

Happy Birthday Donny

12/9/2021

Last week I was outside the front of my house touching up my outdoor Christmas decorations when two young ladies approached me. They were both wearing dresses, and I could see name badges on their sweaters. I assumed they were probably from a nearby church, and I was surprised to learn they were from the church of Latter-Day Saints, or more commonly known as Mormons. I mentioned to them that I was used to seeing the young men out and about doing their mission work. I guess even the Mormons are changing with the times.

They invited me to Christmas festivities at their church, and then we continued chatting for a while. When they asked me if I was familiar with the Latter-Day Saints, I was compelled to give my standard answer. Knowing they were probably too young to know who I was talking about, I simply told them that my childhood idol was Donny Osmond, and it's because of him that I'm a Christian today. It turned out they had heard of him and knew a little bit about the Osmond's musical background. I was keenly aware of my age at that moment because my childhood memories came flooding back to the time in my life when Mr. Osmond was my reason for living.

I don't want to drone on about the details of my childhood, and compared to many, I probably had it much better than most. But for this young girl, life in my home was hard. I am a very sensitive person anyway, and I feel things way too deeply, so when I am hurt, I hurt deeply as well. From early on, all I can remember were the screaming fights between my parents, usually due to my dad coming home after having disappeared for three to four days. He was usually so drunk that he could barely function. Rather than let him sleep it off, my mother, understandingly a wreck with worry, but also fuming mad, would lay into him as soon as he staggered into the door. My father was in the Coast Guard and we moved all the time. I was the new kid in school more times than I care to mention. I never felt like I belonged anywhere, especially at home.

Eventually my parents divorced, I watched my older siblings join the military one by one to escape from being home. I was left alone with my severely depressed mother, with whom I had an extremely toxic relationship. My father ended up marrying his high school sweetheart, and basically chose an entirely different family. He left all of us behind. As you can imagine, I am leaving out all the painful details, but ultimately, I grew to feel very unloved, unwanted, and had a terribly low self-esteem. Before I ever grew to an age containing two digits, I felt like my life was a terrible accident.

Then one day my new best friend, Pam, showed me a picture of Donny Osmond. If anyone remembers 16 Magazine or Tiger Beat, those were my bibles...I was hooked. I collected anything and everything I could about Donny and his brothers. I'm thinking this was about 1971, and I was probably in the 3rd Grade. Every time we moved, the posters were taken down with care and placed on the walls in the next house. I probably gave new meaning to the word fanatic.

We lived in Maryland in 1973, and our mom bought tickets for my sister and I, and of course, herself, and I saw my very first Osmond concert. As luck would have it, I cut my foot just days before, which required major stitches and I couldn't walk on my foot. Imagine if you can, Baby Huey (how I felt at that age) being carried through a concert venue with thousands of little screaming girls. I was nearly as tall as my mom at the time, and she had to carry me! Our seats were far back and up high, so the Osmonds looked like they were maybe an inch tall. But it was one of the best days in my life.

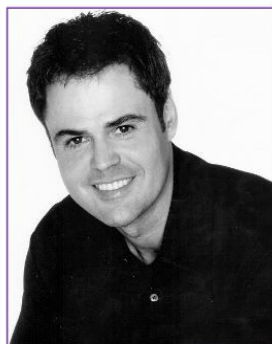
As I grew older, I devoured everything there was to know about Donny and his family. If you know anything about this family at all, they were very open about their devout Mormon faith. My experience with religion was nil, so I was not biased on anything I was reading, other than my adoration for the family that I wished was my own. The more I read, the more I wanted to know about this God that my beloved family referred to. All I could see was that my home was a nightmare, and we were all miserable. Donny and his family seemed genuinely happy and never wavered from proclaiming the love of God.

My sister and I went to Las Vegas to see Donny & Marie on my 50th birthday. Of course, the highlight was meeting Donny backstage afterward at a meet and greet. I shared with him a letter I had written and asked him to place his autograph next to my signature. He also signed my author's copy of my first "Meet Lisa Jo" book. He was as kind and thoughtful as I expected him to be. After the 4th or 5th hug, I had to exit and let the others waiting in line have their time to talk with him.

Truth be told, I didn't want to leave him. As I came out into the bright lights and noisy casino, I had to find a wall and just hold on. I kid you not... I started sobbing like a baby. It wasn't just the excitement of finally meeting my lifelong symbol of comfort and best friend. I was crying over all those times he was there for me when I was afraid and lonely. He was the only constant I had when there was no one to talk with or to understand the pain I was in. I will always love him and thank him for being there for me.

I have now been a Christian longer than I haven't been one. Troubles don't end when you become a believer in God, but somehow, you get through those problems with a promise of hope, love, and dignity. Having this faith does not give me any claim to being perfect...far from it. I fail every single day. It has only been in the last decade that I have truly recognized the causes for my depression and low self-esteem. I have learned I have codependency issues and still feel things way too deeply. The neat part about the person I am today though, is that I'm learning to love myself despite my flaws. I'm learning to see me the way God does, and not how I think the world does. I owe those seeds of faith to Donny and his family.

As I was still chatting with the two young ladies, I shared a little bit about how I met Donny in Las Vegas, and I told them I have a framed collage to commemorate that day on my bedroom wall. It was hard for me not to invite them in to show it off. When I think about those days growing up, inside I become that little girl all over again. His songs, "Puppy Love" and "I Knew You When" still make me smile. And without fail, every December 9, I still say out loud, "Happy Birthday, Donny".



Happy Birthday, Donny!