

Love Comes In Unexpected Places

by Hillary Roy

When the women from the Women of Gilgal substance abuse center in East Point, Georgia heard that they had a visitor coming they had no idea what to expect. It was Valentine's Day, a holiday that is historically meant to be shared with the one you love.

Yet, for some reason, none of that seemed to matter to me. I had arrived at Gilgal at 6:45pm after drudgingly driving through 2 hours of Atlanta traffic. I was hot and sweaty, my nerves were in shambles, and my make-up was almost gone when I approached the door. *What in God's name was I going to share with these women about love that they didn't already know?*

Two weeks earlier I had called my mother with the novel idea of visiting a center for women that day. I had envisioned this as the perfect way to jump start the launch of my book, "***Journeys of Love Voices of the Heart***" and also do something wonderful for the community. I didn't want to waste my evening sitting around waiting for some jerk to give me a bouquet of wilted, dried out, supermarket bought flowers and a bag of Hershey kisses. I wanted to experience love in a way that was not only meaningful to others but also myself.

As I opened the door of the house, I was greeted by warm faces and smiles from ear to ear. It was as if I was looking into a rainbow of color in many vibrant shades. Lynn (not her real name) was the first person I saw. She was a tall African-American woman with smooth, baby soft skin. Her smile was wide and her hands told the story of a woman who had wisdom in her soul. And then there was Collette (also not her real name) a short, spunky middle-aged Caucasian woman with reddish-brown hair and a bright scarf. As I continued to walk through each room, I heard the voices of the other women echo around me. They were thanking me for the carnations and journals I'd brought.

When I sat on my stool to begin the presentation, I could feel the eager anticipation of the unknown. Many were excited, while others were uneasy as they glared deeply into my eyes. As I read the first selection, I began to hear the pleasant sound of roars and cheers filling the room. These women were beginning to let go of all of their silent inhibitions and journey with me. Suddenly, tears fell from their faces and the sound of cries scattered across the room. They were moved by the words of a mother who had lost her 23-year-old-daughter to HIV in the story "*My Daughter, My Angel.*"

As I continued reading I noticed that my eyes were becoming teary and my heart was pounding from emotion because I knew that this was more than just one woman's journey. It was a journey known by many of the women in that room. They too had lost friends and family members, cousins, aunts, uncles, and innocent children.

These women each had stories, their own stories to share. Suddenly, I could feel the change of disposition in the room; their nods, shouts and handclaps said it all. They believed, just as I did, in the power of love and they knew that love was the focal point of

their recovery but it had to start with them.

For the rest of that evening we exchanged stories and photos about the people we had loved and lost. We laughed, embraced, and reflected on the joy of our youth and all of the other love journeys we've had since then. From a broken marriage; to an intimate escapade; and finally the mention of innocence being taken away too soon. Whatever journey it was, it was a magical evening, and a night that I'll never forget.