

Day 7

excerpts from : ***Love From the Inside Out***

Johnnie was a high school junior enrolled in Upward Bound, federally-sponsored program born in the mid-60s to provide academic and personal support services to economically disadvantaged but promising secondary school youngsters with college potential.

I was her tutor/counselor in the summer of 1965 and she stood out from the other young women who comprised my student group. She was extremely bright intellectually, but she seemed socially reserved and somewhat personally distant. Her glasses always slipped to the end of her nose, her athletic legs were scarred and she wore clean but tattered clothes. She was strong enough to be respected by her peers, determined enough to survive and gentle enough to suggest vulnerability. Her smile, as did her manner, showed caution and anticipation, as if to signal, "Maybe I can trust you, I'm just not sure. But even if I can't, I'd like to."

Johnnie became pregnant during academic year 1965-1966, and, horrified, I told my mother. I rambled on about the sin of it all, the scandal of it all. As I ranted and raved, I was cut short by my mother's expression. In contrast to my anger and indignance, she spoke calmly and with concern – not about Johnnie, but about me. Why was I so upset? Shocked that she would pose this question, I exclaimed something to the effect of how she had taught me that intercourse before marriage was wrong, that bringing children into the world without marriage was wrong, and numerous other banterings that amounted to wrong, wrong, wrong. So much self righteous rhetoric spewed forth from my mouth that I became physically exhausted by this diatribe.

Whereupon, I received maternal lesson number 78, which went like this:

"Is that all you have learned from me? If so, then I have failed, because I also tried to teach you compassion. Johnnie must not be judged by you or me. I thought you knew her, but you apparently never saw her – the *real* Johnnie -- at all. Her inner beauty... her kindness...her unfolding as a young woman. I thought she told us about her life through her poetry...gave us glimpses of her struggle...confided in us about her fears -- but you apparently never heard her. Look past her clothes, her roughness, her gawkiness and look into her heart. Look past her behavior and into her soul. You say you love her. Well she needs your love now even more than before."

"When you look at someone, look at him good. Try to see where he has come from and what he has experienced before judging where he is now. Try to see the person within, and instead of fretting about what he has done, look to see who he *is*. If you practice this day after day, you'll begin to understand compassion."

"Johnnie deserves your best vision. Look at her from the inside out and then you will learn to love her from the inside out."