

# HomeWord

Dedicated to household harmony & family faith

## Sharing About

- Courage and Caution for Love's Sake
- A Jubilee Challenge
- Symptoms of a Healing Family

## Cow Kissing Cautions by Ken Potts

During a recent trip to the children's zoo, my three-year-old daughter decided to befriend a rather large cow. She started with a cautious pat on the brow. Receiving a positive response from her new acquaintance, she decided that hugging the cow's neck was probably safe as well. Then, mustering her courage, she leaned forward and planted a gentle kiss on the still accommodating heifer's head.

Unfortunately, at this very same moment, a small bee decided to make friends with the cow's other end. Startled, the animal turned suddenly to see what was threatening it. In the process the heifer slammed Natalie right into the wooden fence that separated them.

So much for bovine buddies. More than a bit frightened, Natalie required quite a lot of tender loving care before she was willing to venture back toward the petting area.

But after a few minutes, and to everyone's surprise, she once again walked up to the cow, patted its head, and began to discuss with the animal their recent mutually upsetting experience.

What struck me as I thought about all this later is just how dangerous love can be, even for a three-year-old. Natalie was just trying to be a friend. And the cow didn't really mean to push her. But through circumstances beyond either of their control, they both wound up surprised and scared. Love is exactly

like that. No matter how much we love or are loved, no matter how careful we are, no matter how well we get along, no matter how clearly we communicate, sooner or later we're going to hurt and get hurt by the ones we love. More often than not, such hurting is unintentional. We don't think things through, we misunderstand, we misjudge. And people we care deeply about get hurt. And people we trust hurt us.

But sometimes we mean to hurt others. We are scared or angry or frustrated or whatever, and we lash out at the ones we love. We may not even be upset with them—they may be just the first ones to get in our way. But we do intend to hurt somebody. And because we know the weaknesses and vulnerabilities of our loved ones, we are especially good at hurting them.

I'm not sure there is really any way to not get hurt when we love. To avoid hurt we'd have to avoid love. And though many of us probably need to be more selective about whom we love, eventually even the most carefully chosen, trustworthy lover will hurt us in some way.

This brings us back to cow kissing—cow kissing caution and cow kissing courage. Ultimately, loving, especially loving after we have been hurt by those we love, is an act of courage. We need to have the courage to forgive, to trust, to try again—the courage of a three-year-old.

I guess lessons in love start early.

## A Jubilee Prayer for Families

(based on Isaiah 58:6–10)

by Kathy Finley

I'll tell you what it really means to worship the Lord. Remove the chains of prisoners who are chained unjustly.

*But my thighs are too fat, Mom!*

Free those who are abused.

*It's not okay to talk to your brother that way!*

Share your food with everyone who is hungry; share your home with the poor and homeless.

*Can my friend stay for dinner?*

Give clothes to those in need; don't turn away your relatives.

*There's a clothes drive next week at school, what can I bring?*

Then your light will shine like the dawning sun, and you will be quickly healed. Your honesty will protect you as you advance, and the glory of the Lord will defend you from behind. When you beg the Lord for help, he will answer, "Here I am!"

Don't mistreat others or falsely accuse them or say something cruel.

*I'm sure your teacher didn't mean to embarrass you by what she said.*

Give your food to the hungry and care for the homeless.

*The parish food bank is looking for volunteer help for this coming week.*

Then your light will shine in the dark; your darkest hour will be like the noonday sun.

# Characteristics of Healthy, Healing Families

by Leif Kehrwald

The best families never fight, right? Yeah, and the toilet seat is always in the right position too. It's a myth that healthy families never have any problems. If we try to live up to that challenge, we might as well bury ourselves in the sand . . . or in that huge pile of dirty laundry.

But I didn't say that healthy families don't exist. Indeed they do. On any given day, yours and mine just might be included among them. There are several characteristics common among healthy families who heal and reconcile well. Can you guess what they are?

Healthy families recognize that conflict is inevitable. Strained relations are natural and normal parts of family life, and these qualities don't automatically characterize a family as dysfunctional or pathologic. Healthy families embrace these challenges, and confront and talk about their differences and struggles. They recognize the things they can change—and act on them—and the things they cannot change. Further, they recognize that conflict is really the flip side of intimacy; if you want one, you have to learn to deal with the other. Think of a chronic struggle within your family. Is it changeable? If not, discuss together how your family must simply embrace it.

Healthy families seek solutions rather than lay blame. Reconciling families acknowledge their hurts, but then they move on and put most of their energy into seeking solutions so that the hurt does not resurface.

Family meetings can be a great help. A simple four-step process can guide your family through problem solving:

1. Brainstorm all possible solutions.
2. Prioritize the ideas according to most helpful and most doable.
3. Choose one solution that all can agree to.
4. Set a timeline to implement and then evaluate the solution.

Try these steps in a family meeting. You'll be pleased at how they work.

Healthy, healing families distinguish between the person and the act. By using careful language, they decry the misdeed but affirm the person. Children and adults are not "bad" even when they make poor choices. Pay close attention to what you say to fellow family members in the coming week. Do your statements distinguish between who the person is (lovable), and what the person does?

Healthy families understand the difference between excusing and forgiving. When I excuse rather than forgive, I don't acknowledge that I've been hurt or that a hurt even occurred. I only admit that something unfortunate happened. But when I forgive, the hurt is acknowledged. While it may be inexcusable, it is forgivable. Excusing the excusable is easy, requiring only modest social courtesy. Forgiveness is the bigger challenge, calling for genuine humility, honesty, and vulnerability. Reflect on your relationship with each family member. When conflict arises, do you tend to excuse it—sort of sweep it under the rug—or can you acknowledge the hurt and move toward forgiveness?

Healthy families ritualize and celebrate their healing and forgiveness. When the family breaks through their conflict into intimacy, they hug,

smile, eat, laugh, tickle, and sometimes cry with joy and relief. And they offer a prayer of thanksgiving to God for guiding them through a potentially dangerous encounter. Think about your family. How can you celebrate your times of healing and reconciling?

These are the things that healthy, healing families do. And remember, on any given day, your family may be one of those families. So take another look at these activities, and bring to mind a recent example of when your family did exactly that. Come on. Give it a little more thought and reflection. . . . See? Even your family, and mine, can be counted among those who heal.

## Symptoms of Family Healing

Watch for these signs of healing:

- a tendency to think and act spontaneously rather than from fear based on past experiences
- an unmistakable ability to enjoy each moment
- a loss of interest in judging other people
- a loss of interest in judging self
- frequent overwhelming episodes of appreciation
- contented feelings of connectedness with others and with nature
- frequent attacks of smiling
- an uncontrollable urge to extend love to others

If you have all or even most of the above symptoms, please be advised that your condition may be irreversible. If you are exposed to anyone exhibiting these symptoms, remain exposed at your own risk.

*HomeWord* is edited by Leif Kehrwald and is published monthly for parish bulletins and individual households by Family Faith-Life Resources of Saint Mary's Press.

Reprint permission is granted for distribution within your parish or institution.

Write to *HomeWord* at  
Saint Mary's Press  
702 Terrace Heights  
Winona, MN 55987-1320  
leifk@worldnet.att.net  
Phone: 800-533-8095