

Feeling The Love



Toni True-Wills Ph.D.

After the death of her husband, Toni True-Wills, Ph.D. a career psychotherapist, began to write for comfort and healing. She started a blog and began to share her writings with others, and she got great feedback which encouraged her to write more and share deeper, more personal thoughts and stories about her life. This book is taken from that blog.

Feeling the Love

by Toni True-Wills, Ph.D.

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ISBN: 978-1-64438-860-0

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Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., St. Petersburg, Florida.

Printed on acid-free paper.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
True-Wills, Ph.D., Toni
Feeling the Love by Toni True-Wills, Ph.D.
Body, Mind, Spirit | Self-help | Psychology
Library of Congress Control Number: 2019911918

Booklocker.com, Inc.
2019

First Edition

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PART ONE

Family

I have often felt we can get too busy and forget to let our family know just how much we value them. So, for my twin sister's birthday, I wrote "An Open Letter to My Twin Sister," and then wrote separate letters to my brother and sister-in-law. I hope you will consider doing this for your family, as I know how much my siblings and sister-in-law appreciated this simple gesture.

An Open Letter to My Twin Sister

The egg split and two little miracles spent nine months in very close quarters, feeling the love of their mother. I was one of those little miracles and you were the other. Our four-and-a-half-year-old big brother was not that happy about this. When asked if he was going to thank the doctor, he said “My mama will thank you.”

We were very blessed to be born into a beautiful, warm, loving family. We looked so much alike that our dad would have fun putting the same one back in the high chair to be fed, just to hear our mom say, “Something is wrong, Jim, this child won’t eat.” Our mom told us when we got older that anyone who says “Two aren’t more trouble than one” is crazy. You feed one, then you feed the other, you change one, then you have to change the other, etc., etc., etc.

We started singing and dancing at a very early age, and continued all through school. We won the talent show at Gulfport High and at Ole Miss.

I remember one high school prom when we were sitting at the same table and decided to go to the restroom. When we came back to the table, we sat in each other’s chair so we could dance with each other’s date. We switched back a little while later.

Your date told you on the way home he didn't know if you were the same one he had come with, but he sure had a good time. My date never suspected anything.

I also remember one of us getting a call at our dorm in college and being asked to a dance, and when the guy was told we already had a date, he said, "In that case, may I talk to your sister?" We were both upset about that because we wanted to be individuals and not just the True Twins.

When we were in our early twenties, I received a phone call saying I needed to come right away, that you were very sick. My heart sank. I had never considered that I might lose you. When I got to New Orleans, they had tried to put you in an iron lung, but you were too short for it. So they borrowed a Byrd respirator from NASA for you and did a tracheotomy. You were paralyzed from the neck down, including your vocal cords, and for the first time ever I couldn't communicate with you.

When you became unconscious for the third time, the doctors told us if you survived you would have heart or brain damage. I went to the chapel to pray. I remember kneeling down when someone tapped me on the shoulder. I looked up and an elderly little man handed me a novena to St. Teresa and he said, "This will help." I looked at the novena and when I turned to thank him, no one was there. I said the novena every hour, day and night.

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While this was taking place, you were having a “near-death experience.” You told me later you learned two valuable things: how precious life is and where we go after we die. I know it was tempting to stay, but you came back to us without heart or brain damage. You were written up in all the medical journals, and our family was blessed with a true miracle!

I moved into your home to take care of your beautiful little Julie, who was twenty-two months old, along with my three little ones, while you were hospitalized for seventy-five days. Julie was so adorable, but had a hard time adjusting to her life changes and was into everything. One day she poured detergent into the hot dryer. Of course, it melted. So while I was cleaning it, I put her in time-out for two minutes on her bed. When I walked back into the room, she was sitting in the middle of her bed with Kleenex tissues all around her. She had pulled them out, one by one. It had snowed Kleenex! I grabbed her and hugged her, and we rolled around the bed in laughter!

I remember a time when Julie was three years old and you were visiting. I was standing by the sink and felt a little tug on my jeans. As I looked down at her, I heard her say, “Are you my mama or are you my Aunt Tone Tone?” She just couldn’t tell. I also remember labor pains, not only for our own babies but for each other’s, too.

We have had some wonderful times and, of course, some fusses, but those didn't last long; we just couldn't stay mad at each other. We've also had losses—our husbands six months apart, and our Jill (who I felt was mine, too), and Ray's Mel—but we were there for each other.

And so, my Pati, I give you this writing because you are so special and we are not just sisters ... we are twins ... and I believe twins have double the love for each other!

An Open Letter to My Brother

You were four and half years old when we (your twin sisters) arrived and, to say the least, you were not very happy that we had come to invade your space. But gradually you started to pay attention to us. We thought you were the coolest thing ever. You had cowboy boots, a gun and holster, and even a cowboy hat. You would go outside every day to shoot at engineers on the train as they passed by. They would wave and grin and play like they had fallen down when you shot them. But one day, just as you pulled your gun out of your holster, they all pulled toy guns and pretended to shoot at you. You fell on the ground in laughter! To think that grown men went to all that trouble to make a little boy happy was amazing!

You were the oldest, so Mom and Dad were harder on you, and I am sure you got tired of hearing that you needed to be setting a good example for us. And when we started school, we didn't get teased very much because we had a big brother to protect us.

I remember one time when I was sick. Mom let you ride Pati on the back of your bike to school. On the way home, she fell off at the top of the hill and you were half way home before you realized it.

You quickly turned around and retrieved her. She was fine. I don't remember if Mom and Dad ever found out about it. And remember when Uncle Jack gave you Amber [a quarter horse]? The first time you rode her, she took off down the road with you hanging on for dear life. When you finally got her to turn down our road again, you hollered to our neighbor on the corner, "Open the door, Miss May! I am coming in!"

I remember the glow you had when you fell in love with that little freshman girl. You were a senior but she stole your heart and fifty-seven years later ... she still has it. I have always felt that you gave me another sister when you brought her into our family, and the five children you two had are mine, also. We have no limits on love in this family.

You and Shirley helped me through my grief for Doug, and nursed me through a shoulder surgery and a knee surgery. I'll never forget that.

We've both grown so much spiritually, and I love our talks about this. You are a beautiful person and I want you to know that you have always exceeded my expectations. I love you so very, very much. And every day I thank God for giving you to us.

An Open Letter to My Sister (in-Law)

I remember the night I was awakened to a noise in the living room. I got out of bed to find my brother sleepwalking and holding the standing lamp, kissing the lamp shade. I knew he was in love! Of course, he got a lot of teasing over that. Shortly after, he admitted he had fallen in love with a little freshman girl. I remember the first time I met you, the porcelain skin and inner beauty that poured from your heart! I also remember the love you had in your eyes for my brother.

A couple of years later, a beautiful, intimate ceremony took place, and a beautiful bride took her vows. And I had another sister! I remember throwing rice, and you two being on your way to sixty-one years of marital bliss! I remember how happy both sets of parents were and, later, how proud both were to become grandparents. And Pati and I were just as excited to become your children's aunts. I remember having seen pictures of my new sister in maternity clothes and—before I knew it—our little Robin appeared, then our little Anne, our little Trudy, and our big Patrick. Bob's buttons were popping off. He had finally gotten his boy! And then, last but not least, our beautiful little Melissa. As you know, I love them all! Whew, I get tired just thinking about those days.

Toni True-Wills, Ph.D.

We have had so many wonderful times together: family reunions you worked so hard to organize; weekend visits spent in laughter; you nursing me through two surgeries; and helping me with my grief over Doug's passing. I love you so much, and I can't tell you how much I cherish all those times.

Our love for angels has connected us in a way that can never separate us. I know we bless each other with angels every day. We both have the same purpose in life—to spread love wherever we go!

It's Snowing

I am sitting in the middle of my bed with my laptop, with the curtains open, watching the beautiful snow fall. It is so relaxing, peaceful, and silent; another one of God's gifts. I've said before that I love the mountains because of the four distinct seasons, and winter is always wonderful. However, if you had asked me three weeks ago, I may not have agreed with that statement.

I had gone to Jackson, Mississippi, to attend my mother-in-law's funeral, and when I returned home I discovered I had no water. I went to the pump house and found the pump was not coming on. I called a pump service company, who returned my call that night, stating I was number five on tomorrow's list.

When the service man arrived late the following afternoon, he said the pump was bad and gave me an estimate to replace it. As we were walking by the back of the house, I saw standing water and pointed it out, but he said they didn't do plumbing.

The first plumber I called said they wouldn't have anyone available for two weeks. On the sixth day, I finally found a plumber, who sent two guys out to fix the two broken pipes. But when we turned

on the pump, it of course didn't work and they said, "We don't work on pumps." And then the estimate the pump service gave me was too high.

To make a long story short, for eleven days I called every repair man I knew, along with names I got from neighbors and friends. A friend called one night and I shared my predicament. He told me he had gotten a new pump the day before, and gave me a name and telephone number. Hallelujah!!

I must say, I had reached acceptance by that time, because on the tenth day I was feeling pretty down and walked to the mailbox and received a note from my daughter. It read: "Mom, I just wanted to tell you that all my childhood memories are filled with all the sweet things you did for me and all the extra love you gave us. You are an amazing, wonderful woman and I love you with all my heart ... Bev." My eyes filled with tears and my mind was filled with all the loving memories of how much I loved being a mother to the three little miracles I gave birth to. I realized how unimportant my water situation was.

This is what life is really all about!

Peace

My firstborn son fought in Desert Storm. I will never forget the feeling I experienced the night I heard the ground war had started. I knew he had been on the first plane out ... and I lost it. We had recently moved to a new town, had new jobs, and were in a new house. I had no close friends locally yet, and when my husband walked into the bedroom and found me crying, he suggested I call my best friend in the last town we had lived in.

When Sandra answered the phone, she knew immediately I was in need of hearing the right words. "Toni," she said, "he is on every prayer list I've seen in Mississippi." Even the grocery stores had posters up for prayer lists, and anyone could write a name on it.

Sandra continued, "Our children are gifts from God, and at some point we have to give them back and put them in His care. God doesn't have grandchildren; you are His child, and your child is His child."

I truly believe God put Sandra in my life when I needed her most. By the time I hung up the phone, I had completely surrendered! Remember, surrender does not mean to give up; it means to give up the end result. Eventually my son returned home safely,

and I don't believe I experienced anything millions of other mothers haven't also lived through. Many have not been as fortunate as I was.

Why do we have war? I know all the pat answers, but the pain and suffering we experience makes it seem senseless. I pray for global peace daily, and ask everyone I know to do the same.

This writing, however, is about letting go of our children. All parents have to go through this at some point. I think letting go of each child is different, and probably each parent may do it a little differently. Looking back, I had let go of my son long before the war, but knowing he was in constant danger was what caused the pain.

A mother's love for her children is different from any other love. The first time your baby is placed in your arms, it is love at first sight. You are filled with love from the tip of your toes to the top of your head. When you realize you had a part in creating this beautiful little miracle, it's overwhelming! I was lucky enough to experience that feeling three times ... three beautiful little gifts. Being able to let them go on their own journey is not only a part of their growth, it is also a big part of *our* growth. My hope is that every mother will find peace within when she is able to accomplish this surrender to God's plan.

The Earrings

He had gotten up early, brushed his teeth, and scrubbed his little face. Every hair was in place and his shirt was tucked neatly into his pants. His socks matched his pants and he had even wiped off his shoes. He sat patiently on the couch, waiting for his Mawmaw. They had a big day planned: lunch and then shopping for his mom's birthday present. He had saved his money for weeks and had it neatly folded in his pocket. He was only three years old, but such an old soul. He had so much love that his little face just glowed! He told his mom he and Mawmaw were going to lunch. "But I can't tell you what we're doing after lunch."

When he heard the car pull up, he ran to the door to greet Mawmaw. He loved her so much and treasured their time together. She came in and visited for a few minutes, but she could see how anxious he was, so she kissed her daughter goodbye and made a comment about their date. He threw his arms around his mom and said he loved her and would see her later.

The lunch conversation was about all the different things he had thought of that he could buy for his mom. Mawmaw listened intently and then

said that jewelry would be nice because “Your mom doesn’t buy a lot of that for herself.”

“You’re right, Mawmaw,” he replied. “She usually just buys things she needs.”

They went to three stores and he looked around, but he just didn’t see anything pretty enough for her. In the fourth store, he spotted them. They were all white and sparkly with rhinestones! “Oh, Mawmaw! Those would look beautiful on Mama!”

“You think so?” she asked.

“Oh, yes,” he replied, as he ran toward them.

When he found out the price, he counted his money with her and found he was short one dollar. He told her if she could lend it to him he would pay her back: “I promise.” She said she thought she could arrange that, and he happily made his purchase.

The sales lady was glad to find a box for them when he explained that his mom’s birthday was tomorrow, and how happy she would be when she opened his present. Now all they had to do was go to Mawmaw’s house and wrap them. He looked over his choices of paper and picked one. Mawmaw helped and then he chose the biggest, most beautiful bow. He placed it back in the bag so his mom wouldn’t see it when he got home. When they

arrived, he made a dash for his bedroom and hid it under his bed.

He went to bed right after supper so morning would hurry up and come. He awoke early and went directly to his mother's bed. She was still asleep, but he just couldn't resist, so he kissed her on the cheek and whispered, "Happy birthday, Mama!"

She opened her eyes and put him in bed with her and said, "Let's cuddle." They hugged and both of them went back to sleep.

When they woke up, he asked her if she wanted to open her present. She said, "Do you want me to open it now, or wait until we have cake and ice cream this evening?"

He replied, "No, let's wait." All day he would come to her and tell her, "You're going to love your present! It's so beautiful!"

The time finally came. Mawmaw and Pawpaw came over and he ran to his room to get his package. When his mother opened it, he said, "Put them on, Mama," and when she did, he told her how pretty she looked.

She said, "You were right, sweetie. They are beautiful!" Each earring had a spray of rhinestones going up each ear.

The next day they had to take his brother and sister to school, and it was her turn to take cookies to their home rooms. When they got to the door to leave he said, "Mama, you forgot to put your earrings on."

She smiled and said, "Oh, my goodness. I sure did." She put them on with her blue jeans and T-shirt. And off they went, rhinestones and all!

P.S. This is the son who grew up to be a designer in New York. You can visit his website at RobertBullockBride.com

Why?

We always ask “Why?” when we are experiencing some sort of sadness in our life. One of the hardest things I’ve ever been through was the death of my baby during a pregnancy ... a still birth.

I had been feeling her movement every day, and I remember I was hanging out clothes on the line when I suddenly realized I hadn’t felt her move all day. I tried to rationalize that everything was fine, but I guess in my heart I knew it wasn’t. An appointment with the doctor confirmed something had gone terribly wrong. He explained the normal procedure was to wait six weeks and then they would induce labor and deliver her. He also advised me not to tell anyone but our parents because “People will have you with gangrene and everything else.” It sounded harsh, but the softer side of him gave me his home telephone number and permission to call him in the middle of the night if I needed to talk. He said it was his belief that this was God’s way of taking care of other problems which may have come up later in the pregnancy.

I remember walking back to my parent’s home (they only lived one block from my doctor) with tears streaming down my face. Several months before that day, I had done the same thing, only I

was in shock from finding out I was pregnant again when I had gone for my six-week checkup after having my second baby. I felt totally overwhelmed. I remember thinking, *God, I want more children, but this is too fast.* There had been only twenty-one months between my first and second child, and now I was pregnant again. Of course, now I was feeling all the guilt for ever thinking that. Was God punishing me for thinking that way? During my pregnancy I had resolved all those overwhelming feelings and had loved this baby, and now she had been taken from me. Why?

During the wait, I know I asked “Why?” a thousand times. I know God doesn’t punish us, but what I have come to understand is that that baby was a gift and, even though I didn’t get to keep her very long, she was part of my spiritual journey. Everything that happens in our life is part of that journey.

I write all the time about accepting our life exactly as it is, and knowing that this too shall pass. I also write about surrendering the end result of everything in our lives that we have no control over. When we accept and surrender, we experience the inner peace that we have longed for, and it brings us to feeling spiritually fulfilled.

The wait was very hard, but I had a lot of family support and peace did come. God blessed me with a little boy a few years later, so I ended up with

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three little miracles. And I still believe I will meet my beautiful little angel one day.

The Hereafter

A few months before my dad's suicide, I told him about a biography Jess Stern had written concerning Taylor Caldwell's life. Taylor and her husband had made a pact that whoever died first would give the other one a sign that there was a hereafter or life after death. When they moved into their last home together, they planted a flowering bush next to the back deck, but it failed to bloom. Every spring they would agree they needed to dig it up and plant something else but, like a lot of us do, they never got around to it. The morning of her husband's funeral, Taylor went out on the deck to drink her coffee and the bush was in full bloom!

I have always believed in heaven, and have had many experiences that made this belief stronger. To name a few: My twin had a near-death experience when she had Guillain-Barre Syndrome, in which she witnessed life after death, and I suffered a still birth after carrying my baby for several months, and never doubted she was in heaven. My dad, who had glaucoma, told me one morning that my mom (who was deceased) had come to him with a patch over her left eye. He felt strongly that she was trying to tell him something. I called his doctor immediately and scheduled an appointment that day, during which we discovered

that the pressure had jumped dramatically in his left eye.

My dad was eighty-two years old when he committed suicide. He left a note saying he did not want to live without my mom any longer. He went on to say his doctor had found a tumor on his bladder and had scheduled chemo. His best friend had died from bladder cancer, and it was a terrible, slow death. And my dad did not want to be a burden to his children during the process. He was a man who felt he was always in control, but when my mom passed first, he was not in control; he was devastated. He was the one who had health issues, therefore he was supposed to die first. Instead, he was left broken-hearted. I've always felt that suicide is a very selfish act, and yet I had witnessed the pain he was in. The note did little to console those of us left behind.

In our bedroom I had a big, beautiful Christmas cactus sitting on the cedar chest, which had been in that spot for two years. It had only bloomed in November. The morning of Dad's funeral, I awoke to two beautiful blooms. After two days, one bloom fell off. Two days later, the other one followed. Mom and Dad both died in March, two years and two days apart!

The Passing of Doug

We don't often think of death as being part of life, until we have to look at it. I had taken my husband, Doug, to the doctor because he had bronchitis. But when the doctor came in the room, he said he didn't like Doug's coloring. From there we went to CAT scans, tumors, and Stage 4 cancer—in one afternoon.

The local doctor gave Doug three to six months, but when we got to Duke, they said they felt sure they could give him two more years. Instead, he fought for three. It hurt so badly to see his physical body deteriorate, but was so beautiful to watch his soul glowing on the inside. He would say, "I am not afraid of dying; I just don't want to leave you." One day he asked if I thought one could feel people's prayers. I told him I had never thought about that and he said, "I can." I asked how it felt and he said it felt like his whole body was filled with love. How beautiful was that?

The last visit to Duke was in early January, 2008. The doctors came in together and told us that the chemo was no longer working and there was nothing else to try. The nurse practitioner said she would get in touch with hospice, but Doug told her he did not want to die at home. She asked why and

he said, "It would be too hard on Toni." He passed away very peacefully in the hospital two weeks later, on the 28th.

Eight months later, I got to experience the love Doug had been talking about. It was very late one night. I was in bed praying and grieving, with my eyes closed, when I realized the room was lit up. I opened my eyes and to my right were the brightest lights ... like the end of a sparkler. With the lights was a warmth and a feeling of love like I've never experienced. It felt like it was saying to me: *You are never alone*. What a beautiful, beautiful gift! I've always believed we are not alone, but I guess I just needed a reminder. And what a way to receive it!

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After the death of her husband, Toni True-Wills, Ph.D. a career psychotherapist, began to write for comfort and healing. She started a blog and began to share her writings with others, and she got great feedback which encouraged her to write more and share deeper, more personal thoughts and stories about her life. This book is taken from that blog.

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