

It Matters to This One

By Latayne C Scott



I wish I could credit the unknown author of a story that, perhaps more than any other, has deeply influenced--and paralleled--my life.

This story tells of a young man who was walking along the seashore. Far ahead of him, he saw a distant figure: someone who like him was walking, but who paused every few steps, stooped down, and seemed to be throwing something into the sea.

His curiosity aroused, the young man hurried forward, his feet awkward in the sand, as he tried to catch up with the man.

As he came closer, he saw that it was an old man, and the reason that he would stop every step or two was to pick up a starfish and fling it into the ocean. It was only then that the young man noticed the thousands of starfish that littered the beach for miles, stranded there by the tide.

The young man felt a rising sense of anger. What the old man was doing seemed so pointless, and he couldn't wait to catch up to him to tell him so. By the time the young man came abreast of the older man, he was out of breath.

"Why are you doing this?" he gasped. "You can't save all of these starfish! It's useless! What does it matter?"

The old man paused for a moment, looking down at the crusty starfish he'd just picked up. He turned it over slowly, then answered.

"It matters to this one," he said and with a slow, deliberate motion, he tossed it back into the sea, into life.

My Story: It matters to this one.

I know a woman who grew up in a Christian home, but who was rebellious. She began dating a young man her parents disapproved of, and despite their protests, she continued in her relationship with him. After a few months, they eloped, crossing over from their home state of Tennessee to Corinth,

Mississippi, where they could be married immediately. She was seventeen, he was nineteen.

From their wedding night it was obvious she had made a terrible mistake, for it was then that the physical violence began. As she sat, bruised and shaking, she knew that her parents' worst predictions had come true. But in a matter of days she was a thousand miles away, living in a small town in New Mexico.

The words of her parents rang in her ears daily: "There has never been a divorce in our family." After she had telephoned to tell her parents where she was, they had responded, "You've made your bed. Now lie in it." And she tried to, as best she could.

There were some happy times, but they became more and more rare. Her husband's fits of rage and curiously alloyed morality (all rules were strict, demanding, and applied to everyone but himself) soon led her to a conclusion that would eventually be vindicated, though years later: he was mentally ill. And then the worst thing of all happened: she found herself pregnant. With only a high school education, hundreds of miles away from relatives and friends, she felt cut off and abandoned. Her husband was so jealous that he would even remove the spark plugs from their car so that she could not attend church, where, he was convinced, men were looking at her.

She has told me with tears in her eyes that she was desperate. She knew even then that children in such a marriage would be abused, too. Had abortions been available in that time, fifty years ago, she would have unhesitatingly sought one.

The child was born, and another. Her fears were realized. His rages began to be focused at times on the children. Many times the husband would leave for long periods of time, and she would sell furniture and household goods to buy groceries. Another child was born. He cheated on her with other women, and came home and told her that they were younger than her, and prettier, too.

He bought diamond-and-emerald rings for these women, and his wife and daughter folded newspapers in torn fabric to use for sanitary pads because there was no money.

It was seventeen long years before she saved up enough to file for divorce. And even then, she was alone: because of her husband's illness, she never received a penny of alimony or child support to raise the two teenagers and the toddler they had.

When that woman looks at me and tells me of her hurt, her desperation when she found out each time that she was pregnant, I know she is not exaggerating. I know that all her fears came true. We cry together for a little while...

She is remembering her first pregnancy,
the profundity of the emotions of the lonely twenty-year-old
she was. She does not say what she says to hurt me, but it does.

With that hurt comes a rush of love for her, of admiration for her courage, of gratitude for her perseverance. I think about the fact that when she went into labor with that first child, her husband dropped her off at the hospital with the instructions that if the child were to be born during the night, not to wake him until morning. I remember the black-and-white photograph of her in the hospital holding that baby. Holding me.

You see, the questions of the morality of sit-ins at abortion clinics are, to me, somewhat relative to a greater personal reality. I am puzzled by the thinking that any of us knows enough about the long-term future to be willing to kill to avert it.

And the matter of when life begins is much less important to me than this truth: **we each only have one life**. The Bible puts it this way: "It is appointed for a man once to die, and then the judgment."

If the Bible is true, then there is no reincarnation, no "overs" on living. The childhood I described wasn't a great childhood, but it was my only childhood. It stands in my life as the great witness to the truth of [Romans 8:28](#), that God will work all things for good. Simply put, I'd rather have lived, than not have lived.

The statistics on abortion are staggering. They are as numbing by their preponderance as the prospect of millions of miles of sand, strewn with helpless beached starfish.

I can only speak for one. And it matters, very much, to this one.