

# Unconditional Love

As I lie awake in the middle of the night, words of tribute to my recently-deceased brother are flowing. He left us suddenly, going through the ice on the lake on a cold winter night in Wisconsin. I knew he was wise beyond wise and I thought, would live to 100. I think everybody thought so too, as he left a whole community in shock, and started an overwhelming wave of love pouring into the family. No doubt, this is just a return of the love he gave to others over his lifetime.



Well-liked, yes, but we had no idea how much he was loved. His constant warm smile made people feel accepted for who they are, and he always seemed glad to see you. Gentle, kind, and a patient listener that seem to choose the most effective words when he spoke. Perhaps we took all of this a little for granted in his 48 years of life, but I know I'll always treasure all of his words—and that smile—for the rest of my days. It's funny how the teacher arrives, when the student is ready. I received the gift of having a lot of time with him over the last couple of years, just as I was wanting to open my heart more to loving ALL, no matter what.

We all know that loving someone that loves us is easy. The really hard part of being human is loving ALL people, ALL the time, no matter what they do. Sure, we may have the compassion to “forgive them, for they know not what they do,” sometimes, but more often, we'd love to give some very-deserved revenge! Ah, to just WAKE THEM UP and help them realize that everyone knows their secret: They don't like themselves at all and therefore, constantly hurt others! (It is impossible to intentionally seek to harm others when you have any self-respect or self-love, so it's very obvious.) I truly want to ask people like this, “What can we do to help you start to like yourself? Don't you know everyone sees through you and your nasty ways? Don't you realize NO ONE likes what you're doing to others? Seriously, how can we help you?”

My brother and I used to talk about certain people like this a lot, because we were both very challenged by it. We didn't like being angry at them and we REALLY didn't like how they went around hurting and misleading everyone with their constant lies. We wanted mostly to protect those we love from them. While we all know that we need to have standards and stay clear of such people when we can, there are times when they're planted right in your life, and there's nothing you can do about it. In this case, I don't think it's a mistake . . . I think they are placed in front of us for our own growth. I have to say, that each horrible incident with these people is to credit for my continued positive growth and desire to be a loving person, no matter what. At the time, sure, they make me furious. The SH\*\* they blind-side you and your loved ones with is inconceivable, and always at the most unimaginable times! One can't understand how anyone with a conscience could possibly live with themselves for being so incredibly hurtful and vicious to the most trusting and vulnerable people in their lives! But I'm realizing it's not for me to understand; it's for me to learn to love, in spite of all of this.

That's where my reflection of my brother's life comes in. The overwhelming message from the community is, “He loved and accepted everyone.” WOW! Seriously, I want to be like that before I go. Thanks to him, I have a great role model. Even as we talked about seemingly horrible people, we didn't dwell on it. We simply agreed, “It's just too stupid to talk about, and it's a lesson in loving ALL.” No, we were not happy about it, but knew it was an opportunity for personal growth. It also taught us to speak up and defend and support others they were hurting, in some kind way if we could, but to be honest about what was happening instead of pretending the ugliness was not there. Close friends and family also let us know when the back-stabbing was going on and this is a beautiful way to always know who your true friends are.

More than anything, though, the growth comes when you have to look hard at yourself in order to forgive them and not take on the negative feelings or actions they're trying to splatter on you. "Is this true? If not, why does it bother me?" Remember, you don't have to respond. You don't even have to acknowledge them or their SH\*\*. You CAN just simply WALK AWAY, and trust me, I will start doing this more often—maybe always? They're going to go for your weak spot, trust me, but it's where it needs to go for you to truly evaluate where you are in life and strengthen the "weak muscles" so to speak. For instance, if you love your family more than anything in life, like my brother did, they're going to try to tear the family apart. Do they know what your insecurities or struggles are? They're going to try their damndest to increase that problem or challenge to break you. EXPECT IT—it is THEIR JOB! Would life be easier without them? You bet! Would we evolve into the best, well-rounded person we could possibly be in our lifetime without them? Sadly, no . . . and you know, we are here for this very big purpose—to grow into the large, loving heart we were born with . . . to be ALL we can be. The ultimate purpose for this life: Unconditional Love, and how would we get there without people like this? In essence, they are a blessing and a very necessary part of our journey. Hey, I don't like it, but I really think that's how it is.

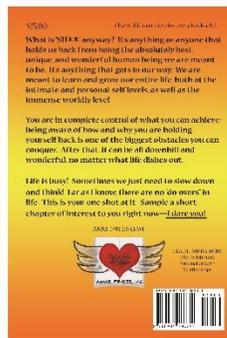
Where's my happy ending? My loving, caring brother taught me the biggest life lesson, only after he was gone. In my memories of him and missing him, I realized that the peace he brought me and so many others, just by being who he was, FAR OVERSHADOWS anything any of these miserable people could ever do to me, EVER AGAIN! I see the light and love in his constant smile, and I see ALL IS WELL and NOTHING can harm me. He's got my back, even now, and I can finally let any lingering resentment go. Light ALWAYS conquers dark . . . or I should say, dark is just a place that light is not shining. My light, others' light, my deceased brother's light, it's BLINDING compared to anything these people could ever do. My heart is at peace, knowing this. My soul is forever grateful for both the gift from my brother's life and at the moment, and, believe it or not, for my "growth opportunities." Stand by me brother, to keep me clear-hearted to always remember this, even on my most exhausting human days. Together, we can keep the light bright for everyone, and we mustn't give up hope that if they're ever ready, some light will fall onto them too.

Remember, loved ones never leave us—just listen with your heart, and you'll hear them! ~Mary Anne

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