

JAM'S PLAYGROUND THE EMAIL FILE

Twenty Dollars

A well known motivational speaker started off his seminar by holding up a \$20 bill. In the room of 200, he asked, "Who would like this \$20 bill?" Hands started going up.

He said, "I am going to give this \$20 to one of you but first, let me do this." He proceeded to crumple the dollar bill up. He then asked, "Who still wants it?" Still the hands were up in the air. "Well," he replied, "What if I do this?" And he dropped it on the ground and started to grind it into the floor with his shoe. He picked it up, now crumpled and dirty. "Now who still wants it?" Still the hands went into the air.

"My friends, you have all learned a very valuable lesson. No matter what I did to the money, you still wanted it because it did not decrease in value. It was still worth \$20.

Many times in our lives, we are dropped, crumpled, and ground into the dirt by the decisions we make and the circumstances that come our way. We feel as though we are worthless. But no matter what has happened or what will happen, you will never lose your value: dirty or clean, crumpled or finely creased, you are still priceless to those who love you. The worth of our lives come not in what we do or who we know, but by WHO WE ARE.

You are special - Don't ever forget it."

JAM'S PLAYGROUND

THE EMAIL FILE

A Thousand Marbles (edited to fit a church bulletin insert)

The older I get, the more I enjoy Saturday mornings. Perhaps it's the quiet solitude that comes with being the first to rise, or maybe it's the unbounded joy of not having to be at work. A few weeks ago, I sat in the backyard patio listening to a radio talk show. What began as a typical Saturday morning, turned into one of those lessons that life seems to hand you from time to time. The host, a retired senior citizen who did the morning show as a hobby, was talking with a high powered corporate executive.

"Tom, it sure sounds like you're busy with your job. I'm sure they pay you well, but it's a shame you have to be away from home and your family so much. Hard to believe a young fellow should have to work sixty or seventy hours a week to make ends meet. Too bad you missed your daughter's dance recital. Let me tell you something that has helped me keep a good perspective on my own priorities." And that's when he spoke of his thousand marbles.

"I sat down one day and did a little arithmetic. The average person lives about seventy-five years. Some live more and some less, but on average, folks live about seventy-five years. So, I multiplied 75 times 52 and came up with 3900, which is the number of Saturdays that the average person has in their entire lifetime. I was fifty-five years old at the time, and by that time I had lived through over twenty-eight hundred Saturdays. I figured that if I lived to be seventy-five, I only had about a thousand of them left to enjoy.

So I went to a toy store and bought every single marble they had. I had to visit three toy stores to round up 1000 marbles. I took them home and put them inside of a large, clear plastic container. Every Saturday since then, I have taken one marble out and thrown it away. I found that by watching the marbles diminish, I focused more on the really important things in life. There is nothing like watching your time here on this earth run out to help get your priorities straight.

"Now, Tom, let me tell you one last thing before I sign-off the show and take my lovely wife out for breakfast. This morning, I took the very last marble out of the container. I figure if I make it until next Saturday then I have been given a little extra time. And the one thing we can all use is a little more time. It was nice to meet you Tom, I hope you spend more time with your family, and I hope to meet you again."

You could have heard a pin drop on the radio when this fellow signed off. I guess he gave us all a lot to think about. I had planned to go in to work that morning. Instead, I went upstairs and woke my wife up with a kiss. "C'mon honey, I'm taking you and the kids to breakfast."

"What brought this on?" she asked with a smile.

"Oh, nothing special, it's just been a while since we spent a Saturday together with the kids. Hey, can we stop at a toy store while we're out? I need to buy some marbles."

JAM'S PLAYGROUND THE EMAIL FILE

Daddy's Day

Written by Cheryl Costello-Forshey © 2000

Her hair up in a pony tail,
her favourite dress tied with a bow.
Today was Daddy's Day at school,
and she couldn't wait to go.

But her mommy tried to tell her,
that she probably should stay home.
That the kids might not understand,
if she went to school alone.

But she was not afraid;
she knew just what to say.
What to tell her classmates,
on this Daddy's Day.

But still her mother worried,
that she would face this day alone.
And that was why once again,
she tried to keep her daughter home.

But the little girl went to school,
eager to tell them all.
About a dad she never sees,
a dad who never calls.

There were daddy's along the wall in back,
for everyone to meet.
Children squirming impatiently,
anxious in their seats.

One by one the teacher called,
a student from the class.
To introduce their daddy,
as seconds slowly passed.

At last the teacher called her name,
every child turned to stare.
Each of them were searching,
for a man who wasn't there.

"Where's her daddy at?"
she heard a boy call out.
"She probably doesn't have one,"
another student dared to shout.

And from somewhere near the back,
she heard a daddy say,
"Looks like another deadbeat dad,
too busy to waste his day."

The words did not offend her,
as she smiled at her friends.
And looked back at her teacher,
who told her to begin.

And with hands behind her back,
slowly she began to speak.
And out from the mouth of a child,
came words incredibly unique.

"My Daddy couldn't be here,
because he lives so far away.
But I know he wishes he could,
be with me on this day.

And though you cannot meet him,
I wanted you to know.
All about my daddy,
and how he loves me so.

He loved to tell me stories,
he taught me to ride my bike.
He surprised me with pink roses,
and taught me to fly a kite.

We used to share fudge sundaes,
and ice cream in a cone.
And though you cannot see him,
I'm not standing here alone.

'Cause my daddy's always with me,
even though we are apart.
I know because he told me,
he'll forever be here in my heart".

With that her little hand reached up,
and lay across her chest.
Feeling her own heartbeat,
beneath her favourite dress.

And from somewhere in the crowd of dads,
her mother stood in tears.
Proudly watching her daughter,
who was wise beyond her years.

For she stood up for the love,
of a man not in her life.
Doing what was best for her,
doing what was right.

And when she dropped her hand back down,
staring straight into the crowd.
She finished with a voice so soft,
but its message clear and loud.

"I love my daddy very much,
he's my shining star.
And if he could, he'd be here,
but heaven's just too far.

But sometimes when I close my eyes,
it's like he never went away."
And then she closed her eyes,
and she saw him there that day.

And to her mother's amazement,
she witnessed with surprise.
A room full of daddy's and children,
all starting to close their eyes.

Who knows what they saw before them,
who knows what they felt inside.
Perhaps for merely a second,
they saw him standing at her side.

"I know you're with me Daddy,"
to the silence she called out.
And what happened next made believers,
of those once filled with doubt.

Not one in that room could explain it,
for each of their eyes had been closed.
But there placed on her desktop,
was a beautiful fragrant pink rose.

And for a moment a child was blessed,
by the love of her shining star.
And the gift of believing,
that heaven is never too far.

Written by Cheryl Costello-Forshey © 2000

JAM'S PLAYGROUND

THE EMAIL FILE

Eagles

Did you know that an eagle knows when a storm is approaching long before it breaks? The eagle will fly to some high spot and wait for the winds to come. When the storm hits, it sets its wings so that the wind will pick it up and lift it above the storm. While the storm rages below, the eagle is soaring above it. The eagle does not escape the storm. It simply uses the storm to lift it higher. It rises on the winds that bring the storm.

When the storms of life come upon us - and all of us will experience them - we can rise above them by setting our minds and our belief toward God. The storms do not have to overcome us. We can allow God's power to lift us above them.

God enables us to ride the winds of the storm that bring sickness, tragedy, failure and disappointment in our lives. We can soar above the storm. Remember, it is not the burdens of life that weigh us down, it is how we handle them.

The Bible says,

"Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles."

Isaiah 40:31

JAM'S PLAYGROUND

THE EMAIL FILE

The Cracked Pot

A water bearer in India had two large pots, one hung on each end of a pole which he carried across his neck. One of the pots had a crack in it, and while the other pot was perfect and always delivered a full portion of water at the end of the long walk from the stream to the master's house, the cracked pot arrived only half full. Of course, the perfect pot was proud of its accomplishments, perfect to the end for which it was made. The poor cracked pot was ashamed of its imperfection, and miserable that it was able to accomplish only half of what it had been made to do.

After two years of what it perceived to be a bitter failure, it spoke to the water bearer one day by the stream. "I am ashamed of myself, and I want to apologize to you."

"Why?" asked the bearer. "What are you ashamed of?"

"I have been able, for these past two years, to deliver only half my load because this crack in my side causes water to leak out all the way back to your master's house. Because of my flaws, you have to do all of this work, and you don't get full value from your efforts," the pot said.

The water bearer felt sorry for the old cracked pot and he said, "As we return to the master's house, I want you to notice the beautiful flowers along the path."

Indeed, as they went up the hill, the old cracked pot took notice of the sun warming the beautiful wild flowers on the side of the path, and this cheered it some. But at the end of the trail, it still felt bad because it had leaked out half its load, and so again it apologized to the bearer for its failure.

The bearer said to the pot, "Did you notice that there were flowers only on your side of your path, but not on the other pot's side? That's because I have always known about your flaw, and I took advantage of it. I planted flower seeds on your side of the path, and every day while we walk back from the stream, you've watered them. For two years I have been able to pick these beautiful flowers to decorate my master's table. Without you being just the way you are, he would not have this beauty to grace his house."

The Moral of this Story:

Each of us has our own unique flaws. Most of us are cracked pots. But it's the cracks and flaws we each have that make our lives together so very interesting and rewarding. You've just got to take each person for what they are, and look for the good in them. There is a lot of good out there. The Master's moulding makes us the way we are....!

JAM'S PLAYGROUND

THE EMAIL FILE

The Hospital Window

Two men, both seriously ill, occupied the same hospital room. One man was allowed to sit up in his bed for an hour each afternoon to help drain the fluid from his lungs. His bed was next to the room's only window. The other man had to spend all his time flat on his back.

The men talked for hours on end. They spoke of their wives and families, their homes, their jobs, their involvement in the military service, where they had been on vacation.

Every afternoon when the man in the bed by the window could sit up, he would pass the time by describing to his roommate all the things he could see outside the window. The man in the other bed began to live for those one-hour periods where his world would be broadened and enlivened by all the activity and colour of the world outside. The window overlooked a park with a lovely lake. Ducks and swans played on the water while children sailed their model boats. Young lovers walked arm in arm amidst flowers of every colour of the rainbow. Grand old trees graced the landscape, and a fine view of the city skyline could be seen in the distance. As the man by the window described all this in exquisite detail, the man on the other side of the room would close his eyes and imagine the picturesque scene.

One warm afternoon the man by the window described a parade passing by. Although the other man couldn't hear the band - he could see it in his mind's eye as the gentleman by the window portrayed it with descriptive words. Days and weeks passed.

One morning, the day nurse arrived to bring water for their baths only to find the lifeless body of the man by the window, who had died peacefully in his sleep. She was saddened and called the hospital attendants to take the body away. As soon as it seemed appropriate, the other man asked if he could be moved next to the window. The nurse was happy to make the switch, and after making sure he was comfortable, she left him alone. Slowly, painfully, he propped himself up on one elbow to take his first look at the world outside. Finally, he would have the joy of seeing it for himself. He strained to slowly turn to look out the window beside the bed. It faced a blank wall.

The man asked the nurse what could have compelled his deceased roommate who had described such wonderful things outside this window. The nurse responded that the man was blind and could not even see the wall. She said, "Perhaps he just wanted to encourage you."

Epilogue:

There is tremendous happiness in making others happy, despite our own situations. Shared grief is half the sorrow, but happiness when shared, is doubled. If you want to feel rich, just count all of the things you have that money can't buy. "Today is a gift, that's why it is called the present."

JAM'S PLAYGROUND THE EMAIL FILE

I Took Your Place

One day, a man went to visit a church. He arrived early, parked his car, and got out. Another car pulled up near him, and the driver told him, "I always park there. You took my place!"

The visitor went inside for Sunday School, found an empty seat, and sat down. A young lady from the church approached him and stated, "That's my seat! You took my place!" The visitor was somewhat distressed by this rude welcome, but said nothing.

After Sunday School, the visitor went into the church sanctuary and sat down. Another member walked up to him and said, "That's where I always sit. You took my place!" The visitor was even more troubled by this treatment, but still said nothing.

Later, as the congregation was praying for Christ to dwell among them, the visitor stood, and his appearance began to change. Horrible scars became visible on his hands and on his sandalled feet.

Someone from the congregation noticed him and called out, "What happened to you?"

The visitor replied, "I took your place."

JAM'S PLAYGROUND

THE EMAIL FILE

I Won't, Ever

I saw him in the church building for the first time on Wednesday. He was in his mid-70s, with thinning hair and a neat brown suit. Many times in the past I had invited him to come. Several other Christian friends had talked to him about the Lord and had tried to share the good news with him. He was a well-respected, honest man with so many of the characteristics a Christian should have; but he had never put on Christ.

"Have you ever been to a church service in your life?" I asked him several years ago. We had just finished a pleasant day of visiting and talking. He hesitated. Then, with a bitter smile, he told me of a childhood experience over sixty years ago.

He was one of many children in a large, impoverished family. His parents had struggled to provide food, with little left for housing and clothing. When he was about ten, some neighbors had invited him to worship with them. The Bible class had been very exciting. He had never heard such songs and stories before. He had never even heard anyone read from the Bible. After class was over, the teacher took him aside and said, "Son, please don't come again dressed as you are now. We want to look our best when we come to worship the Lord."

He stood in his ragged, un-patched overalls, looked at his dirty, bare feet, and said, "No, Ma'am, I won't, ever." "And I never did," he said, abruptly ending our conversation.

There must have been other factors to have hardened him so, but this experience formed a significant part of the bitterness in his heart. I'm sure that Bible teacher meant well. But what if she had really understood the love of Christ? What if she had studied and accepted the teachings found in the second chapter of James? What if she had put her arms around that dirty, ragged little boy and said, "Son, I am so glad you are here, and I hope you will come every chance you get to hear more about Jesus?" I reflected on the awesome responsibility a teacher has to welcome little ones in His name. How far-reaching her influence is! I prayed that I might ever be open to the tenderness of a child's heart, and that I might never fail to see beyond the appearance and behavior of a child to the eternal possibilities within.

Yes, I saw him in the church house for the first time Wednesday. And as I looked at that immaculately dressed old gentleman lying in his casket, I thought of the little boy of long ago. I could almost hear him say, "No, Ma'am, I won't, ever." And I wept.

JAM'S PLAYGROUND

THE EMAIL FILE

It's funny:

how a \$100 "looks" so big when you take it to church, but so small when you take it to the mall.

how long it takes to serve God for an hour, but how quickly a team plays 60 minutes of basketball.

how long a couple of hours spent at church are, but how short they are when watching a movie.

how we can't think of anything to say when we pray, but don't have difficulty thinking of things to talk about to a friend.

how we get thrilled when a baseball game goes into extra innings, but we complain when a sermon is longer than the regular time.

how hard it is to read a chapter in the Bible, but how easy it is to read 100 pages of a best selling novel.

how people want to get a front seat at any game or concert, but scramble to get a back seat at church services.

how we need 2 or 3 weeks advance notice to fit a church event into our schedule, but can adjust our schedule for other events at the last moment.

how hard it is for people to learn a simple gospel well enough to tell others, but how simple it is for the same people to understand and repeat gossip.

how we believe what the newspaper say, but question what the Bible says.

how everyone wants to go to heaven provided they do not have to believe, or think, or say, or do anything.

JAM'S PLAYGROUND

THE EMAIL FILE

The Still Small Voice

The man whispered, "God, speak to me."
And a meadowlark sang.
But the man did not hear.

So the man yelled, "God speak to me!"
And the thunder rolled across the sky.
But the man did not listen.

The man looked around and said "God let me see you."
And a star shone brightly.
But the man did not notice.

And the man shouted, "God show me a miracle."
And a life was born.
But the man did not know.

So, the man cried out in despair,
"Touch me God and let me know that you are here!"
Whereupon God reached down and touched the man.
But the man brushed the butterfly away and walked on.

*Don't miss out on a blessing because it isn't packaged
the way you expect.*

JAM'S PLAYGROUND THE EMAIL FILE

How You Spend Your "Dash"

(Author unknown)

I read of a man who stood to speak
At the funeral of a friend.
He referred to the dates on her tombstone
From the beginning ... to the end.

He noted that first came her date of birth
And spoke the following date with tears,
But he said what mattered most of all
Was the dash between those years. (1900-1970)

For that dash represents all the time
That she spent alive on earth
And now only those who loved her
Know what that little line is worth.

For it matters not how much we own;
The cars...the house...the cash.
What matters is how we live and love,
And how we spend our dash.

So think about this long and hard ...
Are there things you'd like to change?
For you never know how much time is left
That can still be rearranged.

If we could just slow down enough
To consider what's true and real,
And always try to understand
The way other people feel;

And be less quick to anger,
And show appreciation more;
And love the people in our lives
Like we've never loved before;

If we treat each other with respect,
And more often wear a smile ...
Remembering that this special dash
Might only last a little while.

So, when your eulogy's being read
With your life's action's to rehash ...
Would you be proud of the things they say
About how you spent your dash?

Spend it well.

"The mind of man plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps".
Proverbs 16:9.

JAM'S PLAYGROUND

THE EMAIL FILE

The 100 Yard Dash

A few years ago, at the Seattle Special Olympics, nine contestants, all physically or mentally disabled, assembled at the starting line for the 100-yard dash. At the gun, they all started out, not exactly in a dash, but with a relish to run the race to the finish and win. All, that is, except one little boy who stumbled on the asphalt, tumbled over a couple of times, and began to cry.

The other eight heard the boy cry. They slowed down and looked back. Then they all turned around and went back every one of them. One girl with Down's Syndrome bent down and kissed him and said, "This will make it better."

Then all nine linked arms and walked together to the finish line. Everyone in the stadium stood, and the cheering went on for several minutes. People who were there are still telling the story.

Deep down we know this one thing: What matters in this life is more than winning for ourselves. What matters in this life is helping others win, even if it means slowing down and changing our course.

JIMMY'S PLAYGROUND

THE EMAIL FILE

Teddy

As she stood in front of her 5th grade class on the very first day of school, she told the children an untruth. Like most teachers, she looked at her students and said that she loved them all the same. However, that was impossible, because there in the front row, slumped in his seat, was a little boy named Teddy Stoddard.

Mrs. Thompson had watched Teddy the year before and noticed that he did not play well with the other children, that his clothes were messy and that he constantly needed a bath. In addition, Teddy could be unpleasant. It got to the point where Mrs. Thompson would actually take delight in marking his papers with a broad red pen, making bold X's and then putting a big "F" at the top of his papers.

At the school where Mrs. Thompson taught, she was required to review each child's past records and she put Teddy's off until last. However, when she reviewed his file, she was in for a surprise.

Teddy's first grade teacher wrote, "Teddy is a bright child with a ready laugh. He does his work neatly and has good manners... he is a joy to be around.."His second grade teacher wrote, "Teddy is an excellent student, well liked by his classmates, but he is troubled because his mother has a terminal illness and life at home must be a struggle."

His third grade teacher wrote, "His mother's death has been hard on him. He tries to do his best, but his father doesn't show much interest, and his home life will soon affect him if some steps aren't taken."

Teddy's fourth grade teacher wrote, "Teddy is withdrawn and doesn't show much interest in school. He doesn't have many friends and he sometimes sleeps in class."

By now, Mrs. Thompson realized the problem and she was ashamed of herself. She felt even worse when her students brought her Christmas presents, all wrapped in beautiful ribbons and bright paper, except for Teddy's. His present was clumsily wrapped in the heavy, brown paper that he got from a grocery bag. Mrs. Thompson took pains to open it in the middle of the other presents. Some of the children started to laugh when she found a rhinestone bracelet with some of the stones missing, and a bottle that was one-quarter full of perfume. But she stifled the children's laughter when she exclaimed how pretty the bracelet was, putting it on, and dabbing some of the perfume on her wrist. Teddy Stoddard stayed after school that day just long enough to say, "Mrs. Thompson, today you smelled just like my Mom used to."

After the children left, she cried for at least an hour. On that very day, she quit teaching reading, writing and arithmetic. Instead, she began to teach children. Mrs. Thompson paid particular attention to Teddy. As she worked with him, his mind seemed to come alive. The more she encouraged him, the faster he responded. By the end of the year, Teddy had become one of the smartest children in the class and, despite her lie that she would love all the children the same, Teddy became one of her "teacher's pets."

A year later, she found a note under her door, from Teddy, telling her that she was the best teacher he ever had in his whole life.

Six years went by before she got another note from Teddy. He then wrote that he had finished high school, third in his class, and she was still the best teacher he ever had in life.

Four years after that, she got another letter, saying that while things had been tough at times, he'd stayed in school, had stuck with it, and would soon graduate from college with the highest of honors. He assured Mrs. Thompson that she was still the best and favorite teacher he had ever had in his whole life.

Then four more years passed and yet another letter came. This time he explained that after he got his bachelor's degree, he decided to go a little further. The letter explained that she was still the best and favorite teacher he ever had. But now his name was a little longer. The letter was signed, Theodore F. Stoddard, MD.

There was yet another letter that spring. Teddy said he had met this girl and was going to be married. He explained that his father had died a couple of years ago and he was wondering if Mrs. Thompson might agree to sit at the wedding in the place that was usually reserved for the mother of the groom. Of course, Mrs. Thompson did. She wore that bracelet, the one with several rhinestones missing, and she made sure that she was wearing the perfume that Teddy remembered his mother wearing on their last Christmas together.

They hugged each other, and Dr. Stoddard whispered in Mrs. Thompson's ear, "Thank you, Mrs. Thompson, for believing in me. Thank you so much for making me feel important and showing me that I could make a difference."

Mrs. Thompson, with tears in her eyes, whispered back, "Teddy, you have it all wrong. You were the one who taught me that I could make a difference. I didn't know how to teach until I met you."

(Footnote: Theodore F. Stoddard, MD is the famous doctor at Iowa Methodist in Des Moines that has the Stoddard Cancer Wing.)

MOM'S PLAYGROUND

THE EMAIL FILE

The Littlest Firefighter

The 26-year-old mother stared down at her son who was dying of terminal leukemia. Although her heart was filled with sadness, she also had a strong feeling of determination. Like any parent she wanted her son to grow up and fulfill all his dreams. Now that was no longer possible. The leukemia would see to that. But she still wanted her son's dreams to come true. She took her son's hand and asked, "Billy, did you ever think about what you wanted to be once you grew up? Did you ever dream and wish what you would do with your life?"

"Mommy, I always wanted to be a fireman."

Later that day she went to her local fire department in Phoenix, Arizona, where she met the Fire Chief, who had a heart as big as Phoenix. She explained her son's final wish and asked if it might be possible to give her six year old son a ride around the block on a fire engine. The Chief said, "Look, we can do better than that. If you'll have your son ready at seven o'clock Wednesday morning, we'll make him an honorary fireman for the whole day. He can come down to the fire station, eat with us, go out on the fire calls, and if you'll give us his sizes, we'll get a real fire uniform for him, with a real fire hat -- not a toy one -- with the emblem of the Phoenix Fire Department on it, a yellow slicker like we wear and rubber boots. They're all manufactured right here in Phoenix, so we can get them fast."

Three days later the Chief picked up Billy, dressed him in his fire uniform and escorted him from his hospital bed to the waiting hook and ladder truck. Billy got to sit on the back of the truck and help steer it back to the fire station. He was in heaven. There were three fire calls in Phoenix that day and Billy got to go out on all three. He rode in the different fire engines, the paramedic's van, and even the fire chief's car. He was also videotaped for the local news program.

Having his dream come true, with all the love and attention that was lavished upon him, so deeply touched Billy that he lived three months longer than any doctor thought possible. One night all of his vital signs began to drop dramatically and the head nurse began to call the family members to the hospital. She remembered the day Billy had spent as a fireman, so she called the Fire Chief and requested that a fireman in uniform come to the hospital to be with Billy as he made his transition. The chief replied, "We can do better than that. We'll be there in five minutes. Will you please do me a favour? When you hear the sirens screaming and see the lights flashing, will you announce over the PA system that there is not a fire? It's just the fire department coming to see one of its finest members one more time. And will you open the window to his room? About five minutes later a hook and ladder truck arrived at the hospital, extended its ladder up to Billy's third floor open window and 16 firefighters climbed up the ladder into Billy's room. With his mother's permission, they hugged him and held him and told him how much they loved him.

With his dying breath, Billy looked up at the fire chief and said, "Chief, am I really a fireman now?"

"Billy, you sure are," the chief said. With those words, Billy smiled and closed his eyes one last time.

JAM'S PLAYGROUND

THE EMAIL FILE

Nails In The Fence

There once was a little boy who had a bad temper. His Father gave him a bag of nails and told him that every time he lost his temper, he must hammer a nail into the back of the fence.

The first day the boy had driven 37 nails into the fence. Over the next few weeks, as he learned to control his anger, the number of nails hammered daily gradually dwindled down. He discovered it was easier to hold his temper than to drive those nails into the fence.

Finally the day came when the boy didn't lose his temper at all. He told his father about it and the father suggested that the boy now pull out one nail for each day that he was able to hold his temper. The days passed and the young boy was finally able to tell his father that all the nails were gone.

The father took his son by the hand and led him to the fence. He said, "You have done well, my son, but look at the holes in the fence. The fence will never be the same. When you say things in anger, they leave a scar just like this one. You can put a knife in a man and draw it out. It won't matter how many times you say I'm sorry, the wound is still there. A verbal wound is as bad as a physical one."

Friends are very rare jewels, indeed. They make you smile and encourage you to succeed. They lend an ear, they share words of praise and they always want to open their hearts to us.

JAM'S PLAYGROUND THE EMAIL FILE

A Prayer For Online Buddies

Dear Lord: Every evening As I'm lying here in bed
This tiny little prayer Keeps running through my head.

God bless my Mom and dad And bless my little pup
And look out for my sister When things aren't looking up.

And God, there's one more thing I wish that you could do
Hope you don't mind me asking But please bless my computer too?

Now I know that's not normal To bless a mother board
But just listen a second While I explain to you 'My Lord'.

You see, that little metal box Holds more to me than odds & ends
Inside those small compartments Rest a hundred of my 'BEST FRIENDS'.

I know for sure they like me By the kindness that they give
And this little scrap of metal Is how I travel to where they live.

By faith is how I know them Much the same as you
I share in what life brings them From that our friendship grew.

PLEASE, Take an extra minute From your duties up above
To bless this scrap of metal That's filled with so much love

JAM'S PLAYGROUND THE EMAIL FILE

Seniors' Lament

Just a line to say I'm living - that I'm not among the dead,
Though I'm getting more forgetful and mixed up in the head,
For sometimes I can't remember when I stand at the foot of the stairs,
If I must go up for something or...I've just come down from there.

And before the fridge...so often my poor mind is filled with doubt,
Have I just put the food away, or have I come to take it out?
And then there are times it's dark out with my nightcap on my head,
I don't know if I'm retiring... or, just getting out of bed.

So if it's my turn to write you, there's no need getting sore,
I may think I have written, and don't want to be a bore.
There I stood beside the mail box with my face so very red,
Instead of mailing you my letter, I had opened it...instead.

JIM'S PLAYGROUND

THE EMAIL FILE

The Portrait

A wealthy man and his son loved to collect rare works of art. They had everything in their collection, from Picasso to Raphael. They would often sit together and admire the great works of art. When the Viet Nam conflict broke out, the son went to war. He was very courageous and died in battle while rescuing another soldier. The father was notified and grieved deeply for his only son.

About a month later, just before Christmas, there was a knock at the door. A young man stood at the door with a large package in his hands. He said, "Sir, you don't know me, but I am the soldier for whom your son gave his life. He saved many lives that day, and he was carrying me to safety when a bullet struck him in the heart and he died instantly. He often talked about you, and your love for art."

The young man held out his package. "I know this isn't much. I'm not really a great artist, but I think your son would have wanted you to have this."

The father opened the package. It was a portrait of his son, painted by the young man. He stared in awe at the way the soldier had captured the personality of his son in the painting. The father was so drawn to the eyes that his own eyes welled up with tears.

He thanked the young man and offered to pay him for the picture. "Oh, no sir, I could never repay what your son did for me. It's a gift."

The father hung the portrait over his mantle. Every time visitors came to his home he took them to see the portrait of his son before he showed them any of the other great works he had collected.

The man died a few months later. There was to be a great auction of his paintings. Many influential people gathered, excited over seeing the great paintings and having an opportunity to purchase one for their collection.

On the platform sat the painting of the son. The auctioneer pounded his gavel. "We will start the bidding with this picture of the son. Who will bid for this picture?"

Someone at the back of the room shouted, "We want to see the famous paintings. Skip this one!"

But the auctioneer persisted, "Will someone bid for this painting? Who will start the bidding? \$100, \$200?"

Another voice shouted angrily, "We didn't come to see this painting. We came to see the Van Goghs, the Rembrandts. Get on with the real bids!"

But still the auctioneer continued, "The son! The son! Who'll take the son?" Finally, a voice came from the very back of the room. It was the longtime gardener of the man and his son. He stood and shouted, "I'll give \$10

for the painting!" Being a poor man, it was all he could afford.

"We have \$10, who will bid 20?"

"Give it to him for \$10. Let's see the masters!"

"\$10 is the bid, won't someone bid \$20?"

The crowd was becoming angry. They didn't want the picture of the son. They wanted the more worthy investments for their collections. The auctioneer pounded the gavel. "Going once, twice, SOLD for \$10!"

A man sitting on the second row shouted, "Now let's get on with the collection!"

The auctioneer laid down his gavel. "I'm sorry, the auction is over."

"What about the paintings?"

"I am sorry. When I was called to conduct this auction, I was told of a secret stipulation in the will. I was not allowed to reveal that stipulation until this time. Only the painting of the son would be auctioned. Whoever bought that painting would inherit the entire estate, including the paintings. The man who took the son gets everything."

God gave his Son 2,000 years ago to die on a cruel cross. Much like the auctioneer, His message today is, The Son, the Son, who'll take the Son? Because you see, whoever takes the Son gets everything.

JAMM'S PLAYGROUND

THE EMAIL FILE

When I'm an Old Lady

When I'm an old lady, I'll live with my kids,
and make them so happy, just as they did.
I want to pay back all the joy they've provided,
returning each deed. Oh, they'll be so excited.
When I'm an old lady and live with my kids

I'll write on the wall with reds, whites and blues,
and bounce on the furniture wearing my shoes.
I'll drink from the carton and then leave it out.
I'll stuff all the toilets, and oh, how they'll shout.
When I'm an old lady and live with my kids

When they're on the phone and just out of reach,
I'll get into things like sugar and bleach,
Oh, they'll snap their fingers and then shake their head,
and when that is done I'll hide under the bed
When I'm an old lady and live with my kids

When they cook dinner and call me to meals,
I'll not eat my green beans or salads congealed.
I'll gag on my okra, spill milk on the table
and when they get angry, run fast as I'm able.
When I'm an old lady and live with my kids

I'll sit close to the TV, thru the channels I'll click,
I'll cross both my eyes to see if they stick.
I'll take off my socks and throw one away,
And play in the mud until the end of the day.
When I'm an old lady and live with my kids

And later in bed, I'll lay back and sigh,
and thank God in prayer and then close my eyes
and my kids will look down with a smile slowly creeping,
and say with a groan. "She's so sweet when she's sleeping."
When I'm an old lady and live with my kids.

JAM'S PLAYGROUND

THE EMAIL FILE

'Twas The Night Before Christmas

'Twas the nocturnal segment of the diurnal period preceding the annual yuletide celebration, and throughout our place of residence, kinetic activity was not in evidence among the possessors of this potential, including that species of domestic rodent known as *Mus musculus*. Hosiery was meticulously suspended from the forward edge of the wood-burning caloric apparatus, pursuant to our anticipatory pleasure regarding an imminent visitation from an eccentric philanthropist among whose folkloric appellations is the honorific title of St. Nicholas.

The prepubescent siblings, comfortably ensconced in their respective accommodations of repose, were experiencing various subconscious visual hallucinations of variegated fruit confections moving rhythmically through their cerebra. My conjugal partner and I, attired in our nocturnal cranial coverings, were about to take slumbrous advantage of the hibernal darkness when upon the avenaceous exterior portion of the grounds there ascended such a cacophony of dissonance that I felt compelled to arise with alacrity from my place of repose for the purpose of ascertaining the precise source thereof.

Hastening to the casement, I forthwith opened the barriers sealing the fenestration, noting thereupon that the lunar brilliance without, reflected as it was on the surface of a recent crystalline aqueous precipitation, might be said to rival that of the solar meridian itself -- thus permitting my incredulous optical sensor to peruse a miniature airborne runnered conveyance drawn by an octet of diminutive specimens of the genus *Rangifer*, piloted by a miniscule, aged chauffeur so ebullient and nimble that it became instantly apparent to me that he was indeed our anticipated caller. With his undulate motive power traveling at what may possibly have been more vertiginous velocity than patriotic alar predators, he vociferated loudly, expelled breath musically through contracted labia, and addressed each of the octet by his or her respective cognomen ... "Now Dasher, now Dancer..." et al. -- guiding them to the uppermost exterior level of our abode, through which structure I could readily distinguish the concatenations of each of the 32 cloven pedal extremities.

As I retracted my cranium from its erstwhile location, and was performing a 180-degree pivot, our distinguished visitant achieved -- with utmost celerity and via a downward leap -- entry by way of the smoke passage. He was clad entirely in animal pelts soiled by the ebon residue from the oxidations of carboniferous fuels which had accumulated on the walls thereof. His resemblance to a street vendor I attributed largely to the plethora of assorted playthings which he bore dorsally in a commodious cloth receptacle.

His orbs were scintillant with reflected luminosity, while his submaxillary dermal indentations gave every evidence of engaging amiability. The capillaries of his molar regions and nasal aptenance were engorged with blood which suffused the subcutaneous layers, the former approximating the coloration of Albion's floral emblem, the latter that of the *Prunus avium*, or sweet cherry. His amusing sub- and supra-labials resembled nothing so much as a common loop knot, and their ambient hirsuite facial adornment appeared like small, tabular and columnar crystals of frozen water.

Clenched firmly between his incisors was a smokingpiece whose gray fumes, forming a tenuous ellipse about his occiput, were suggestive of a decorative seasonal circlet of holly. His visage was wider than it was high, and when he waxed audibly mirthful, his corpulent abdominal region undulated in the manner of impectinated fruit syrup in a hemispherical container.

Without utterance and with dispatch, he commenced filling the aforementioned hosiery with articles of merchandise extracted from his aforementioned previously dorsally transported cloth receptacle. Upon completion of this task, he executed an abrupt about- face, placed a single manual digit in lateral juxtaposition to his olfactory organ, inclined his cranium forward in a gesture of leave-taking, and forthwith affected his egress by renegotiating (in reverse) the smoke passage. He then propelled himself in a short vector onto his conveyance, directed a musical expulsion of air through his contracted oral sphincter to the antlered quadrupeds of burden, and proceeded to soar aloft in a movement hitherto observable chiefly among the seed-bearing portions of a common weed.

But I overheard his parting exclamation, audible immediately prior to his vehiculation beyond the limits of visibility: "Ecstatic yuletides to the planetary constituency, and to that self-same assemblage my sincerest wishes for a salubriously beneficial and gratifyingly pleasurable period between sunset and dawn."

JAM'S PLAYGROUND

THE EMAIL FILE

Do It Anyway

People are illogical, unreasonable, and self-centred.
Love them anyway.

If you do good, people will accuse you of selfish ulterior motives.
Do Good anyway.

If you are successful, you win false friends and true enemies.
Succeed anyway.

The good you do today will be forgotten tomorrow.
Do good anyway.

Honesty and frankness make you vulnerable.
Be honest and frank anyway.

The biggest people with the biggest ideas can be shot down with the smallest minds.
Think big anyway.

People favour the underdogs but follow only top dogs.
Fight for a few underdogs anyway.

What you spend years building may be destroyed overnight.
Build anyway.

People really need help but may attack you if you do help them.
Help them anyway.

Give the world the best you have and you'll get kicked in the teeth.
Give the world the best you have anyway.

JAM'S PLAYGROUND

THE EMAIL FILE

Parents Vs Children

After creating heaven and earth, God created Adam and Eve.

And the first thing He said to them was: "Don't."

"Don't what?" Adam asked.

"Don't eat the forbidden fruit." God said.

"Forbidden fruit? We got forbidden fruit? Hey, Eve ... we got Forbidden Fruit!"

"No way!"

"Yes, WAY!"

"Don't eat that fruit!" said God.

"Why?"

"Because I'm your Father and I said so!" said God, wondering why he hadn't stopped after making the elephants.

A few minutes later God saw the kids having an apple break and was angry.

"Didn't I tell you not to eat that fruit?" the First Parent asked.

"Uh huh," Adam replied.

"Then why did you?"

"I dunno," Eve answered.

"She started it!" Adam said.

"Did Not!"

"Did so!"

"DID NOT!"

Having had it with the two of them, God's punishment was that Adam and Eve should have children of their own. Thus the pattern was set and it has never changed. But there is a reassurance in this story. If you have persistently and lovingly tried to give them wisdom and they haven't taken it, don't be hard on yourself. If God had trouble handling children, what makes you think it would be a piece of cake for you?

JAM'S PLAYGROUND

THE EMAIL FILE

Thanks to our long time American friend, Teresa Hoskins, for forwarding us this one that she had received, believed to be a true story. The original author is unknown:

Red Marbles and Green Peas

During the waning years of the depression in a small south eastern Idaho community, I used to stop by Mr. Miller's roadside stand for farm-fresh produce as the season made it available. Food and money were still extremely scarce and bartering was used, extensively.

One particular day Mr. Miller was bagging some early potatoes for me. I noticed a small boy, delicate of bone and feature, ragged but clean, hungrily apprising a basket of freshly picked green peas. I paid for my potatoes but was also drawn to the display of fresh green peas.

I am a pushover for creamed peas and new potatoes. Pondering the peas, I couldn't help overhearing the conversation between Mr. Miller and the ragged boy next to me.

"Hello Barry, how are you today?"

"H'lo, Mr. Miller. Fine, thank ya. Jus' admirin' them peas ... sure look good."

"They are good, Barry. How's your Ma?"

"Fine. Gittin' stronger alla' time."

"Good. Anything I can help you with?"

"No, Sir. Jus' admirin' them peas."

"Would you like to take some home?"

"No, Sir. Got nuthin' to pay for 'em with."

"Well, what have you to trade me for some of those peas?"

"All I got's my prize marble here."

"Is that right? Let me see it."

"Here 'tis. She's a dandy."

"I can see that. Hmmmm, only thing is this one is blue and I sort of go for red. Do you have a red one like this at home?"

"Not 'zackleybut, almost."

"Tell you what. Take this sack of peas home with you and next trip this way let me look at that red marble."

"Sure will. Thanks, Mr. Miller."

Mrs. Miller, who had been standing nearby, came over to help me. With a smile she said: "There are two other boys like him in our community, all three are in very poor circumstances. Jim just loves to bargain with them for peas, apples, tomatoes or whatever."

When they come back with their red marbles, and they always do, he decides he doesn't like red after all and he sends them home with a bag of produce for a green marble or an orange one, perhaps."

I left the stand, smiling to myself, impressed with this man. A short time later I moved to Utah but I never forgot the story of this man, the boys and their bartering.

Several years went by each more rapid than the previous one. Just recently I had occasion to visit some old friends in that Idaho community and while I was there learned that Mr. Miller had died.

They were having his viewing that evening and knowing my friends wanted to go, I agreed to accompany them. Upon our arrival at the mortuary we fell into line to meet the relatives of the deceased and to offer whatever words of comfort we could. Ahead of us in line were three young men. One was in an army uniform and the other two wore nice haircuts, dark suits and white shirts ... very professional looking.

They approached Mrs. Miller, standing smiling and composed, by her husband's casket. Each of the young men hugged her, kissed her on the cheek, spoke briefly with her and moved on to the casket. Her misty light blue eyes followed them as, one by one, each young man stopped briefly and placed his own warm hand over the cold pale hand in the casket. Each left the mortuary, awkwardly, wiping his eyes.

Our turn came to meet Mrs. Miller. I told her who I was and mentioned the story she had told me about the marbles. Eyes glistening she took my hand and led me to the casket. "Those three young men, that just left, were the boys I told you about. They just told me how they appreciated the things Jim "traded" them. Now, at last, when Jim could not change his mind about color or size...they came to pay their debt.

"We've never had a great deal of the wealth of this world," she confided, "but, right now, Jim would consider himself the richest man in Idaho."

With loving gentleness she lifted the lifeless fingers of her deceased husband. Resting underneath were three, magnificently shiny, red marbles.

Moral: We will not be remembered by our words, but by our kind deeds.

JAM'S PLAYGROUND

THE EMAIL FILE

Making Pancakes

Six-year-old Brandon decided one Saturday morning to fix his parents pancakes. He found a big bowl and spoon, pulled a chair to the counter, opened the cupboard and pulled out the heavy flour canister, spilling it on the floor. He scooped some of the flour into the bowl with his hands, mixed in most of a cup of milk and added some sugar, leaving a floury trail on the floor which by now had a few tracks left by his kitten.

Brandon was covered with flour and getting frustrated. He wanted this to be something very good for Mom and Dad, but it was getting very bad. He didn't know what to do next, whether to put it all into the oven or on the stove and he didn't know how the stove worked!). Suddenly he saw his kitten licking from the bowl of mix and reached to push her away, knocking the egg carton to the floor. Frantically he tried to clean up this monumental mess but slipped on the eggs, getting his pajamas white and sticky.

And just then he saw Dad standing at the door. Big crocodile tears welled up in Brandon's eyes. All he'd wanted to do was something good, but he'd made a terrible mess. He was sure a scolding was coming, maybe even a spanking. But his father just watched him. Then, walking through the mess, he picked up his crying son, hugged him and loved him, getting his own pajamas white and sticky in the process.

That's how God deals with us. We try to do something good in life, but it turns into a mess. Our marriage gets all sticky or we insult a friend, or we can't stand our job, or our health goes sour. Sometimes we just stand there in tears because we can't think of anything else to do. That's when God picks us up and loves us and forgives us, even though some of our mess gets all over Him.

But just because we might mess up, we can't stop trying to "make pancakes" for God or for others. Sooner or later we'll get it right, and then they'll be glad we tried.

JAMIE'S PLAYGROUND THE EMAIL FILE

Gold Wrapping Paper

Some time ago a mother punished her 5 year old daughter for wasting a roll of expensive gold wrapping paper. Money was tight and she became even more upset when the child used the gold paper to decorate a box to put under the Christmas tree. Nevertheless, the little girl brought the gift box to her mother the next morning and said, "This is for you, Momma."

The mother was embarrassed by her earlier overreaction, but her anger flared again when she opened the box and found it was empty. She spoke to her daughter in a harsh manner. "Don't you know, young lady, when you give someone a present there's supposed to be something inside the package?"

She had tears in her eyes and said, "Oh, Momma, it's not empty! I blew kisses into it until it was full."

The mother was crushed. She fell on her knees and put her arms around her little girl, and she begged her forgiveness for her thoughtless anger.

An accident took the life of the child only a short time later, and it is told that the mother kept that gold box by her bed for all the years of her life. Whenever she was discouraged or faced difficult problems she would open the box and take out an imaginary kiss and remember the love of the child who had put it there.

In a very real sense, each of us, as human beings, have been given a Golden box filled with unconditional love and kisses from our children, family, friends and GOD. There is no more precious possession anyone could hold.

JAM'S PLAYGROUND

THE EMAIL FILE

How Much Does A Miracle Cost?

Tess was a precocious eight years old when she heard her Mom and Dad talking about her little brother, Andrew. All she knew was that he was very sick and they were completely out of money. They were moving to an apartment complex next month because Daddy didn't have the money for the doctor bills and our house. Only a very costly surgery could save him now and it was looking like there was no one to loan them the money. She heard Daddy say to her tearful Mother with whispered desperation, "Only a miracle can save him now."

Tess went to her bedroom and pulled a glass jelly jar from its hiding place in the closet. She poured all the change out on the floor and counted it carefully. Three times, even. The total had to be exactly perfect. No chance here for mistakes.

Carefully placing the coins back in the jar and twisting on the cap, she slipped out the back door and made her way 6 blocks to Rexall's Drug Store with the big red Indian Chief sign above the door.

She waited patiently for the pharmacist to give her some attention but he was too intently talking to another man to be bothered by an eight-year-old at this moment. Tess twisted her feet to make a scuffing noise. Nothing. She cleared her throat with the most disgusting sound she could muster. No good. Finally she took a quarter from her jar and banged it on the glass counter. That did it!

"And what do you want?" the pharmacist asked in an annoyed tone of voice. "I'm talking to my brother from Chicago whom I haven't seen in ages," he said without waiting for a reply to his question.

"Well, I want to talk to you about my brother," Tess answered back in the same annoyed tone. "He's really, really sick ... and I want to buy a miracle."

"I beg your pardon?" said the pharmacist.

"His name is Andrew and he has something bad growing inside his head and my Daddy says only a miracle can save him now. So how much does a miracle cost?"

"We don't sell miracles here, little girl. I'm sorry but I can't help you." The pharmacist said, softening a little.

"Listen, I have the money to pay for it. If it isn't enough, I will get the rest. Just tell me how much it costs."

The pharmacist's brother was a well-dressed man. He stooped down and asked the little girl, "What kind of a miracle does your brother need?"

"I don't know," Tess replied with her eyes welling up. "I just know he's really sick and Mommy says he needs a

operation. But my Daddy can't pay for it, so I want to use my money.

"How much do you have?" asked the man from Chicago.

"One dollar and eleven cents," Tess answered barely audibly. "And it's all the money I have, but I can get some more if I need to."

"Well, what a coincidence," smiled the man. "A dollar and eleven cents - the exact price of a miracle for little brothers." He took her money in one hand and with the other hand he grasped her and said "Take me to where you live. I want to see your brother and meet your parents. Let's see if I have the kind of miracle you need."

That well dressed man was a surgeon, specializing in neuro-surgery. The operation was completed without charge and it wasn't long until Andrew was home again and doing well. Mom and Dad were happily talking about the chain of events that had led them to this place. "That surgery," her mom whispered. "was a real miracle. I wonder how much it would have cost?"

Tess smiled. She knew exactly how much a miracle cost ... one dollar and eleven cents ... plus the faith of a little child.