

LOVE AND FRIENDSHIP

"I Love You, I Hate You...Now Get Lost"

Sonia Hernandez

Love...some swear by it; others, well, just swear at it. There is no doubt that love is one of the most wonderful, confusing, maddening, and delirious emotions that we experience in our lives. While we know how this particular emotion makes us feel, being able to define it is more complicated. What is it about this four-letter word that makes it so hard to define? Why is there not a clear-cut answer to what love is? Surely someone must hold the answer, right? The only thing we can know for sure is that only through personal experience, can we begin to understand one-tenth of what love really is. While I still am not fully able to comprehend what it entails to love or be loved, I do know that what little knowledge I now possess was largely in part because of my mother.

For most of my childhood and adolescence, my mother and I never saw eye to eye on anything. We constantly argued and yelled at each other. The littlest mistakes would be grounds for an argument. I didn't do the dishes the night before; I didn't make my bed; I made the lemonade too sweet (or sour); I burnt the toast; I sighed the wrong way; I eyed her the wrong way...nothing I did was ever right. Our fights were emotional battles that left deep wounds as we tried to hurt each other with

bitter remarks. She would yell that I was a disappointment to her, while I screamed that she was the worst mother in the world. The arguments usually ended with my bedroom door slamming and my mother trailing after me. I would spend the rest of the night crying on my bed with only my tears to keep me company.

My dissatisfaction with my mother began to consume me and infect my relationship with others. I began to get irritated with my friends and deliberately pick fights with the guy I was seeing. Even my once loving demeanor toward my cat, Stewy, had turned malicious. I grew impatient and neglectful of him, constantly yelling and throwing things at him to get him to leave me alone. Then one morning, as I called him to come inside, he didn't return. I wasn't too concerned because I had just assumed that he was still out and about. This continued for a couple of days, but by the fifth day, I began to worry. Horrible scenarios began to conjure in my head. Thoughts of snow plows, cars, and wild animals plagued my mind. I missed my cat and was scared to even imagine the possibility of his being dead. I'm slightly ashamed to admit that I cried at the thought of never seeing Stewy again.

After waiting for so long, I decided to send a search party to find him, and by search party, I mean my sister and me. As she and I got ready to face the freezing cold, my mother just sat by and laughed at us. She kept saying that we were wasting

our time and that Stewy was probably dead. "Wow, if you are doing all of this for a cat, I can only imagine what you would do if I went missing," my mother said laughing.

"See, that is the difference between you two. I actually love Stewy," I said. As soon as those words left my mouth, I knew I had overstepped some boundary. The look on my mother's face was one that I had never seen before. Normally, I would rejoice at having provoked a reaction from her, but someone I knew I had probably gone a bit too far. Sure, we argued and said mean things to each other on a daily basis, but my mother never once said she didn't love me or that she hated me. My mother just looked at me and went to her room without saying a word. My sister and I went outside into the bitter cold, but it was no match for the icy stare my mother had given me.

We searched for my cat for nearly two hours that evening. We went door to door asking neighbors and strangers if they had seen our cat. Some people proved to be helpful, while others were just plain annoyed that we had brought them from their warm, cozy chairs to the freezing cold. It was starting to get dark and my little sister was getting scared, so I left her with neighbors and said I would be by later to pick her up. As I continued on with the search, I was suddenly smacked with loneliness. My sister was no longer there to keep me company, my cat was missing, and my mother was probably disowning me at that very moment. For reasons that are beyond me, I couldn't

help but cry. What if my cat were really gone? The last memories of my cat were of my screaming and yelling at him. How is it possible to treat someone you love so much so badly? The stinging that my tears caused upon my cheek as they hit the cold was not the only pain I felt that night.

Suddenly, I remembered every fight I had had with my mother. *I can't wait to leave this place and get as far away from you as possible! I don't know what I did to deserve someone as horrible as you for a mother! I actually loved Stewy!* With each occurring memory, my stomach began to work itself in knots. Had I really said such malicious comments to my mom? If I did, I didn't really mean any of it. I mean, that's what mothers and daughters are supposed to do, right? My mom knows that...doesn't she? Does my mom really think I hate her? The wind suddenly became colder and picked up its pace. I braced my coat to my chest to keep the chilly air out, but it was too late. My insides were already bitter and cold.

I finally had to realize that I was not going to find Stewy that night and abandoned my search. When I got home, I was surprised to see that my mom was sitting in the living room, sewing. She is rarely in there, since she doesn't like to run the risk of dirtying it. "Did you find the cat?" she asked, not looking up from stitching.

"No," I responded. I felt a slight twinge in my nose, a sure sign that tears were on their way.

“Did any of the neighbors say anything?”

“No.”

“Well, has anyone at least SEEN the damn cat?”

“What do you care?!” I yelled as I began to sob. My mom got up and hugged me as she walked me to the couch (I had to take off my shoes, though). She told me that she cared a lot about the cat because she knew how much he means to me. I know that my mom was trying to make me feel better, but I couldn’t help but be pugnacious and point out that she never had acted as if she cared before. “Just because I’m not constantly doting over him, doesn’t mean I don’t care,” she said, brushing my hair, “not everything in life needs to be reassured, especially not with love. If we need constant reassurance that we are loved, then love becomes nothing more than an object that is exchanged. It loses one of its key meanings.”

“Oh, yeah, and what’s that?” I asked somewhat bitterly.

“Faith, trust, hope, and conviction. If you have the good grace of having someone tell you that they love you, well then, you better believe it. They do, so why shouldn’t you? Just because you haven’t told me you love me any time recently doesn’t mean I’ve stopped believing you have, or vice-versa.” I couldn’t help but laugh and ask her how delirious was I the last time I told her that I loved her. She pinched me for my smart-ass question and told me that, when I was little, I would pop out of the weirdest places and scare her by screaming “I love you,

mommy!” Well, the look on my face when she told me this must have given me away, as she squeezed my shoulder and told me that she still had plenty of “I love you mommies” to last her awhile.

Shortly afterwards, my little, philandering kitty finally came home to me after nearly eight days. I was a little more than thrilled to have him back, that is, until he threw up on my comforter a couple of hours later. Before all of this happened, I was always ver angry, not only at others but at myself, as well. I think that it had a lot to do with the fact that my mother was never doting after me like I had often seen in movies or on television. Instead of constant praise or adoration, it was repeated demands and criticism. Because of this, I was always angry at others for not being someone who could love or be loved. When my mother told me that I constantly had told her I loved her when I was little, I felt a tremendous sigh of relief inside me. It was proof that at some point during my life I had the capacity to love, but that it had somehow managed to warp into a deadly toxin that was harming me emotionally. And it was because I did not have the constant reassurance of someone telling me that they loved me. I am now able to see that my mother really does love me, even though she might not express it frequently. And even though I would rather set fire to my magna collection that to admit this out loud, I love my mom, too. But don't tell her that I told you so.

Questions for discussion: Does Sonia's constant "hedging" make her story more believable or less believable? What does the questioning of her own motives do for the writing? How would this essay be different if it were written by a man? Is there a difference between masculine and feminine writing? What do you think those differences might be?