

feb 11

a moment of innocent love

we were the only family with children in the restaurant. i sat erik in a high chair and noticed everyone was quietly seated and talking. suddenly, erik squealed with glee and said, "hi there." he pounded his fat baby hands on the high chair tray. his eyes crinkled in laughter and his mouth was bared in a toothless grin as he wriggled and giggled with merriment.

i looked around and saw the source of his merriment. it was a man whose pants were baggy whose toes poked out of would-be shoes. his shirt was dirty and his hair was uncombed and unwashed. his whiskers were too short to be called a beard, and his nose was so varicose that it looked like a road map.

we were too far from him to smell, but i was sure he smelled. his hands waved and flapped on loose wrists. "hi there, baby; hi there, big boy. i see ya, buster," the man said to erik. my husband and i exchanged looks, "what do we do?" erik continued to laugh and answer, "hi, hi there." everyone in the restaurant noticed and looked at us and then at the man. the old geezer was creating a nuisance with my beautiful baby.

our meal came and the man began shouting from across the room, "do ya patty cake? do you know peek-a-boo? hey, look, he knows peek-a-boo." nobody thought the old man was cute. he was obviously drunk. my husband and i were embarrassed. we ate in silence but not

erik, who was running through his repertoire for the admiring skidrow bum, who in turn, reciprocated with his cute comments.

we finally got through the meal and headed for the door. my husband went to pay the check and told me to meet him in the parking lot. the old man sat poised between me and the door. "Lord, just let me out of here before he speaks to me or erik," i prayed. as i drew closer to the man, i turned my back, trying to sidestep him and avoid any air he might be breathing. as i did, erik leaned over my arm, reaching with both arms in a baby's "pick-me-up" position. before i could stop him, erik had propelled himself from my arms to the man's. suddenly, a very smelly old man and a baby expressed their love and kinship. erik, in an act of total trust, love, and submission, laid his tiny head upon the man's ragged shoulder. the man's eyes closed, and i saw tears hover beneath his lashes. his aged hands full of grime, pain, and hard labor, cradled my baby. no two beings have ever loved so deeply for so short a time. i stood, awestruck. the old man rocked and cradled erik in his arms and his eyes opened and set squarely on mine. he said in a firm commanding voice, "you take care of this baby." somehow i managed, "i will," from a throat that contained a stone. he pried erik from his chest lovingly, as though he were in pain.

i received my baby, and the man said, "God bless you, ma'am; you've given me my christmas gift." i said nothing more than a muttered thanks. with erik in my arms, i ran for the car. my husband was wondering why i was crying and holding erik so tightly and why i was

saying, "my God, my God, forgive me." i had just witnessed Christ's love shown through the innocence of a tiny child who saw no sin, who made no judgment. the child saw a soul, and his mother saw a suit of clothes. i was a christian who was blind holding a child who was not. i felt it was God asking, "are you willing to share your son for a moment?" when He shared His for all eternity. the ragged old man, unwittingly, had reminded me, "unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." (matthew 18:3)