

My parents kept vigil at my bedside. They also battled with me to keep mirrors away. As my body healed internally and strength returned, I became increasingly difficult. On the fifth day, I demanded Dad give me a mirror. Angry and beaten down, he snapped, "Don't ask me again! I said no, and that's it!"

I propped myself up on my elbows and through lips that could barely move I hissed: "You don't love me. Now that I'm not pretty anymore, you just don't love me!"

Dad was stunned. He slowly lowered into a chair and put his head in his hands. His shoulders heaved. My mother walked over and put her hand on his shoulder and glared at me. I collapsed against the pillows. The room was quiet, filled with the soft sound of my father trying to control his tears.

I didn't ask my parents for a mirror again. Instead, I waited until someone was straightening out my room the next morning. I figured one of the housekeeping staff might not know about the "no mirror" order.

My curtain was drawn shut. From behind it, I asked for a mirror that "I must have mislaid." After a little searching, she found one and discreetly handed it to me around the curtain.

Nothing could have prepared me for the image that resembled a giant scraped knee, oozing and bright pink, looking out at me. My eyes and lips were crusted and swollen. Hardly a patch of skin, ear to ear, had escaped trauma.

A little while later my father arrived with magazines and homework tucked under his arm. He found me staring into the mirror.

He pried my fingers from around the mirror without mercy as he matter-of-factly said, "It isn't important. No one will love you less."

Finally he got the mirror away and tossed it into a chair. Then he sat on the edge of my bed, taking me into his arms.

"I know what you think," he said.

"You couldn't," I mumbled, turning away from him and staring out the window.

"You're wrong," he continued, ignoring my self-pity. "This will not change anything," he repeated. He put his hand on my arm, running it over an IV needle. "The people who love you have seen you at your worst, you know."

"Right. Seen me with rollers or with cold cream, not with my face ripped off!"

"Let's talk about me, then. I love you. Nothing will ever change that because it's you I love, not your outside. I've changed your diapers

and watched your skin change to a cluster of blisters with chicken pox. I've wiped up your bloody noses and held your head while you threw up in the toilet.

"I've loved you when you weren't pretty," he hesitated and then continued. "Yesterday, you were ugly—not because of your skin either, but because you behaved ugly. But I'm here today, and I'll be here tomorrow. Fathers don't stop loving their children no matter what life takes away from them. You will be blessed if life takes only your face."

I turned to my father, feeling it was all words, spoken out of duty — polite lies. I looked at him through swollen eyes and spoke through bloody lips.

"Look at me then, Daddy. Look at me and tell me you love me!" My tone of voice and words defied and accused him.

I will never forget what happened next. As he looked into my battered face, his eyes filled with tears. Slowly Daddy leaned toward me; and with his eyes open, he gently kissed my scabbed, oozing lips.

It was the kiss that tucked me in every night of young life, the kiss that warmed each morning. My father's kiss was probably the one thing carrying the power to assure me that love doesn't change. It was a kiss echoing eternity.

All that remains of my accident today is one tiny indentation just above an eyebrow. But my father's kiss and all it taught me about love is still with me.

Agnes soon penetrated deep into the misery of Calcutta's poorest to discover atrocious, unbelievable suffering. Before long a few women joined her and one by one a community formed. Before Mother Teresa passed away, her every word made headlines, and her name continues to be a household word; she is still one of the most admired women in the world. God sent her not to just the poor of Calcutta but to all of us. It began the day a nervous young woman closed the door on one life and walked into the mystery of the future.