

A LIFE WORTH LIVIN'

ABOUT THE BOOK

A Life Worth Livin' is a gripping story that delves into the extraordinary life of an ordinary man. This powerful narrative is packed with breathtaking action, intense drama, and fist-bumping suspense. The story weaves a wild triad of lust and love, making your heart pound with every page.

Experience an emotional rollercoaster filled with deep sorrow, intense happiness, hope, and love. From gut-wrenching heartbreak to moments of sheer joy, this book will tug at your heartstrings. It will pull tears from the most jaded reader and bring hope to those feeling lost.

d. e. mead masterfully captures the essence of a young man's journey, showing how the simplest choices can lead to an extraordinary life. Follow this poignant and inspiring tale that proves every life, no matter how ordinary, is truly worth living.



d. e. mead



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Dedication

I dedicate this, my first novel, to my Beautiful, Amazingly Loving Parents:

Ethel Mead (Mom)

Kenneth Mead (Pops)

John Brown (Adopted Dad)

Erica Mead (Stepmom)

Laverna Mead (Stepmom)

J. Cathy Mumford (Adopted Mom)

You taught me to Love. It just took a while to sink in. I Love you all so much.

Acknowledgment

For those who have blessed me with love and friendship, I'd like to take a moment to mention the amazing people who have helped me turn a dream into a reality. J. Cathy Mumford (Cathy) believed in me before anyone else. She helped me transform a VERY rough handwritten draft into a real book and, through her touching support, encouraged me to make it even better. I've adopted her as a surrogate mom because she and my real mom, Ethel Lee March Mead, share the same values and beliefs that inspire me to be the best I can be.

This brings me to my other loved ones—some lost now, some still with me. Each of you has greatly influenced who I am and, therefore, how I think and write. I've always felt loved and supported, even in the darkest moments. Ethel Mead, Ken Mead, John Brown, Erica Mead, and Laverna Mead are all my beloved parents and stepparents. While some people are blessed with two parents, I was given the great gift of being raised by many stepparents, and their added love has become part of who I am. Thank you all, and God bless you. May you all rest in peace.

With many parents come many brothers and sisters. In every family, some are closer than others, but in my case, each and everyone is always in my heart: Julie Mead and Kenny-Sue Hansen, Tom and Chris Gibbons, Jaena Gibson, Vicky Ricks, Rich and Colleen Mead, Shawna Frazier, and my precious sister Darla Bowden. John and Ray Drlik-Mead, my two amazing brothers, without whose help this book would not exist. Their love, support, encouragement, and guidance have helped me not only with my books but with my whole life. I am truly blessed to have the love and support of all these amazing, beautiful people. Thank you for sharing your life with me.

With every life comes many friends. All of you have meant more to me than you could possibly know. From childhood buddies, I've hit with snowballs and BBs to the great loves of my life with whom I've shared tender moments—you all have shaped who I've become and given me the inspiration to be more. One such friend is Darwin Bagshaw, who read one of my many short stories and inspired me with simple words to stop throwing away my work and write a real book. And so, I did. Thanks, D!

If you shared any part of my life, you have helped me become who I am. If your name isn't specifically mentioned, it doesn't mean your role was any less significant than anyone else's. I've loved, lost, and been blessed by countless people in my life, and there were never any small roles. I've been influenced by single moments of great courage and shaped by love from unexpected corners—none greater than the other. ALL of you are in my heart always: Michelle, Shannon, Mike, Skippy, Becky, Winnie, Uncle George, Paul, Uncle Rob, Uncle Pete, Uncle Ray, Uncle Jack, Aunt Jane, Terry-Lyn, Teresa, and Sandy, Liz, Amy, Tammy, Josh, Mark, Nattie, Bobby, Paige, Sue, Shawn, Timmy, Art, and Jaz—just to name a short list. I could write a novel just with names, but I'll leave it at this with two exceptions: Enrique Martenez and Danny Zerull, my two buddies who banged on me endlessly. They read my book, recognized its potential, and gave me a hard time until I tweaked it into the book it is today. Thanks, guys. I was actually listening.

I love you all,

Dave

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About the Author

d. e. mead was born in 1967 in Salt Lake City, Utah. He has written well over a hundred short stories for various companies until the day came when his friend D. encouraged him to write a real book, and so he did. His characters are so real, and the dialogue so natural, that you fall right into his stories as if you're sitting beside them on a couch. He's honed his writing for decades and now wishes to share it with the world he loves. His family and close friends, whom he also considers family, are his greatest treasures. He also loves dogs and a few select cats, and each day, he tries to remember to laugh.

Author d. e. mead presents the novel

‘A Life Worth Livin’

A

Drlik-Mead Production

For the purpose of sharing our Love with the world and to aid in accomplishing our mission.

Our Mission:

To aid in ending Domestic Violence, Bullying, and Abuse of every kind, and to also help the world find a way to reconnect.

80%

of the author’s proceeds from this manuscript will go toward this mission. It will be donated to well-established existing charities, such as ‘Safe Haven’ homes for the battered and abused and individuals who have suffered this tragedy.

Share your Love



Change the World

A Life Worth Livin' is a biographical story of a young man's life. Packed with breath taking action, intense drama, fist-bump suspense and gut-wrenching heartbreak, all woven around a wild triad of lust and love. This emotional rollercoaster will pull tears from the most jaded housewife and bring hope to the sad of soul. All while you follow an ordinary life made extraordinary by the simplest choices.

Chapter One

Starin at the wall in my apartment for so long my eyes burned. What color was it? White? No Maybe a long time ago. No, not white, I've seen this color. Where? Hmm, Oh yeah, last night, Dead guy. It was dead flesh, white but not white, Dead flesh. I stared. The show was bad. I'd stayed on it because I'd had nothin better to do. Cop shows are all the same. Bad guy does somethin, cops chase, bad guys get away, then with only minutes left the cops catch the guys, Cliche. That was an hour lost. In the bank as they say. My life felt that way. I leaned back, and stared at my ceiling

"Stains gettin bigger," I mumbled to no one. It was the color of coffee. No, yellower. Piss maybe? It was definitely bigger. It didn' always get bigger. Must be a leak, I thought. But leaks would well... keep leakin. So maybe a spill? I could see that. I'd met the guy that lived above me a few times. Big. Not lumberjack big, just, BIG. Smelled like stale cigarettes, old beer, and sharp, and I mean burn your nose sharp, body odor, and maybe piss. Who knew? I tried not to smell him. That made me think. I lifted my t-shirt and took a whiff. Did I shower yesterday? Couldn' remember. I had a routine on workdays, but Saturdays, they became kind of a blur. I tried to remember, but did it really matter? At least I didn' smell like the big guy.

I sat forward, TIRED of stain. Color caught my eye, I turned my head, the poster, I stared at it. I loved this poster. Hated it too. Some things were like that. Family, you could love family and still hate them. I stared at the poster. It was one of those. P.I. Detective, Noir kinda posters. Probably a B-movie that'd run into video its first week. The guy Looked Slick. One of those guys that would walk into the room and steal all the attention, face like a stone God, features chiseled and sharp, hair slicked back and eyes that seemed to know somethin you didn'. People would listen to what he had to say no matter how ridiculous it sounded because he was tall, handsome and just had that thing. A thing I'd never had. Yeah, well, so be it. I looked at the girl. She was the part I loved about the poster. The Guy, not hard to figure out I hated him but, her sexy, skintight red dress that matched the bright red

lipstick on her plump, pouty mouth. Her dress fell just above her knees to show off her Great Legs, fit and long like shadows at sunset. The dress was stretched over her tight to show off her round bum. Sex Sells. Tiny waist, big boobs. She was walkin away from the guy who was lookin over the top, dramatic. She was lookin back over her shoulder. Twisted perfectly to show off her boobs. Watchin to see if the guy was comin after her. THAT LOOK! Guys don' have this look in the book, only chicks. The look that says, "I'm frightened, I want to get away but, don' really want to. I want you to chase me, catch me!" Sultry. Mouth slightly parted, eyes that look both frightened and excited, BEAUTIFUL EYES! Lookin, almost like they're lookin at me.

Who was she? No one I knew. Just some B-movie actress. So pretty! L.A. Was filled with em. I wondered what made the difference? Why would a girl like her not be a huge star and some of the homely chicks I saw in countless movies become famous? Was it pure chance? Who you knew or blew? Luck? As far as I could tell, I didn' have it. If I did, it was all Bad Luck. Stuck on me like tree sap. If I tried for somethin, sure as shit things would go sideways 9 out of 10 times. Even on number 10, I'd get what I wanted only to figure out it was shit. It was like pickin a new flavor of ice cream, Bubble gum! Sounds good. I love bubble gum but, nope. The ice cream tastes like shit! It has a weird after taste. That's just the way it works for me.

I turned away from the girl with gray eyes and jet-black hair. The poster was torn, pulled from one of those movie marques displays. Thrown away to put up the next cheesy movie poster. I'd rescued it from the dumpster walkin back from work. Odd really, I never took the alley shortcut, too risky. Guy could get his throat cut for \$5.00 but, now at least I had some color to cover a small space on my dead flesh wall.

I glanced around tryin to figure out what to do today. Sundays, Flat Sundays! I wasn' into watchin sports other than football and the boys were done for the season. Besides, watchin sports was a lot funnier with a bunch of friends yellin and cheerin and, since I didn' have any close friends, I didn' watch much and, so I didn' have a lot to say. Guys are pretty simple, sports, chicks, cars and a few hunted. Mix those around and pretty much had most guys. Oh, and the gym/ fitness nuts that just wanted to talk about calories and workin out.

NO THANKS! I hated those guys. Guys obsessed with how they looked. Most spend more time in the mirror than talkin to real people.

That reminded me. I slid off the couch, laid on my floor and started my pushups. No. I wasn't a gym guy. NO but I did try to stay in some shape. I pushed and fell, pushed and fell. It took me awhile to get to 100. I used to be able to do 100 straight. NOT today. Sets of 30 to start faded. Finished with sets of 15 and barely got those. Out of shape. Someone can say you're out of shape. You can argue you're not, but a push-up is honest. Simple numbers. I used to be able to do 100 straight and now could barely get 30. Yeah, I was out of shape. I got up, walked to my kitchen and got some eggs. I liked eggs. You could make so many good things with eggs but, today I felt especially lazy. I cracked two into a cup and drank em. Yeah. I get it. They're slimy and gross but, I'd gotten over that a long time ago.

Breakfast done, shirt didn't stink, nothin to do in the apartment, might as well head out. I snatched my keys off the table and left. Not sure why I even locked my apartment. Nothin worth stealin anyway. I CLUNKED my way down the stairs to the ground floor. I knew it was a silly, petty ass thing to do but, there was this little o'l lady on the ground floor that liked to bitch and moan about EVERYTHIN! I just Wanted to give her somethin to complain about since that's what seemed to make her happy. As I hurried around the corner of my squat, plain apartment building I imagined Mrs. Dalfie rushin from her apartment, face in its usual disgusted pucker, try'n to figure out who she was gonna complain to the apartment manager about next. I couldn't help but smile. Bo would get on my ass later, I was sure. That made me smile even more. Two o'l birds with one stone. Of course, I didn't want to get Bo to pissed off at me. He was BIG! Not like the slob upstairs but, linebacker BIG! Ex-cop, pretty sure ex-military too. He had an ex old lady too that would come by and bitch and scream at him too. Bo had a lot of exes but, he was pretty cool most of the time, if the rent was on time and you didn't cause him a lot of work, he pretty much left you alone.

I walked to my car and frowned at my rusty beater. I kept say'n I was gonna fix him up. At the moment he was more rust than car, I swear. I got in and had to fix the faded blanket I'd thrown over a chunk of foam. Without it I got a damn rough ride with springs stabbin me the whole time. The one thing Earl had goin for him was he had a tough little

motor. I'd been shocked, when I bought him. The tiny man that sold him to me said the tranny was shot so, I got him for next to nothin'. The guy didn't know much about cars because, after I got Earl back to the apartment, I'd checked him out. He needed work for sure but, not the work Tiny thought. Lucky for me I work at a garage. I ain't no crack wiz with cars, not even close. I stock the shelves, run a few errands, do the cash register once in a while when the cute girl that normally does it goes on break. Corra hates it when I run her register.

She'll yell, "Don't bang the damn keys you'll break em," or "Close the drawer like your human not a damn monkey!" She has some fire for sure, so I just did stuff that needed doin'. I did know a few things and the mechanics liked me well enough. So, when the garage wasn't too busy, I worked on ol' Earl. Yeah. I'm one of those guys. I named my car Earl. It fit. Old, beat up but, still runnin' great! The problem with the tranny was actually the drive line. The motor mounts were busted. Clean Gone! Crazy! I had to get some help, but the job had gone quick. New motor mounts, slide the motor back to where it shoulda been and, "Earl ran Great." I'd bought pizza for the garage the next day.

Sadly, Earl still looked like shit though. I pulled out and drove. It was Sunday and I wasn't goin' to church, I was headin' north up onto the hill. I knew where I was goin' without givin' it much thought, there's a lot of garage/estate sales up north. Times were tough and gettin' tougher. The once rich and Greedy were bleedin'. Sellin' off their stuff in order to stay on the hill. You know what they say, "One man's loss is another man's gain," and I'd been trampled on plenty, so didn't mind seein' them bleed just a little. Of course, most of their stuff was WAY out of my price range. I really didn't have a price range, I had rent money, food money, gas money. Anything I spent; I would have to get back. No new toys for me. I drove past the shrines of easy livin'. Huge, Spacious houses. Some people might call them mansions.

I didn't know when a big house became a mansion. What made a mansion a mansion, I wondered? Rooms? Did they have to have a certain number of rooms? or was it bathrooms, or just the size? Some of these places were HUGE! I saw a few 'for sale' signs out in front of a couple. I guess they'd run out of stuff to sell. I went up one street and down another. I liked lookin' at the places. I even dreamed of ownin' one, one day. I mean. How cool would

that be. Yeah, well that was about as likely as me growin wings out my ass and learnin to fly. Still, it was fun to dream of.

I spotted a yard filled with stuff. It looked like movin day. At least till I got closer. There were small signs on the pricey things. I noticed a few of the house's neighbors standin out on lawns and porches. Some had pinched, disgusted looks on their uptight faces. One woman standin off from her husband had a face only a blind man couldn' read. I parked right out front, and Earl had center stage. A couple of other cars were nearby. One truck looked like you could sell a couple of it's wheels and buy Earl, and still have money left over. Earl was a piece of shit. Sorry Earl but, the truth was obvious. Earl's rusted body screamed out 'Poor' to these people. I got out and Earl creaked. I made an effort not to look down from all the weight of their glarin eyes on me. I walked onto the lawn and found a tall woman almost instantly in my face.

"Please don't touch anything. If you wish to purchase something, call me over and, I will help you." One last look, and she left.

"Sure whatever," I said to her back, as I tried hard not to glare at her. She might as well of said, "Don' Steel anything, I'm watchin you," with that haughty, better than me look. I looked around. The furniture was beautiful, rich wood. I loved wood but couldn' afford anything. Some of the other shoppers saw me and actually wrinkled their noses and walked away. One guy glanced my way and smirked. I was used to this, ALMOST. It still pissed me off though. None of these people were any better than me, so I tried to tell myself. I looked. I didn' TOUCH! I didn' want the lady to have any excuse to kick me off her lawn.

Off to the side and near the back of the lawn, I spotted a box with old marker on the side. It said, 'Harold's Books.' I like books. Two reasons. One, at yard sales they were normally cheap, and two, I liked to read. My TV was gone thanks to Jill, my Ex-girlfriend. Jill'd made sure the TV was destroyed when she caught me watchin Porn. What can I say, I'm a young guy.

"Hey! Can I check out these books?" I yelled. Just to be a little obnoxious. The tall woman winced and frowned. To avoid me yellin again, she came over very reluctantly. I smiled and waited. Once she stood over me, I was a bit more polite as I said, "is it alright if I

open this up check out these books?" I waited. She looked down, Starin. Was that a tear in her eye?

"Yes," she said softly. Definitely fightin back a sob. Sometimes it's easy to forget that these sales represented these people's lives bein sold away for pennies. I opened the box. It was old books. I glanced at a few and recognized them. "O'l Harold liked his classics." I said tryin to sound nice now. She didn' say anything. I glanced up.

She quickly wiped away a tear, then said, "Fifty bucks! If you want them."

"Fifty Bucks! Dang \$10.00 tops." I said a bit shocked. They were old not gold. Her face pinched. She was sellin off her memories.

"\$40.00, no less." She choked.

I was goin to keep barterin but, I'm not a jerk. I could tell this was wreckin her. So, I shrugged and said, "Sure whatever, \$40.00 for the whole box?" She gave a Crisp nod, and the deal was done. I gave her two worn out twenties and carried my box to Earl. As I put it in my trunk, I glanced back. The woman was watchin me. Her face not as uptight as before. Now she stared at me as if I were carryin away her soul. Pure sadness and pain etched her pretty face. I forced myself to look away and up in a high window, I saw a small face. A cute little girl, maybe 8 or 9 starin out. Watchin her life float away into the trunks, and arms of an army of strangers. Then she was lookin at me. I stared back. I couldn' break her gaze. She was a pretty little girl but clearly sad. We watched one another.

Moments like these happen once in a rare while. When you're doin somethin or see somethin, time seems to stop. We stared. Stared as time froze like a drop of rain at the end of an icicle. Then slowly she raised her tiny hand and waved. A cute silly little wave. It came naturally. My arm raised, my hand moved and, I mimicked her cute childish wave and smiled. We smiled at each other. I slowly got into Earl. I glanced back at the yard sale. People milled through the family's life like vultures pickin at bones. On last glance up. She was gone. I pulled away.

I'd spent more money than I could afford. The haughty lady hadn' really wanted to sell the books and, I'm not sure why I'd wanted them. Broke, I had no place to go but home. Back to the palace of dead flesh. I wished I hadn' thought of that. I carried the box up past

Mrs. Dalfie. She gave me the eye. I only smiled back. Once behind my door, I realized how hungry I was. I hadn't stopped for a burger because I was literally totally broke. I fished through my fridge. A few swallows of milk left in a plastic jug, bologna, enough in my mayonnaise jar to scrape the sides and, three pieces of bread. I really shouldn't have bought the books, I thought as I made a double stack sandwich with what I had and finished off the milk. Once I could think again, I sat down on the couch and opened the box. One by one I took the books out. A couple of business books, a few children's books, including 'Winnie the Pooh' and 'Swiss Family Robinson.' Several classics, 'Moby Dick' and 'Count of Monte Cristo.' I was pretty sure I could sell the classics to a used bookstore I'd sold to before. I wasn't sure if I could get back all my money but, enough for food, I hoped.

I Opened 'Winnie the Pooh' smiled as I read it. I know it's silly but, I like to think everyone's a kid at heart. At least deep somewhere. I turned a page and a picture fell to my floor; I picked it up. An old Polaroid of a young girl. She looked familiar and I knew. This was the haughty lady as a child. Cute, playful smile. Maybe at a party. On the back it said, "Kathrine, age 11." I smiled. Her daughter looked a lot like her at that age. Kathrine, OK, so that was her name. I finished Pooh and for some reason slid the photo back in place and smiled. I pictured her dad reading this to her, and it made me feel a bit sad. It was something I'd never had. My old man had been a mean drunk and luckily for me and mom, she'd booted his ass to the curb. Unfortunately, it made things ALOT tougher for us. Life's only fair in fairy tales. I set the book back in the box. I opened 'Swiss Family Robinson', read a few pages, then thumbed through it. Again, a picture was tucked in a page. The page was blurred. Water wrinkled, as if someone'd spilled water on it. The picture was of a young smiling boy, I turned it over. 'Charles, age 13' is all it said. Good looking kid. Probably lawyer now, or doctor. That's what happens to rich kids in my mind. Poor kids go to work at the garage, I tucked Charlie's picture back into the same worn page and put the book back in the box. I glanced at 'Moby Dick', then picked up 'Count of Monte Cristo', because I liked the movie. I started reading but it was tough. This was the original print and tough to read. I was going to set it aside but, decided to just thumb through it. Toward the middle, I found a small card. Old looking.

Small. Smaller than a playin card. I looked at it. It was an o'l school baseball card. Black and white. I read it. It was some guy I had never heard of play'n for a team I had never heard of. I wasn' dumb. I knew baseball cards could be worth ALOT of money. My Heart raced. I sat the card carefully down on my coffee table, AFTER I made sure it was clean. Then page by page went through the book. I found two more cards! OLD! Just like the other one. I whistled through my teeth. I put them all together. 3 old Cards! Jack Pot! I looked through all the other books and found nothin. Only in the 'Count of Monte Cristo!' Well maybe because the o'l book was about findin a treasure. My mind raced! I tried to Imagine how much they were worth. At least 100's. Heck maybe 1000's! I might be rich! I thought of buyin one of those big houses, fixin up Earl so he was totally bad ass. I was still holdin the book and lookin at the cards thinkin of bein rich and hidden treasure when my fingers brushed over the paper on the inside cover of the book. Was it my imagination or was that a tiny bump? I felt carefully. It was! My heart pounded as I traced the ridge. I knew. It was the exact shape of one of the Cards. Hidden! If it was hidden, then Kathrine's o'l man knew it was valuable. I felt lightheaded as my heart pounded excitedly. I was goin to be rich! I went through every page of every book carefully, I noticed and replaced Charlie's and Kathrine's pictures then checked all the back covers. I wanted to scream when my fingers brushed over another hidden card in 'Moby Dick.' I wanted to dance like a silly fool. I wanted to YELL!!

So I did, "FINALLY, MY TURN!!!" both hands shakin over my head. I sat back down on the couch and smiled. I don' know why but, the moment I smiled I thought of Kathrine and an adorably cute little girl with a silly little wave. I pictured Kathrine's daughter smilin bravely as her life was plucked off the lawn of her home.

"DAMN IT!!!" I yelled. Feelin guilty now. This was how yard sales worked. All sales final! I sat there, sat there and stared, stared a long time. Starin at those cards and thought slowly, then smiled. Not any smile either. This one I felt, not just on my face but, everywhere. It was a feelin so strange to me that at first, I wasn' sure what it was. I had to actually think about it for a while as I just sat there smilin. Finally, I knew what it was. Joy. Not the joy you get from love. This was the Joy of pure happiness. Maybe the first time I'd ever felt it. It was so intense I felt a tear slip down my cheek. With a huge smile on my face, I slowly slipped the cards back into 'Count of Monte Cristo.' Put all the books back in the box,

walked past Mrs. Dalfie on my way out. Just before goin out the door, I turned and called back, "I'm sorry I stomped down the steps earlier," then grinned. At first, she just stared. Then actually smiled. SMILED! It shocked me.

"Well," she said, still smilin. "Boys will be boys sometimes," and she actually softly chuckled. It blew me away so badly. I just laughed with her as I walked out.

I put the box next to me in Earl and drove away. I didn' glance at it but I did smile as I drove past the used bookstore. I took me a second to find the house. I parked. The lawn was all but picked clean. I stared across the lawn at Kathrine sittin behind a tiny fold out table, took a long deep breath, thought for a second, smiled, and got out with the box. Kathrine looked drained and worn. She saw me and glared. I almost laughed but only smiled back. I walked up with the box but before I could say anything, she barked, "No Refunds. All sales are final." It felt like a test. The door was open. She was holdin it open for me in fact. I could walk through so easily.

I smiled warmly at her and stared at her for a long moment then said, "Kathrine, I need to show you somethin."

It shocked her. She sat very, very still. Her hands clasped in front of her on the table so tightly her knuckles turned white. Her mouth quivered as she finally spoke, "Oh only my father calls me that."

I nodded, glanced at the box and said "I know. Can I please show you a few things," then just waited patiently. She saw I was sincere, nodded at a chair beside her tiny table. It was a rickety metal chair that squeaked as I sat. The little girl came out of the house with two glasses of yellow lemonade. As I sat the box on the grass, I smiled at her and Kathrine looked over her shoulder. All haughty matron gone as she looked at her daughter, smiled, and said,

"Thank you sweetheart." Her daughter gave her a glass, then held out the one she had clearly meant for herself to me. It was in a tiny glass with bears and hearts on it. Probably her favorite cup. I smiled back, rolled my eyes silly and said,

"Oh Thank You but I can' drink another drop. I drank a whole gallon before I drove over. You drink it for me, please." It made her giggle. Her mommy now looked at me very

confused. Clearly unsure of what to think of me. She finally said, “This is my daughter Christina,” as she put her arm around her daughter and squeezed.

“It's nice to meet you Christina,” I said politely as Cristina smiled shyly and tucked in close to mom. She was a super cute kid. I pulled from the box 'Winnie the Pooh.' Kathrine eyed it hungrily. I thumbed through the pages, found her picture, turned it over and slowly read, “Kathrine, age 11” then started where her Dad had left off, “Pooh Bear was stuck once again in the honey hole of the tree. ‘Christopher – Christopher Robbins I'm Stuck again.’ Pooh hollered.” I looked up and Kathrine was indeed cryin. Two tears raced one another down her flushed cheeks. I handed her her picture. She held it tenderly, then softly said,

“Taken,” her voice choked with emotion, “at my birthday party. My Dad used to read me 'Pooh' every night even when he was too tired to stay awake.” I smiled gently. I had never really had a memory like that. It made me happy now that she at least had. I passed the book to her,

“This is yours.” She couldn't refuse it. She took it and held it to her chest. A few more fat tears leaked out. She couldn't speak for a few seconds, then softly mumbled,

“Thank you, Thank, you,” as she smiled warmly. I smiled and nodded in return. I pulled a second book out. Her face went white as a sheet of paper, mouth open. “I... I Thought that was lost.” She grabbed desperately for it, and I gave it up gladly. Her tears fell as she softly sobbed and held the book tightly. The little one, not understandin, started to cry too. Her Momma hugged her too. Both cryin now. Tears fell like summer rain. Mine too. I'm human and these were tears I'd felt before. Tears of deep sorrow. She held the book to her and when she could take a breath I said,

“Go to page 39.” Her hands shook. Her whole body trembled. She moved as if stuck suddenly into slow motion as she turned the pages. Her fingers were so gentle as if she thought this book, was the Holy Grail. Finally on page 39 she stared at Charlie's picture and began to cry much harder than before, as she held Charlie's picture to her heart. I waited, head down. These were different tears. Her sob had pain only she understood. Her daughter Christina, clearly confused and scared, cried harder too, clinging to her Momma. I waited, slowly her

sobs faded, and Christina sniffled. Katherine sniffled just like her daughter as she studied the picture in her hand, then spoke so softly I leaned in to hear her.

“This is my big brother Charles. He died three days after this picture was taken.” She took a deep breath - “My Dad locked himself away from us after that.” She stared at me with tortured eyes. “He used to read 'Pooh' to me and 'Swiss' to Charles.” The pain and sadness in her words were so real, I felt like they brushed my skin. “They were our favorite books...He,” she held back a sob. “He never read to me again after Charles died. Our family pretty much died too. These These are priceless to me.” she said as she looked at the two books now lying together under her hands. Then finally looked, stared me in the eye. Deep Searchin. Her pain was still there but, so much more as she said, “Thank you for returnin them to me. I’ll - I’ll give you back your money,” she stammered fishin in a small money box for money.

I held up my hand and said, “Please No. I wouldn’t take it if I were starvin. Besides, all sales are final. So, it's a gift.” She looked at me as if seein me suddenly appear. She stared, stared and studied me now. Then finally nodded and gave me the most radiant smile I’d ever seen. WOW! It was like the sun came out and flashed sunlight right through me. If I thought I knew Joy before then, this was somethin far more beautiful.

I returned her smile and stared. Smiled and stared. She sensed somethin and said, “What?” in a curious tone. I was so happy I couldn’t help but laugh a little as I said,

“I got one more surprise for you.” She stared, unsure, clearly excited because I was excited. I pulled out ‘Count of Monte Cristo.’ She saw what I held and reached, this time I gently raised my hand to hold her back and she drew back. “You know this story?” I asked with a sly smile.

“Yes of course. That was my dad's favorite book. He wouldn’t let us touch it. He kept it locked in his case to be sure we didn’t.” Her voice bitter. I smiled warmly at her. Stared for a second then said, “Your Dad had a very good reason to lock this away from his sweet children. A very good reason he wouldn’t want his adorable children to take it out and play with it.”

I reached out and gently took the glasses off the table. They both looked at me funny as I set them on a small chest. I used my shirt to clean any moisture off the table. A little

crude but I'm just a kid anyway. Kathrine gave me that motherly look and I smiled and shrugged. Now certain the table was perfectly clean, I said, "Did you know your Dad loved baseball?" I asked Kathrine with a smile ear to ear. She stared at me for ages then slowly very slowly said,

"You can't know that." Her voice filled with complete shock. I just smiled and said,

"I know your dad was a very smart man. He loved you very much and I know that he knew these books would mean somethin to you. You would never sell them if you weren't frazzled and desperate. If you'd had time to look through the box, you'd have found these and never ever sold them." She was noddin, "You thought all the important books were long lost. When I opened the box, I saw a bunch of business books on top and a few old classics. You probably just rushed and saw the business books and closed the box back up. Well, you missed a few things." I nodded at her childhood treasures as my fingers tapped 'The Count of Monte Cristo.' My heart raced as I slowly turned the book around and nudged it out into the middle of the table. She watched my slow, deliberated motion as if it were magic.

I thumbed to the first card, pulled it free and pushed it over to her. She knew immediately what it was, I was showin her. Like me, she likely didn't know its exact value, but she knew enough. She knew it was valuable. I took out the other two, laid them in a nice, neat row. She was shocked. I reached out, took her hand. She flinched back unsure, I smiled and said, "I need to show you Kathrine." My voice soft and sure. She let me take her hand. I guided her fingers, Traced the hidden cards. She felt them. Her eyes went wider still, mouth WIDE open in complete shock. I smiled and softly said, "If the cards you see are valuable, which I really suspect they are, then how valuable do you think the cards are that he's hidden and protected? These are your Dad's final legacy for you Kathrine. He kept his books safe so one day when you really needed it, you would have these." I got up. Turned and walked away.

"What? Wait Wait! Why? Why? You could have kept them." She stammered "All sales Final," she repeated from before but now in shocked awe. I stared back. Stared for a long time. Memorizin this moment. Mom and adorable daughter standin side by side on

their picked over lawn. Kathrine, clearly confused and excited, but unsure. Christina not sure what to do. I smiled back, laughed and said,

“Not this time Kathrine. Have a Great life!” I waved that silly childish wave at Christina as Kathrine began to laugh and cry and laugh and cry. So happy she swept Christina up into a crushing hug. Dancin! Laughin! I watched from Earl for a few seconds. Christina was now laughin with her Mommy, she waved, and I waved back as I drove away. I’d never felt better in my whole life.