

The Hug

The year was 1980 something. After teaching third grade for ten years, I was moved to first grade. Who would have thought that two years difference in the age of students would make that much difference in the classroom? First graders needed so much more: more guidance, more time, more individual attention, more patience, more knock-knock jokes, and more hugs! Yep, that's right, this particular class loved to give and receive hugs. I received hugs all day from the children, especially Sam. He gave me a hug in the morning when he got off the school bus and every afternoon before he got back on the school bus to go home. And at least once during the day, I would receive a Sam hug.

At our school in the 1980s, the elementary teachers did not have a duty-free lunch period. We had finally compromised with the administration for the right to sit with our colleagues at two round tables in the corner of the cafeteria. This way, we could eat together while still supervising the students. On this particular day, I was seated across from the principal with my back to the children. Suddenly, I found myself being pulled into a hug by two little hands grabbing me from behind, chest high, one hand on each of "the girls." I'm sure my face mirrored the surprise that I saw on the principal's face. Conversation at the table ceased as all eyes were on those two little hands.

What to do? I gently took those two little hands in mine, turned sideways in my chair, and guided the body attached to the hands so he was facing me. And there was Sam with a big, beautiful smile on his face. I smiled back, what else could I do? And told Sam how much I loved getting hugs. BUT, I explained, I needed to see his face when he hugged me, or I wouldn't know who was giving me that great big hug. Sam smiled his Okay and returned to his seat. I turned around to a table full of smiles, a few chuckles, and the principal busily eating his lunch.