

Excerpt from “Why Do You Hurt Me God?” Chapter 1: One Night, One Kiss, Three Words

by Dave Matthews

“God, why can’t my daddy live with us any more?”

Thousands of children, every day

It was 1963. The Dodgers won the World Series over the hated Yankees, sweeping them in four straight. My Texas Longhorns were 11-0, beating Roger Staubach and Navy in the Cotton Bowl, and were crowned national champions. Life was pretty good for a thirteen-year-old living in Texas.

And in addition to those ‘important’ things above, my parents had the perfect marriage. Often I bragged to my friends at school about it, taking pride in their love for one another. But one night in the ‘60s changed that thinking; in fact, it changed everything.

That fateful night was the day my innocence was shattered—the moment in history when I discovered fairy tales were exactly that—fairy tales. It was the night an appalling truth crashed upon me: Mom and Dad did not have a perfect marriage. Mom and Dad appeared to hate each other.

I do not recall what they fought about that night, but I remember enough to know that awful feeling deep inside of me, gnawing away any sense of stability. Their fighting intensified as the weeks and months rolled by. Every weekend was the same—yelling, cursing, hate-filled words slung back and forth.

Finally, Dad moved out.

Writing those words fifty years later still stings. At times I wonder if parents really comprehend the negative impact those three words have on a child’s thinking: *Why? Why the hate? Why does Dad have to leave? Why can’t they love each other the way I love them both? Why can’t they forgive, and start all over? Why doesn’t God do something about it? Why can’t my daddy live with us? And why doesn’t the hurt go away?*

Parents seem to forget the hurt they unintentionally inflict on their kids. But sometimes, parents remember.

It was a Sunday morning. We had not heard from Dad in weeks. I actually thought I might never see him again. The phone rang. It was Dad. "You guys want to play golf?" What a dumb question!

Dad, don't you realize that all I want to do is to be with you? I miss you. Since you moved out, life has taken a tumble. I have pimples, I'm fat, and all the girls laugh at me. I have only one friend in the world, and he's almost as weird as I am. I don't care about anything, yet I do care. I'll do anything with you. Sure, Dad, we'll play golf with you.

So we played, but we hardly talked. Darkness came much too soon, and as much as I hated it, we headed home. "Thanks for the golf, Dad. Do you have to go so soon? Please stay a few minutes. Mom is not home yet. You can leave when she gets here. Please, Dad."

So he stayed. We drank iced tea. We mostly sat, dreading the coming separation. And then Mom walked through the door.

To fully grasp the impact of that night, a few painful facts need to be revealed. They had been living apart for a few months, but they had been emotionally separated much longer. They had not kissed, hugged, held hands, or slept in the same bed for years. They had not, at least to my knowledge, used the word love to each other in ages.

Whether she knew it or not, Mom was about to give my sister, brother, and me the greatest gift imaginable.

It was around 10 p.m. when she opened that door and walked in. Dad began to get up to leave, but she stopped him. "Tom, you can stay as long as you want. I'm tired and going to bed." My sister and brother were sitting there with us. So Mom made the rounds to say good night.

"Good night, Ann. I love you." She then kissed my sister on the cheek.

"Good night, Richard. I love you." She kissed my brother on the cheek.

"Good night, David. I love you." And she kissed me on the cheek.

She paused. We sensed that she was not yet finished with the 'good nights.' But there was only one other person in the room. He was sitting in a big chair to my left. And though it has been fifty years since that night, I see his face so vividly, and I hear her words so clearly.

She walked over to Dad. With compassion, love, and tenderness such as I had never seen before, she kissed her husband, our daddy, on the cheek.

“And I love you, too, Tom.”

She left the room. Dad finally said good night and left to go back to his apartment. No one mentioned the miracle we just experienced. Stunned is too mild a word to describe our feelings.

The next day, as I was sitting alone in the den, the doorbell rang. I opened the door and saw Dad holding a couple of boxes with clothes slung over his shoulder. “Can you help me move my stuff into the house?”

So that’s how my daddy came home to stay. For the next twenty-seven years, he and Mom held hands, kissed, hugged, and, yes, slept in the same bed. They loved each other with the love of the ages.

Why? What happened? For twenty years, I asked that question to no one in particular. One day I was working on a sermon about comebacks. I always loved those stories where the underdog looks defeated and then makes a miraculous recovery, when no one believes winning is a possibility. And it hit me: the greatest comeback I have ever witnessed was the night Mom kissed Dad again. But I did not know the answer to that big “Why?” question.

So I called Mom and read the story I had written concerning that one night. I asked her if it was true, or had I imagined it? “If it is true,” I continued, “what happened, Mom? Why did you do that?”

Mom could hardly respond. No one in the family had ever said a word about that night. Tears flowed. Alzheimer’s disease was beginning to ravage Dad’s mind, which added more emotion upon her hearing the story.

Finally Mom spoke, saying, “First, every word of the story is true. You remembered it exactly as it happened. But I am surprised that you do not know why we got back together. I thought it was obvious. You three kids were a mess when Dad moved out. I simply could not bear to see all of you in such pain. So I decided to love your father again, and he decided to accept that love.”

So there you have it: they decided to love each other again.

Years after the night of the kiss, Mom was diagnosed with breast cancer. I arrived at the hospital after traveling all day. As I walked into her room, I found Dad sitting in a big

chair to my left. He was holding his bride's hand and gently stroking her hair and forehead.

And my mind raced back to that fateful night, when love was reborn. One night, one kiss, three words.