

AN OPEN LETTER TO MY NEPHEW

Dear Lil' man,

I'm sorry. I was wrong. Please forgive me. I love you.

There it is: "power-language" – four of the most powerful statements known to build or *rebuild* a relationship. If we were quicker to use our "power-language", I'm convinced our family would be better, stronger. I believe we'd all be together.

I was in NY last month checking out of my hotel. There was a Jewish family checking in – mother, father, aunt, uncle, kids, cousins, grandma, and grandpa – a big, fat, happy, Jewish family. They laughed and smiled, smuggling each other in folded arms, spraying the hotel lobby with wet kisses to both cheeks. I smiled in admiration. But my smiles very quickly became an angry scowl. Soon after that, I was bolting towards Central Park, tears streaming down my face, my eyes flaming red with fury. Why can't my family be that way? I wondered. Why can't black American families have a mom and dad together, a grandma and grandpa together, an aunt and an uncle...together? Why are we so fractured? What the hell happened that my sister, my brother and I have different moms? Why were both my grandmas single? Why does my family tree look more like an unkempt grapevine than a stern oak? I hurt very deeply watching that Jewish family on that day and I still hurt now as I remember them but quickly wipe my tears as I type this (I'm sitting in my neighborhood Starbucks; I look crazy sitting here crying while dressed in my favorite pair of BCBG shorts – too chic, too cool for tears, even though they come earnestly).

My dad/your grand-dad

My quest for understanding begins at, well, the beginning. How was I conceived? The Psalmist in Psalm 139 says, "I was conceived in sin." It's like the writer saw my mama – a freshman at Huston-Tillotson College, a Christian – and my dad – a handsome guy from California with a strong rap – hooking up February 1969. Nine-months later, here I come. One year earlier, he had gotten another girl pregnant. Her name was Linda. She was your aunt Deidre's mom. One year later, he got your dad's mom pregnant. He had three baby mamas by his early 20's. Diapers, child-support, caring/nurturing from our dad? NOT! He was still out there doing his thing. Selfish. Self-centered. Scared.

My brother/your father

One summer while visiting Grandma in California we found out that we had a brother – your dad. We were SHOCKED to learn that we had a brother. We put some of our friends in California on the hunt to locate him, and that's when we discovered he was living in Houston the whole time. Oh my God!!! We had to meet him. I didn't realize the sticky situation that was created by our curiosity. We just wanted to meet our brother. Fortunately, he had two great parents – Kay and Ray – rearing him, instilling in him all things good. One of my favorite memories of being with your dad and his parents was one weekend I came home from college and wanted to spend time with your dad and his ex-wife, Carolyn. They lived in the Orleans Apartments at the time. One night we all wanted to go out on the town but none of us had any money. So we scrimped together some change, put gas in the car, and drove all the way out to North Houston. Your dad asked Ray to borrow some money. Ray took him into the back bedroom and handed him an envelope. Inside the envelope was money your dad gave Ray from his first paycheck years earlier. It was \$10. We weren't going far with \$10 to split between three people. We were sad that we couldn't get any money to go party that night. But I'll never forget how cool it was that Ray seemed

to be a teacher, a real man. Whatever choices your dad made in life, I know he had good home-training. That's a great start. I was jealous and I was proud that someone was there for him.

Family

Too bad we can't pick our family, right? I would've chosen a different situation. If it was up to me, I would've chosen a dad who loved God and loved his family, a dad who kept a job, a dad faithful and committed to his wife, a dad who regularly used "power-language". But I wasn't given the choice. God picked for me. In His infinite wisdom He gave me the perfect setup for me to do what He has called me to do. Sometimes His plan is really tough to accept. Sometimes His plan is really sweet, especially the part of the plan where He picked me to be your aunt. I love Him for connecting you and me – the two writers in the family (**WINK-WINK**).

Me

I have missed you terribly and regret the day I didn't press harder for you to be raised by Lewis and me. Everyone felt that it would be unfair for you to live with us because of my strained relationship with your big daddy. I found their arguments to be stupid. But no one likes to be called stupid. So I sucked it up, opting to listen to other folks dissuade me from the role my heart pined for. I'm sorry for not being there for you during the rough times. Please forgive me for shucking my responsibilities as your auntie. I believe that God, in His blessed and all-knowing way, allowed things to happen the way they did because He has bigger plans. Psalm 23 says, "He leads me in the path of righteousness FOR THE SAKE OF HIS NAME." I trust I'm being lead in the right way. That's why I'm sitting down to write you this letter. He is leading me. I feel like since Grandma died I'm now responsible for keeping our family together. I don't know how to do that without first mending the brokenness in my immediate family. Please keep up with me. I'm not changing my cell number or my email address because I need for you to have a way to reach me when you need me.

Since writing my first book, I've felt an overwhelming need to "loot" my life. Part of my "looting" it, requires that I understand it. This letter is my attempt to understand it (and to reach out to you).

People

God's creation is amazing. I'm fascinated by how the beautiful thing and the ugly thing live side-by-side, both created by God. The butterfly and the frog, the eagle and the buzzard, Texas bluebonnets and burdock weed – the beautiful thing/ugly thing coexisting in nature. It's the same way with people. Beautiful people who spread love, joy, and hope work right next to ugly people who spread fear, shame, crime and hopelessness. I wonder about their lives, the childhood upbringings and the history of what makes the beautiful people beautiful, and the ugly people ugly. There is a catalyst or something that can explain why it is the way it is. I guess I feel that understanding what makes people beautiful or ugly will help ensure that I'm always ranked among the beautiful people. That's what I want for you and for all my family.

Life

So, in your life, at the beginning of your adulthood, my prayer is that you choose to be one of the beautiful people spreading love, joy and hope. I know life has dealt you lots of craziness – some of which you had no control over and some of which you chose. You can look at it like fertilizer, which makes the beautiful things in your life and heart grow strong, or you can see it as weed-killer, which chokes out all the bad-stuff, making room for the good-stuff to grow. Both images work for me. Remember that you only have one life, and your choices matter. Big daddy made a series of selfish choices 40 years ago. He continues to make selfish choices. It becomes harder to do the right thing the older you get. That's why I

want you to make a decision EVERYDAY for the rest of your life to choose the right thing, in every way, at all times.

God

God is with us. You know how I know? Because we're still here, we're still in the land of the living. Everyone who is alive is being kept alive by God's grace and for God's purposes. I know you made a decision to follow Jesus Christ. I know you've had a hard time honoring God's standard about how to live successfully. I struggle with that myself at times. Do you want to know how to be successful in your walk with Christ? Be careful who you hang with. The people around you will either lift you or lower you. You want a lift, want to go higher? Get with people who're going higher. You wanna be dropped into the pit of hell? Get with people who don't care about God or living right. Life is easier than you think. God is faithful to all generations – yours and mine.

You

Finally, my sweet, precious nephew, my prayer for you is this:

That you will be blessed because you don't take counsel from wicked people,

That you will be blessed because you don't stand with sinners, or hang out with people who mock God.

That you will meditate on God's word day and night.

And, as a result, that you will be like a tree planted by streams of water and whose leaves don't wither.

I pray that whatever you do will prosper and that God will continue to watch over you.

I love you forever,

Aunt Lex

a.k.a, "The Passionista!"