of that love changes, shapes, and molds us—as much as it changes, shapes, and molds our children.

One mother relates her experience of how love can alter us and enable us to cope with difficult situations.

My two-year-old son is just like all other children. He gets frustrated. He gets mad. He gets angry. He gets sad. He gets fed up. He gets tired.

When I feel myself running out of patience with him, and I don't know any other way to help him, I take him in my arms, hug him as tight as I can, and tell him I love him.

Hugging him and telling him I love him doesn't usually make much of a difference in him. It does not stop the tantrum. It does not end the frustration. It does not make everything all right.

Hugging him and telling him I love him makes a difference in me. It renews my patience. It makes me thankful for the moment and thankful for my son, tantrums and all.

- Jenni Ellis

Since becoming a mother I have been surprised by how profoundly my mother love has changed me. Surrendering to all that is involved in motherhood, even the mundane parts, and learning to daily acknowledge the love that is at the core of it all, has given me strength to do things I didn't think I could do. It has drawn out parts of my soul I didn't know existed. It has transformed the way I look at the world, deepened my empathy for others and refined my sensitivities. It has altered the way I experience life.

Loving Takes Effort and Planning

In his book, *The Road Less Traveled*, M. Scott Peck sheds light on what love is, what love isn't, and how we can use real love to powerfully alter our lives and relationships. He says, "Love is not a feeling. Love is an action, an activity. . . . Genuine love implies commitment and the exercise of wisdom. . . . Love is the will to extend oneself for the purpose of nurturing one's own or another's spiritual growth." These words ring true to me—real love takes effort, planning, wisdom, and commitment.

I confess, I dish out a lot more planning, effort, wisdom, and commitment to getting my kids fed and clothed than I do to getting my kids loved. In order to love our children well, we need to take time to sit down and think. We need to have a plan. What do we need to do more of? Less of? How can we ensure that “loving” is a daily “must-do” in our lives?

Learn Each Child’s Love Language

Each child is different. Each needs to be loved in vastly different ways, and it takes effort and wisdom to figure out how to do that. I love this experience related by one mom.

In the book, “The Five Love Languages,” author Gary Chapman suggests that we all need to be shown love in a way we recognize and that suits our individual needs. This is ever so true for children; they need love expressed to them in ways they understand. Chapman’s “love languages” include physical touch, words of affirmation, acts of service, quality time, and gifts.

My daughter and I went through a time when love just wasn’t being communicated correctly on my end. She was three years old, and whenever I would try and teach her to behave, she would respond through tears of, “You don’t like me mommy!” or “You are so mean!” Some days I’d think to myself, “Surely I have the skills to get along with a toddler!”

Our turning point came when I decided to devote part of my day to losing myself in play with her. I remember mustering up all of my enthusiasm so she felt like I was having the time of my life as we played endlessly with her dollhouse. It’s hard for me to admit that playing with my children takes such a conscious choice (some of you moms are naturally so good at this). That day playing with my daughter was me, choosing to love.

As the day came to a close and my husband came home from work, my daughter went racing out of her room to enthusiastically say to her daddy, “Mommy and I are playing dolls!” He expressed his delight in her happy news, and then she said, “Yes, when I was little I didn’t love my mommy, but now I love her so much!”

I was stung.

What did she mean she didn’t love me? That is quite possibly the worst thing a mother can hear! Yet suddenly, I understood what my daughter was trying to say. She was telling her dad that I had just done something that made her feel loved. I was instantly so grateful I had learned that valuable lesson and had recognized a tool with which to love my child even better.

- Danielle Monson

As mothers, we need to learn to speak the love languages that our children speak. This is not an easy task. It requires real analysis, thoughtful discussions with our parenting partners, meditation, trial and error, and sometimes doing things for and with our children that we don't particularly enjoy. It's up to us to be the "love" experts and to 'speak' love to our kids in a way that will sink right down to their core.

Make Loving Our Families Part of Our Routine

We must build love into our lives. In her book, *I Love You Rituals*, Becky A. Baily makes a compelling argument that building a relationship in which your children feel loved above all else is key to raising smart, adjusted, and happy children. She suggests that one way to make sure your children feel loved is to build "Love Rituals" into your daily routines. Love Rituals are things you do deliberately and routinely that help your children feel your love. They are motivated only by the desire to connect and be with your children. I love the idea of building slices of time into your days and weeks where really loving your child is the only thing you're trying to accomplish—nothing else. Essentially, it puts "loving" on your to do list.

For me, the only way love rituals have really stuck is if I plan them to coincide with other already-scheduled parts of my life, if they are genuine, and if they fit my personality as well as my children's needs. A foot massage for Hazel after her Sunday morning bath, a lunch date after a yearly physical for each child, a silly tickle with Charlie at bedtime, greeting Emmeline's little toes with a kiss each morning as I take off her footy sleepers. Love rituals can be serious or silly, active and crazy, or soft and cuddly. But since touch is so important to children feeling secure, love rituals should often involve touch.

The beauty of love rituals is that they can be simple and take little time. To this day, when it's time to say goodbye to my dad after a visit, he looks deep into my eyes for a full five seconds—like he's looking right into my soul. He's done this since I was a teenager. It is his way of acknowledging that he sees, cares, and knows who I really am. Although it is a little strange, it makes me feel his love. It only takes five seconds.

Other love rituals might take a little more time, but they can be attached to things you're already doing. Let love creep into the spaces that are often filled with busyness and distraction. A friend told me that one of her best memories of her childhood was the 15 minutes after she got home from school each day. Her mom gave her and her siblings their after school snacks and just sat with them while they ate. No agenda, homework, cooking, or cleaning. It was just an available mom and something yummy to eat. I'm sure there were times that this didn't actually happen—times when babies were crying and times when my friend didn't really want to sit and be with her mom. But I love that she doesn't think about those times. What she remembers is the feeling that sunk into her through this routine expression of love.

As this mom expresses below, I have found that a good bedtime love ritual is key to my children feeling loved, rather than begrudged, as I struggle to put them to bed.

I have heard many parents speak fondly of bedtime; sadly, none of those parents were me. Bedtime at our house was filled with frantic, last-minute requests for water and snacks, songs and stories, and pretty much anything that kept them out of their beds for a few more minutes. I found I liked my children the least at the end of the day.

One evening, I was struck with inspiration. I told my girls that as soon as they climbed into their beds, I would tell them a secret. Giggling, they dove under their covers. I leaned over one little girl and spoke softly in her ear. I told her what I noticed that she had done well that day. The look on her face was thoughtful. Then I hugged her and told her I loved her and how grateful I was that she was part of our family. I did the same with her sister in the other bed. Not only did this quiet them down and get them in bed, but I could see they felt loved and valued. This meant much more than the usual, "I love you. Goodnight." They knew I loved them, and they knew one reason why.

- Shawnie Sutorius

I love the way this mother recognizes and describes the magical role that love rituals play in her family:

I come from four generations of women who are mild mannered and easygoing. I am navigating new territory as the mother of three spirited boys who never cease to surprise me with their competitive natures and strong wills. They learn and grow through passionate bursts of energy. While my boys wield foam swords in imaginative play, I dream of procuring a magic wand which will transform our emotionally charged interactions into bonding moments and bridge our differences in temperament. I've yearned for a fairy godmother to say magic words to restore the peace.

Fortunately, I have found magic without the appearance of a wand. It comes when I engage my children with simple expressions of love—special traditions for expressing our love that create peace and harmony in our relationships.

Often, these rituals surface spontaneously. On countless occasions when my son Clayton sees I am weary or frazzled, he will catch my eye, point from his eyes to mine and sign "I love you" with three fingers up and two bent down. My grumpiness fades as my heart melts. Other times, I have signaled in the same way to a son through a window, across a crowded playground, while he waits to perform in a recital, or while he runs the bases in a ball game. This simple gesture, uniquely ours, strengthens our bond and communicates love.

Other rituals are sprinkled into our daily routines. Before we part each morning, we huddle together and each child clamors for his turn in the “mush pot.” Each is squeezed in a tight hug and emerges amidst “I love yous” knowing they are a special component of our family.

The best opportunities to build love into our relationships come when I tune into individual needs in the moment and provide personalized attention. Making a favorite snack, leaving a love note on a bed, recognizing a small accomplishment, discussing the details of a cloudy sky together, and spending special time doing an activity of my child’s choice are all meaningful expressions of my love.

Someday my children will no longer request a lullaby or rush to be in the “mush pot.” However, while our traditions of expressing love might evolve as we grow, their power to bridge our differences and strengthen our bond will not change.

- Laurie Brooks

Because the whole family—not just individual relationships with mom and dad—can provide children with a powerful source of security and unconditional love, love rituals can be designed to include everyone in the family. Family traditions around birthdays and holidays help children feel a sense of pride and belonging and can cast a powerful net of love over children that will help them navigate their world.

Love rituals can come in all kinds of shapes and sizes. We need to find the ones that will speak to us and to our children. In my experience, this means trying on a bunch of different love rituals. Some have felt pretty cheesy and unauthentic. My kids have even laughed at some of the things I’ve tried and can tell that they don’t exactly come from my heart. When we land on one that feels right, I try to embrace it and work hard to make it happen regularly. It takes extra effort, but I’m convinced it is through these rituals that love gets written into our relationships, and I can’t think of anything I could possibly put on my to-do list that would be more important.

When the Going Gets Tough, Love Harder

My oldest daughter is *different* from me in hard ways and *similar* to me in hard ways. At times our relationship gets tangled into knots and because we’re both so darn hard headed, it’s tough for either of us to untangle—to see our way back to neutral, loving ground.

A few summers ago, I was at the end of my rope. I was venting to a friend about how lost I felt and how worried I was that I was destroying my daughter and our relationship by my inability to react the right way. She said something I hope I never forget. She told me there had been many times when she had felt at her wits end with one of her children, and her answer was always to just love them more. Instead of strategizing about ways to

help them behave, implementing new discipline techniques, or finding new ways to react to tense situations, she focused solely on dishing them out an extra large serving of love. She told me this strategy has never failed.

Since then I've tried it. And I have to say that although it's a simple strategy, it can be extremely hard to implement. I've found when I'm entrenched in a difficult mothering situation, it takes great humility and effort to show forth that extra bit of love. But when I can do it, even if it feels a bit contrived at first, it works like magic. It changes us both. I begin to fill up with real, genuine love, which drastically changes the way I view my children and helps me see clearly what they really need. And as my love miraculously softens them, melting away tension, we build solid ground that makes the rough times ahead easier to navigate.

I recently read about Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT), a type of therapy that has been used to help parents who have been abusive towards their children. The first step in the therapeutic process is for parents to spend five minutes each day in "child-directed" interaction with their children. During these five minutes, parents are to do nothing but be with their children on their children's terms. Because it can be surprisingly difficult to interact with your children on their terms, parents are coached through those five minutes by a therapist using sneaky little earpieces and a two-way mirror.

At first, most parents smirk at the suggestion that five minutes a day will strengthen their relationships with their children. However, research findings show that teaching parents how to engage with their children in child-directed interaction, along with teaching them skills to better recognize and praise their children, can drastically reduce the incidence of abuse. This kind of intervention has proven to be far more effective than simply enrolling the parents in anger management courses. Essentially, these parents are taught the art of actively loving their children in a way their children can recognize, and it changes things. It's fascinating to me that the answer to these severe parenting dilemmas rests in training parents how to practice real, hands-on love.

This mom gets it right: "When the going gets tough, love harder." Below she relates a few experiences that have proven the effectiveness of love in dealing with difficult parenting situations.

My parents are a great example of loving through hard times. When my sister was in her freshman year of college, her life turned upside down with the news that she was pregnant. She and my parents had dealt with some difficult things throughout her high school years. Just when things were finally looking up, she had to turn to my parents and bear the heart-rending news. She fully expected anger, lectures, and guilt-ridden words to follow her announcement. What took place instead was a small miracle for our family. My dad later said that as he took a moment in prayer to know what to say to his daughter, he had an overwhelming feeling that his only job was to

love her. The time for strong words and lectures was over; his only responsibility now, as her father, was to express his love. I truly believe this experience was the catalyst in changing my sister's life. To be unexpectedly enveloped with love, even when you don't feel like you deserve it, is powerful.

I am inspired by the quote by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, "I have never met a person whose greatest need was anything other than real, unconditional love. You can find it in a simple act of kindness toward someone who needs help. There is no mistaking love. You feel it in your heart. It is the common fiber of life, the flame that heats our soul, energizes our spirit and supplies passion to our lives."

My son was a perfect one-year-old (wink, wink) except for one little problem: he had a serious issue with biting. Oh, the agony I felt as I witnessed my sweet little boy bite and hurt other children. I had some serious low points, like the day my friend showed me five massive welts on her little boy's back caused by the teeth of my child. And then there was the day he got written up at my gym's daycare for "provoking violence" and "failure to obey the rules!" You walk away from those little moments thinking everyone must think you are a terrible mom.

Luckily, I received advice from some women that I treasure, and I was told to simply love him. Love, love, love him, and then love him some more (all the while being rigidly consistent with teaching him the right way). I realized this phase would only last a minute in the grand scheme of things, but the way I was handling the situation with my son could set a precedence that would be lasting.

I can safely say my now two-year-old son has improved dramatically. And it's funny, but having gone through that trying stage with him makes me love him all the more because we loved our way through something tough.

- Danielle Monson

Love can solve a multitude of problems. It can cover up our mistakes. It can make us resilient. It is the strongest antidote to our most serious dilemmas as mothers. While it won't always magically fix or change everything, it will fix and change us.

Love Spreads

As I watched my little Hazel, all grown up, march into school for her first day of kindergarten, I felt my throat tighten. Would she like her teacher? Would she make friends? Would she feel secure? Does she know who she is? Does she know how much I love her? What will she share with the world? What have I etched into her heart?

Like every mom, I want my children to leave my home equipped with all the tools that they need to be happy and contribute to the world in a positive way. But more than

anything, I want my children to go out into the wide world knowing how to love—how to truly, deeply and completely love others.

Every way we love our children teaches them how to love others. Our love will one day pass through them and spill out into a whole new sphere.

If we watch, we can see evidence of our love spreading through them and onto others. The following story demonstrates how beautifully our love can come full circle.

It was a beautiful springtime day—one with that Zip-a-dee-doo-dah kind of feel, but of course, it was the one day I became unusually sick. Moms aren't supposed to get sick, but if it does happen, what do we end up doing? We work right through it, right? As mothers, we keep pressing forward—it's in our genes.

We know no one is going to spoon-feed us Chicken and Star Soup, no one is going to put little wet towels on our forehead, and no one is going to kiss our rosy little cheeks and tell us, "Don't worry, you'll feel better soon." It's one thing to be sick, but it's another when you're the only adult at home with a husband away on business. What can you do?

On this particular day, I was so sick I really couldn't work through it anymore. I just rested in bed, head throbbing, fever running, body shaking—and I felt miserable. I said a little prayer hoping that someone would call to see how I was doing. I said another little prayer that someone might stop by to help me out. I even tried calling a friend, but all I got was her answering machine. I was miserable and saw no relief in sight, so I just kept on praying.

As my eyes began to swell with tears, who should come up to see me but my little ten-year-old daughter, Maddie? She saw that I didn't look very well, so she gave me a big hug and then asked if I was feeling okay because I felt really hot. I told her I didn't feel very well and that I just wanted to rest. She gave me a hug and then slowly left the room.

After a few minutes had passed, I heard a little knock on the door. Maddie came in with little wooden tray that contained a book to read, a Capri Sun, a handful of Goldfish crackers, and a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. She covered me up with her favorite blanket, tucking it under my legs, just the way she likes me to do it for her. It made my heart melt. Who knew that tucking a blanket under your legs when you were sick made your temperature drop by five degrees?

I gave Maddie a big hug and thanked her for taking care of me. She told me that I always take care of her, so now she was going to take care of me. My heart and my eyes began to overflow with tears of love for her. It's just so wonderful to see how love can be displayed by the smallest of gestures—even by the smallest in stature.

- Lisa Hawkins

Love spreads, and through loving our children, we are weaving threads of love into the fabric of the world.

When We are Present and Uncluttered, We Let Love In

“Our lives are frittered away by detail ... simplify, simplify.”
– Henry David Thoreau

Life is busy. As a mom it is frightfully easy to let our days be frittered away by details, only realizing as we fall into bed at night that we didn't really live the day. We were moving, certainly moving, but we weren't present. Love happens in the present and is hidden in the moments.

My youngest sister, Charity, has had a lot of vicarious mothering experience. As the youngest of nine siblings and the only sister yet to have kids, she is our go-to girl when any of us need some extended child care in order to travel or work. I love her fresh perspective on what it means to mother and why we do it day in and day out. Sometimes when you're in the trenches you don't see things quite as clearly. These are her words:

I spent the past week babysitting my brother's three small children. I am a seeker of all kinds of adventures, and this was one like no other: a glimpse into the trump-all adventure of parenthood.

Among other things, I kissed owies better, tried to sooth choruses of screams when I really felt like screaming myself, changed the world's most epic stinky diaper (you are probably thinking, “I have seen worse,” but I honestly doubt it), drove to the elementary school in my nightgown, made a memory game and a chalkboard canvas out of the driveway, wiped up literally countless piles of spit-up, barely won the wrestling match in the pew during church, safely (but perhaps just barely) frequented the swimming pool and the school playground, sang lullabies, made pigtails, shook formula into bottles and desperately promised fruit snacks for good behavior.

Every night when the kids went to sleep at 7:30, I was exhausted. It was fun, but there were flashes when the thought, “I really can't do this!” ran through my head.

Here is the naive and amazed question of my childlessness—how do parents do it?

I found the answer in a tiny flake of split-second bliss where I felt what I'm sure is just a small taste of a certain brand of golden, liquid joy preserved for moms and dads. It was an emotion that would absolutely propel a parent to keep going, week in and week out, no matter how crazy things got. It was a simple moment, but miraculously and magnificently energizing, empowering, motivating and so, so, so beautiful.

I was sitting on the beach. The sun was saying goodnight with simple yellows and the lightest of blues. McKay was digging, silhouetted in front of the shimmering waves, Baby Cubby was sitting nuzzled to my left side, and Lyla stood in the sand holding my thumbs—her feet willowed into the beach as she giggled in the amber light. Her hair was wispy and golden. Cubby’s body was warm. McKay radiated the plain happiness of childhood. The hairs on my arms stood on end. The world stopped spinning. Just for a moment, just for that wildly beautiful moment, as if it was unable to contain the euphoria of such love.

Soon came the whines and the spit-up and the encroaching night. That beautiful moment didn't last, but maybe it will last me until I have a similar but amplified experience with a child that is mine.

I thank heaven that God has put into us this extraordinary but so human ability to love.

- Charity Eyre

Motherhood is hard. It is often the overwhelming love buried in small moments that “propels” us to keep going and going. The trick is to be present and uncluttered enough to see these moments—to let them fall into our laps. When we can grasp them and take them in, our love grows, our joy swells, and we are renewed.

When I analyze the times I’m unhappy as a mother, I find they always coincide with days and weeks and months when I’ve overcrowded my life. Times when I’m overcommitted, times when my brain is overburdened by compulsions or discontent, and I’m distracted. When I can muster the energy and discipline to build in some space, un-clutter my life, and simplify things, suddenly I can see the crystals in the air, hear the music of my life, and drink in the present in all its glory. I can see the love that is laced through all I do. I can feel the power of mother love wash over me, push me forward, and fill up my family.

Love Will Exit the Other Side

“Love is the only thing that will exit out the other side. It will stand alone, vindicated. It will finally and clearly be seen for the dominant, unbeatable, infinite, glorified force it has always been, just obscured for millennia by layers of fallen clutter.”

- Richard A. Swenson, M. D.

I want to be able to watch my sleeping children at night—assured they have felt the love that propelled us through the day. I want to “put my heart on” and wear it so boldly that they can’t escape its powerful pull.

Our children will be gone in a blink. The difficult questions, the bad phases, the tantrums, the rebellions and our never-ending lists of things we want to get done will all come and go. But what will stand in the end is how well we loved.