

Life's Little Magicians

by Missy Nash

The most amazing things in life come in the smallest packages. Usually when one recalls tales of how someone has left an imprint on their life, it is a yarn spun about a seventy year-old aunt, an elderly neighbor, or an elementary school teacher who had blue hair and wore her glasses on a string around her neck. Certainly, I could share a story about each of these individuals, but at this crossroads in my life, the magical moments for me are the ones spent with my nieces.

My brother and sister-in-law, Jason and Hilary, have two young daughters. My niece Isabela Grace just turned five years old on July 3, while Leila Bree will be three years old on September 2. What you must know to appreciate the magic is that my brother is in the Navy and has been stationed in Italy for the past two years. Prior to Italy, he and his family lived in San Diego on the West Coast. Thus, I have never had the privilege of quality time with my nieces.

Isn't it amazing how life's biggest issues seem to melt away when in the company of little ones? Last school year was the most difficult I have experienced to date. It seemed like I was constantly being pulled in by the undertow and just could not get my footing solid. I tried so many things to shift my focus but always to no avail. Then, the morning of May 16th the magic began. Jason, Hilary, Isabela, and Leila arrived at my mom's house from Italy. My mom and dad live within a mile of the high school; so naturally, I stopped by the house for "magic hugs." As I walked in the door, Isabela greeted me, "Hi Aunt Mimi. I missed you. Do you want to see my sister?" I was hugging her the whole time with tears in my eyes not wanting to let go. Of course, we walked in the other room to see Leila. I must say Jason and Hilary had done such a fantastic job preparing the girls for everyone they would meet. The last time I saw Leila she was ten months old, but this morning she beamed upon seeing me and came running over "Aunt Mimi". As I told her how happy I was to see her, she lovingly agreed that she was happy to see me also. Tearing myself away from those girls that morning was one of the most difficult things I have ever done. Yet the magic carried with me. That day at school I noticed the burdens that had been weighing me down no longer seemed

significant. The spring in my step was much more pronounced; the smile on my face no longer forced.

Over those next couple weeks, I saw the girls every day. Some days, I would even stop on my way to school for more “magic hugs”. My brother had to return to Italy after two weeks, but Hilary and the girls stayed in Teays Valley all summer. How amazing it is to be able to stop by and see the girls when I want. When they come running to the door crying out “Aunt Mimi,” it is truly medicine for the soul. How can one convey the magic? Simply tell the stories. Share the laughter. People will connect to their own lives.

For me, the first bit of magic is the loving nature of the girls. While I am aware that they do not fully comprehend the meaning of their words, I believe they will come to understand. When Isabela tells me she missed me “very, very much,” my heart melts. She will look at me with her big, blue eyes sparkling and whisper that I am “very cool”. Then, little Leila will tell me how she “wuvvs” me, and my heart sings with delight. Hearing their voices is a symphony of joy.

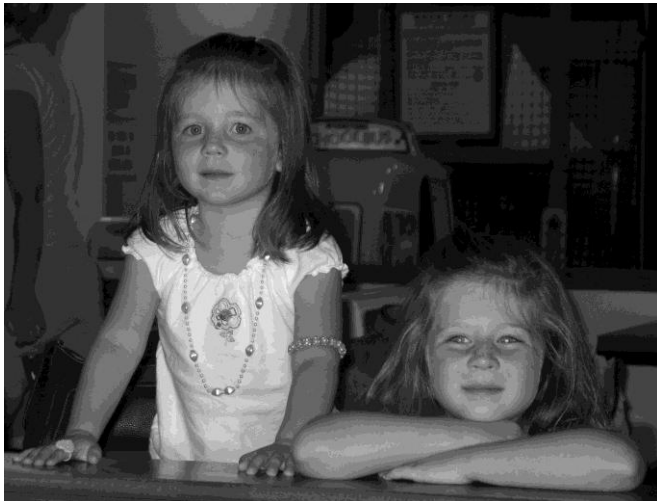
Not having spent much quality time with the girls, I knew nothing of their true nature. Isabela revealed some of her character during a trip to the local Dollar General Store. In the parking lot, we encountered a couple of my students. Obviously, as the proud aunt, I introduced Bela to them. What Bela did next truly touched me. The high school girls were headed to soccer practice. Bela remarked to Jordan, a student in my French 2 class, that her cleats were untied. Without hesitation, Isabela bent over and tied both shoes. The willingness to do that for another person showed me what a generous nature my niece has.

Afterwards, we went into the Dollar General. I told Bela that she could pick four items for herself and her sister. Wide-eyed, Bela roamed the store seeking just the right props for the adventures soon to be explored. She thoughtfully chose her beautiful gifts. Naturally, as we turned to the final aisle, there were a couple more “must-have” items. The problem was that it put her over the limit of four each. Mindful of my budget, I told her she had to choose some things to put back. Certainly, Leila’s items would be quickly sacrificed I thought to myself. However, with the items all laid out on the floor of Dollar General, Bela visibly anguished over what to do. I could sense that she truly liked what she had picked for Leila and did not want to return any of them. What a kind, sweet

nature my little girl displayed. I told her how thoughtful it was that she did not want to put any of Leila's fortune back on the shelf. And, since she was so considerate of her sister, we would just ignore the four item limit.

My parents' home became quite the playground during those two weeks. Playing hide and seek with Leila proved to be quite humorous-mostly for my mother. To demonstrate, I hid, and Mom helped Leila to find me. Leila laughed so hard when they found me. She was excited – cackling with joy. Then it was Leila's turn to hide. In the three-year-old version of the game, you apparently must hide where you just discovered the previous person. So there I was roaming the room. "Where's Leila? Is she over here? Behind there? Under this?" Finally after much fake seeking, I miraculously found her where I had just hidden. "Leila there you are. What a great place to hide!" Then, she told me to count again. And, as expected, she hid in the same place. This went on several times. Occasionally, we would convince her to hide in a different place, but the concept remained basically the same. Observing from the couch, my mom laughed uncontrollably the whole time. The playful nature of the girls reminds me of the innocence of children.

Children know how to appreciate the important things in life. My nieces remind me of this every time I see them. Love one another. They are not too proud to say, "I love you." Be considerate of those around you. They have shown compassion for others with no underlying motive. Love life because it is precious. Whether it is playing hard



or laughing hysterically, Isabela and Leila live life to the fullest.

Magicians, well, they might not be able to pull a rabbit out of a hat, but the world is a whole different place when in the company of these cherished little girls.