

Overcoming the Odds

What do YOU really know about love?

Blood scarred his oval shaped face. The bullet, as though meticulously measured; positioned the very centre of his not-so-small forehead. His death soaked up the front pages of the local newspaper and inflicted international headlines as the 'youngest member of the 1990 Coup was shot and killed!' Those lines, I could well imagine, hinted some level of victorious remorse. Ever since the disastrous events of 1990, Muslim Coup left my beautiful twin island, particularly Trinidad, in a state of disgust, mistrust and fear.

The ringing of our land line startled me; I answered a whispered: "hello," only to discover a female voice hysterically screaming: "Oh my God I think they just killed Garvin!" I'm not sure what I said, but I must have uttered something stupid because I was scolded and told to pass the phone to someone with better sense than what I was displaying at that moment. I mean what was expected? Who is ever prepared to respond sensibly on hearing that one of their most precious cousins was brutally shot and killed? Nothing could have prepared my family and me for the events which followed... The events of that frightful evening plague my memory as though it occurred yesterday.

News travels fast in Laventille and very soon my cell phone began to ring uncontrollably. With shaking hands and an unexplainable numbness I tried to answer each call with certainty and authority, relying solely on my imperfect acting ability. This lasted only until my emotions got the better of me. As I recall, the adult members of my family made the journey up St Barbs hill and after hours of waiting to view my cousin's bullet ridden body, we finally came face to face with death! It's interesting how our judgments are instantaneously stopped when disaster strikes!

Looking at my loving, caring, now dead cousin, nothing of what he had done mattered at that moment. Who cares if he was actively involved in the Coup? It mattered not that he was a staunch practicing Muslim who referred to Abu Bakr as his father! All I saw was a life violently snatched away from a father preparing to celebrate his daughter's second birthday three days away! Why? What could he have done to be dealt this cruel blow? Sure, he was the youngest member of the Coup and held a gun, but is that reason for someone to be shot like some dog and left for the coubeuxs like some worthless, inhumane carcass?

That's when I was given my own reality check. Who are we to say who deserves life and who ought to have been shot and killed riding on the merit that we sow what we reap? Certainly not Rachel-Lee Berkeley and I would opt to be audacious enough to say surely no human being on this God created earth. In a church where teenage pregnancy seems to be fashionable and abortions are swept under the rug like mere dust, how do we successfully fight such battles?

The world is filled with a plethora of challenges and obstacles. I started this article by lending a little of my personal self out the box, to give you a front seat view into how I overcame that impediment. It was not easy. At times, I still have to stop and let God lift me. Thankfully if HE - the sweet, merciful, all knowing, understanding and sympathizing Jesus can do it for me, HE can surely do it for YOU! Our situations may not be the same but everyone is struggling to overcome. Each person is hungry! Yes, but this hunger isn't only about mouth-watering delightful food. No! Some hunger for respect, success, forgiveness, purity, wisdom, admiration, freedom, laughter, happiness, joy, a parent, a soul mate, a friend, a child, a career, a pet, a house, a car. This list is infinite and as our faces differ so do our appetites. Sadly, these things can never truly satisfy our unwavering hungers and no matter how successful we think we are and what stick we use to measure our happiness, there will always be that empty space.

To the person who has lost a mother, a father or both parents; to the teenage mother who feels forced to leave the church; to the pastor finding difficulty brining hope to the hopeless; to the mother whose son is a thief or the father who has a daughter on drugs; to the girl carrying a secret that is eating and destroying her; to the man who badly wants to propose to a girl but cannot because she belongs to another, to the adolescent overwhelmingly obsessed with pornography; and to that person battling with HIV, homosexuality or adultery. How can you overcome these blurred and burdensome blunders?

The answer is simple, yet at times it seems impossible. The key to overcoming thinkable and sometimes unthinkable devastating situations, lay in an overused four letter word - LOVE. Sounds crazy, yes? Even too simple or too good to be true right? I must have confused most of you while others are possibly saying I need to see a shrink because my cousin's death left me mentally disturbed. Before you throw that lost stone at me. This is my story and how I successfully beat the odds. Love, motivated me to forgive, to accept and to move on. I would reiterate it was no easy task and the road traveled was quite torturous and sometimes elongated. However,

this love was the motivating factor which encouraged total forgiveness and unadulterated change in my life.

It was Mother Theresa, who so eloquently stated: "And how do we begin to love? By prayer. Prayer always gives us a clean heart, and a clean heart can see God. And if we see God in each other, we will naturally love one another. We must help each other to pray." Love fosters prayer and compels us to rally round each other. This love led me to a group of devoted people whose prayers, encouragement and testimonies helped with my further understanding of this thing we misuse, abuse and refer to as love.

There is a group of people in Laventille who every Monday evening at six come together to put into motion this thing we call love. The '**Loveuntil Foundation**' located at Church Street Laventille, has started something that spurs individuals to do what Christ did on the cross, to put love into action. It is here that I found true love, after the painful death of my cousin motivated me to volunteer at the Foundation to help others. Who knew that in giving of myself to rebuild broken lives and tainted spirits I was, by extension, helping the one person who needed it most? Me.

The Loveuntil Foundation is piloted under the directorship of Mr. Brian Jones and Managed by Ms. Rachael Byng-Roberts. Whoever chose the name for the Foundation must have had a peek into the future, because at this charitable organization the love never ends. In that building with such tender, sincere and loving human beings miracles occur from day to day. Within that yellow and blue structure, support groups were birthed under the dedicated direction of Pastor Clive Dottin, Lord bless his darling heart and energetic spirit!

Proudly, we have formulated: Heart Touch – dealing with victims of HIV & AIDS. Courage Unlimited Please (CUP) – gang intervention; Friends Forever – drug and alcohol use and Prisons Ministry – carrying the gospel to jail cells. The Loveuntil Foundation has also trained grief and peer counselors. At present, after much prayer and rigorous training, our hotline for distressed individuals (800-HELP) is operational. Even though there have been challenges, we try to never lose focus and are ever mindful of our responsibility to touch hearts and change lives.

As I encourage you to live the life as Jesus did, and let love motivate and change you. Be always mindful that these crises go beyond you and me. At Calvary, Christ

did something so great for sinners like myself that I question why a total stranger would accept such a gruesome death on my unworthy, undeserving behalf? He did nothing to deserve it; actually His death was a substitute for my sins. He was wounded for our transgressions (Isaiah 53:5). There is no greater example of love and I will say here and now there will never be another display of such selfless love.

This is the type of love I encourage you to embrace and replicate. No I am not asking you to be crucified, but I am prompting you to let God's love comfort, heal, forgive, redeem and purify YOU! I know many of us have warped examples and thus misguided interpretations of love. This is not the love to which I have been referring, not the kind that gives you butterflies in the stomach, and what does that mean anyway? (Confused face) I am speaking about the love that makes a blind person see, forgets a prostitute's sin and admonishes her to "go and sin no more."

Love is the only powerful principle and yes, it is a principle and not a feeling, this standard has the power to see beyond our faults. It goes even deeper, by encouraging a new life, a positive outlook and an invigorating smile! Love makes you hug a vagrant and accept with open arms a homosexual. God loves the sinner but hates the sin. We get this twisted and instead we tolerate, condemn, bash and 'bad talk' the sinner. Where is the love? Today I thank God that He is the friend of sinners and no matter how many times I fall short, make wrong choices or cry myself to sleep; His loving arms are always there bringing safety, comfort and inspiration. I serve the loving, amazing Jesus who loves me even when I am unlovable!

By: Rachel-Lee Berkeley