

The things we do for love, Part 4: Forgive

When my new student began her first day in my sixth-grade language arts class at St. Joan of Arc School in Aberdeen, I asked her to introduce herself to me in a short essay. I expected to hear about what sports she played, her favorite YouTuber, or how much she was missing her old friends. What she presented, instead, was a surprising and beautiful story of forgiveness from a child's perspective.

In 2016, when Brooke was 9-years-old, she was attacked by a black lab. She had been roller skating with the dog on a leash while her uncle got together all their gear to go canoeing. As Brooke's uncle was getting the paddles out of the shed, the dog jumped up on Brooke and bit her while she was petting him. The dog's owner, a family friend, drove her to the nearest hospital where she slipped into a state of shock. They wrapped her face in gauze and gave her IV fluids. When she was finally stabilized, they rushed her to Dupont where she had more than 40 stitches. Brooke's extended stay at the hospital was frustrating for her. She couldn't get any sleep because people kept coming into the room and turning on the lights to check on her. One of the nurses was mean! Eventually, she got to go home, but needed several plastic surgeries to restore her face.

Being a middle school girl, Brooke is very self-conscious about the scars that cover her right temple and cheek, but she wanted to talk about it right away. She was also quick to point out that she doesn't hate dogs and she's not afraid of them. In fact, she wants to start a dog-walking business in her neighborhood. She says that she doesn't hold any grudges or carry any anger against the dog who attacked her because she knew that he didn't intend to hurt her.

And isn't that what real love is about? Even though we have been hurt and scarred, we recognize the fact that he or she who wronged us may not have done it on purpose. Even if they did, we must never forget that they are human, a sinner not unlike ourselves. Children are going to talk back, friends are going to talk behind our back, and every once in a while, someone in a parking lot is going to back into us. Every time, we must forgive.

We should continue remind ourselves of the stories we have heard where the olive branch has been extended, such as St. John Paul II's pardon of Mehmet Ali Ağca, who attempted to assassinate him or the recent historic meeting between Kim Jong Un and Moon Jae-In, which we will pray to be a sign of peace in our world.

Of course, the ultimate forgiveness is what we have been promised by our faith. Despite our sins against Him, God has a place for us in His Kingdom. And while we're here, he'd like it if we forgive each other...and our four-legged friends, too.