

My Journey: What is Love? Where is Love?

“What is love?” Could you give me a definition? An explanation? “Where do I find it?” Please help me understand.

I was born two days ago. Yes, there is love in the world. There must be because I am the center of their world. At least I think I am. Everyone is taking care of me, looking at me, smiling at me, cuddling me...loving me. I am happy, and I think they are too.

Oh no, will they love me now? My parents just brought home my baby brother. For two years, I knew they loved me. But now? They look at my brother; they smile at my brother; they cuddle my brother...don't they love me anymore?

I am seven years old. Yes, there is love in the world. I play with my dolls; I feed them; I change their diapers; I give them a bottle of milk; I cuddle them; I sing to them. They are my children. I love them all. How can that be? All of them? Not just one? Parents love their children...that's the way it is.

Yes, that is what happens. Now I think I can explain how it happens. In school, we are learning about money. If I have a dollar bill, it's just one item. If I have four quarters, I have four items, but together they form one dollar. That's like my family...we are four persons, but together we are one family. It takes all four to make the dollar...the family. We all take care of each other. I love my mother; I love my dad; I even love my brother. And they love me.

Now I am eleven, and my example does not seem to apply to my friends at school. I have four special friends; we are supposed to be “best friends,” but... One day, only two of them spend time with me. The next day, the group is different. It seems that every day the group is redefined. Why must the group always exclude one or two of the “friends?” I love each of them just as I love everyone in my family. Why do they quantify love as limited? Shared love always is enough to make a group whole, right?

I am fifteen years old, and NO ONE understands me. NO ONE listens to me. Teachers and parents all tell me what to do—for my own good. At least I have social media. I may post anything I want, or may I? Some of the kids at school just got censored. OK, at home, I may not get my way, but my family listens to me, asks me to explain, shares their support or concerns—if I listen too. They accept me the way I am. Do they love me?

Sweet Sixteen! He asked me to the Prom. Is he “The One?” He’s good-looking; he’s smart; he’s athletic; he has a job and a car. I’ve known him since Kindergarten. We have mutual friends and have gone skating, hiking, and swimming with our friends. But now we will have an actual date. I am shopping for a dress with my mother this weekend. I am so excited!

My dad walks me down the aisle. He squeezes my hand. I turn and smile at him and whisper “I love you” and see that he has tears in his eyes, but he smiles back. The man waiting for me at the altar is “The One.” Watching a movie together, chatting or texting, contemplating the future, or just being together is perfect. I want only the best for him, and he for me. This is another kind of love. I still love my family and my friends that have been there always when I need them. But this is different.

Am I finally becoming able to answer my own questions? As I pass to the next step on my life’s journey, I realize that my earlier comparison of love and money may not be enough. Let’s try something a little more philosophical...the more one divides love, the more it multiplies.

I just gave birth to my first child. It’s glorious. I do not have to choose between my husband and my child. I love them both...and they love me. I can see the joy on my husband’s face and hear his words of love to me and to our son. Then I feel the little one in my arms, hear his coos and enjoy his cuddles. He needs me; I need him. There is a special bond between us—and among us when we add “daddy.”

With age comes wisdom, some say. I think they are correct. Now as my hair is lighter and my energy level reduced, I have more time for reflections. I finally understand that there are many kinds of love. There is not one love with one definition that fits for all of life’s situations.

With fewer responsibilities (work and family), I have more time to enjoy the sounds and beauty of nature, time to reminisce, time to even plan for the future—time to smell the roses. I am again wondering about love and my earlier questions.

Where do we find love? Everywhere.

What is love? It cannot be defined. It can only be experienced. It starts with self—acceptance of who I am and my dreams to become better. It is also the realization of the special bonds within a family and the shared dreams to add to the

joy of each person in that unit. It is also the myriad of friends that share my life journey for a short time or longer. It's the special person with whom I begin a new circle of life.

Love grows when I divide (share) my love with others. It multiplies!

I have lived well. I have known love.