

A SURE THING

The ride to take Katie to school takes between ten and twelve minutes, and our conversations are usually fairly light stuff – special school activities, how long it is until the weekend, whether or not we need to stop at the store for Cheetos – things like that. But not this particular morning. After two or three minutes of silence, she came out with this: “Daddy do you love Mommie more than me?” “No Child”, I answered. She immediately came back with, “Do you love me more than Mommie?” I could almost hear the smile that I knew was on her face. “No Child”, I answered again. “You mean you don’t love us?” she asked. I could hear the disappointment in her voice. “Sweetheart, of course I love you” I said, “I love both of you more than anything in the world, but I love the two of you differently.” I got a quick glance at her expression in the rear view mirror, and I could tell that something about that answer was less than satisfactory. “What do you mean that you love us ‘differently?’” she asked, almost with a scowl.

There was no doubt in my mind that this conversation was going to require more time than just this 10-minute ride to school, so pre-emptively I said, “You know Sweetheart, that is a very big question, and we’ll start on it now, but we’ll talk a lot more about it during the coming months and years – a whole lot more, I promise. But there are many kinds of love. For instance, there is the kind of love that attracts a man and a woman to each other and makes them want to spend their time together and to have a family. Then when they have a child, they love the child with a love that is just as good and just as strong, but it’s different in some ways. It makes them want to look after and protect the child and to raise it to be a good and happy person. Then there is another, similar in ways but still different, type of love that the child has for the parents. Then as the child grows up she eventually meets a guy that she will love in a different way than she does her parents and her other friends, and she’ll want to go and spend her time with him and maybe start a family of her own.”

I knew it was a big thought, and I waited for her to process it. I glanced at her in the rearview mirror and noticed that her lips were quivering. She was at, or maybe just past the point of tears as she said almost pleading, “But Daddy I want to stay with you and Mommie.” “Well that’ll be fine, Sweetheart,” I replied, “you stay with us just as long as you want to, because that’s what I want too. But you know, most people eventually find somebody that they feel very special about and want to go and be with them.” She looked to be very weighed down by that thought – almost in distress, as she asked in a very subdued voice, “And will I find somebody?” “I can’t be 100% sure, but you probably will,” I replied. She was very quiet after that exchange, apparently deep in thought, and we were almost to school. Finally she looked up at me in the rearview. “Daddy,” she said, “When the time comes, will you help me find a good person for me to be with?” “I certainly will, Sweetheart,” I said, “you can bet on it.”

Having taken care of that future bit of unpleasantness, she smiled as we made the turn into school, and the weight shifted from her shoulders to mine. I smiled too, as I reached down and turned off the tape recorder. “You’ll be worth a fortune to me in the years to

come,” I thought. No, just kidding. This little transcript is all there will be to remind both of us that there really was a time - for one brief, shining moment - that she was happy and contented to trust my judgement.

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