

An Everlasting Lesson

The squeaking sound of rubber soles on the painted gymnasium floor
Built rapidly to a symphonic crescendo as the music of movement
Was abruptly ended by the shrill of a solitary whistle,
The young men circled swiftly around me awaiting a final word;
“Life is a giant circle, love grows when received and returned..
Lessons learned expand when understood and then taught.”
And after a caring handshake we dispersed and departed into the wintry night.

As my white car darted into the black of the night
And weaved its way through the escalating hills of the suburbs,
I was hypnotized by the colored lights, reflecting on
The many young men and women who have enriched my life,
Feeling blessed in so many ways to have had the chance to give.
And now, as these adolescents have grown to adults,
Fortunate to have the opportunity to receive.

As I swiftly arrive to the comforts of my home, the pot belly stove
Extinguishes the chill of the December night.
The home has been transformed once again into a magical winter wonderland.
I walk through an intricate maze of lights and decorations
And stop to rest amidst dressed bears, antique trains, and Christmas villages.
I gaze at the splendor of a perfect tree hosting hundreds of ornaments and
Marvel at the many mementos of all colors, shapes and sizes that sparkle all around me.

But there beneath the spotlight of a shining string of bright lights
Glow a simple ornament, hung meticulously in a special place of honor.
A smiling bear in a green basketball uniform holds a bright orange ball
In one hand and waves with the other, seemingly beckoning me to remember,
His black, penetrating eyes look piercingly into my soul.
I fondly recall this gift from a thirteen year old girl, who graced my life for too short of a time.
Slowly turning it over, I read the simple inscription: To Coach, Love, Cindy 1987

Just months ago, the expected but unwanted call finally arrived,
“Hurry, Dad, you have to see her, she wants to say goodbye.”
As I tearfully drove through an endless stream of ever blurring red lights
I finally smiled as I remembered the hundreds of trips our girl’s basketball team took together.
Driving and speaking in parables, trying to guide them through their troubled adolescent years.
I recalled the beauty and light that radiated from her angelic face and
Remembered her passion for life, her excitement and appreciation of the most simple things.

Moments later, memories dissipated as I entered her hospital room and saw her weakening smile.
She bravely held my trembling hand, begged me to be strong and
Thanked me for the many lessons that we had shared.
My voice shook as I asked her how one so young could acquire
Such wisdom and understanding in accepting such a seemingly unfair fate.
She answered that she was at peace, that she had no regrets in her life,
Completely content with a life shortened in years, but lengthened in love.

She expressed gratitude for the final months she was able to spend with her parents.
And happily spoke of the last visits she had planned
With her brother and sister, nieces and nephews, and friends from the past.
We laughed as we happily reminisced of our years together.
“Thanks for being my coach,” she whispered.
I tearfully thanked her for being my teacher in her final moments,
For including me in her circle and courageously sharing her last lessons.

And now, as I feel the wooden ornament in my hand
I am overwhelmed by her presence in this brief moment in time.
The grandfather clock strikes the hour, calling me back to reality
And I smile as I remember that the circle of life is completed.
Love given grows when received and returned,
Lessons learned expand when understood and then taught.
Teacher becomes student, student becomes teacher....

May this Christmas season remind us to appreciate the blessings that we have
And to live each day without regrets, always mindful of the endless circle of giving and receiving.