



SONrise September-October 2002
EMMAUS
NEWSLETTER
... Strengthening the Local Church

Loving with Abandon

A few days ago, I received a phone message from Sandy Winsor. She had called to ask if Dewey or I would like to have the opportunity as out-going chrysalis lay directors for the community, to say a few words in the next newsletter. Both Dewey and I thought that was a pretty cool idea! So, here I sit with pen in hand (literally!), thinking, "OK, God, what exactly do you want me to say?" The directive was simple, yet very clear. "Tell them about me." And so I shall.

The Christian life is more than finding Jesus - it is following Jesus. Following is not a one time spectacular act of faith, but rather a day-at-a-time, daily act of fearlessness that takes us through the most frightening and rugged terrain to places of peace, joy, and abandon. During either one of the send-offs or closings this summer, I quoted from the book, *Dangerous Wonder*, by Mike Vaconelli. The words I am about to share are words that I cannot claim as my own; however, I can and do lay claim to the fact that they ring very true and real in my heart.

This is a story of a young girl who ended up breaking the rules, rejecting the expectations of all around her, because she loved with abandon. Last year, my young son played t-ball.... needless to say, I was delighted! Now, on the other team there was a girl I will call Tracy. Tracy came each week. I know, since my son's team always played her team. She was not very good. She had coke-bottle glasses and hearing aids on each ear. She ran in a loping, carefree way, with one leg pulling after the other, one arm wind milling wildly in the air. Everyone in the bleachers cheered for her, regardless of what team their progeny played for. In all the games I saw, she never hit the ball, not even close. It sat there on a tee waiting to be hit and it never was. Sometimes, after ten or eleven swings, Tracy hit the tee (in t-ball, the ball sits on a plastic tee, waiting for the batter to hit the ball, which happens once every three batters). The ball would fall off the tee and sit on the ground six inches in front of home plate. "Run! Run!" yelled Tracy's coach, and Tracy would lope off to first, clutching the bat in both arms, smiling. Someone usually woke up and ran her down with the ball before she would reach first. Everyone applauded.

The last game of the season, Tracy came up, and through some fluke, or simply in a nod toward the law of averages, she creamed the ball. She smoked it right up the middle, through the legs of seventeen players. Kids dodged as it went by or looked absentmindedly at it as it rolled unstopped, seemingly gaining in speed, hopping over second base, heading into center field. And once it reached there,

there was no one to stop it. Have I told you there are no outfielders in t-ball? There are for three minutes in the beginning of every inning, but then they move into the infield to be close to the action, or, at least, to their friends. Tracy hit the ball and stood at home, delighted. "Run!" yelled her coach. "Run!" All the parents, all of us, we stood and screamed, "run Tracy, run, run!" Tracy turned and smiled at us, and then happy to please, galumphed off to first. The first base coach waved his arms 'round and 'round when Tracy stopped at first. "Keep going, Tracy, keep going! Go!" Happy to please, she headed to second. By the time she was half way to second, seven members of the opposition had reached the ball and were passing it among themselves. It's a rule in t-ball...everyone on the defending team has to touch every ball. The ball began to make its long and circuitous route toward home plate, passing from one side of the field to the other. Tracy headed to third. Adults fell off the bleachers. "Go, Tracy, go!"

Tracy reached third and stopped, but the parents were very close to her now and she got the message. Her coach stood at home plate calling her as the ball passed over the first baseman's head and landed in the fielding team's empty dugout. "Come on Tracy! Come on, baby! Get a home run!"

Tracy started for home, and then it happened. During the pandemonium, no one had noticed the twelve-year-old geriatric mutt that had lazily settled itself down in front of the bleachers five feet from the third-base line. As Tracy rounded third, the dog awakened by the screaming, sat up and wagged its tail at Tracy as she headed down the line. The tongue hung out, mouth pulled back in an unmistakably canine smile, and Tracy stopped, right there - halfway home, thirty feet from a legitimate home run. She looked at the dog. Her coach called, "come on, Tracy! Come on home!" he went to his knees, behind the plate, pleading. The crowd cheered, "Go, Tracy, go!" She looked at all the adults, at her own parents shrieking and catching it all on video. She looked at the dog. The dog wagged its tail. She looked at her coach. She looked at home. She looked at the dog. Everything went into slow motion. She went for the dog! It was a moment of complete, stunned silence. And then, perhaps, not as loud, but deeper, longer, more heartfelt, we all applauded as Tracy fell to her knees to hug the dog.

Two roads diverged on a third-base line. Tracy went for the dog. Two roads diverged in this little girl's life. One is the road of rules and expectations; the other is the road of love. The roads of our lives are much the same. Will we go for the safe, predictable road of rules and expectations? Or will we go for the one we love, Jesus, who bids us come with wild abandon?

Pam Johnson
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