

Dedicated to my Dad.

Stories in the Flames

"Hurry everyone, the fire's ready." Children scurried from all corners of the big house, to sit in front of the blazing fireplace - the father, mother, and one, two, three, four. Uh-oh, one was missing. Her six-year-old feet trudged slowly, as if she were wading through a creek of peanut butter. "Why can't we have a television set like everyone else, Daddy?" she asked for the hundredth or so time."

"For one thing we can't afford it, remember Honey?" her father answered. "But more important . . . come join us."

"Okay, Daddy," she said as she sighed and flopped down on the rug between her two big sisters.

"Now everyone, look into the fire," he continued. "See what pictures and stories you can find in the flames tonight."

The souls living inside the father, mother, and each child, peered through the windows of their eyes at the multi-colored, ever-changing fire. They sat and kneeled, making no sound, except for the baby's gurgles. The imagination, longings, and dreams of each was kindled, and they saw beautiful stories and wonderful adventures painted in those flames. Their eyes were so aglow, it seemed like invisible sparks darted back and forth between the blaze and each heart in that warm, lovely room.

The silence was broken by the low voice of the father. "Now, everyone will have a turn." First, the melodic voice of the mother revealed what she had seen in the flames: a work of art, embroidered by her life experiences. Then each inspired, rosy-cheeked child told the illustrated stories he or she had seen flickering in the fireplace.

As the six-year-old finished her story, she smiled and said, "You're right, Daddy! Our fireplace *is* the best television! We can use our 'magination and make up our own stories!"

Then she saw the skin crinkle around her father's blue eyes, as he began to speak to the family he loved so. He told funny and thrilling stories about animals, children, history, and the world they were growing up in. The children listened, sometimes giggling, sometimes teary-eyed, sometimes asking questions.

As on every other fire-side evening, the last story answered the deepest, most heart-felt questions of his children, of *all* children and grown-ups *everywhere*, in *all* times and centuries: What is life all about? What is love? And is there such a thing as loving and being loved forever? From the mouth of their father who knew the heart of God always came the most beautiful of all love stories, the true story of how God had kept His Word, His promise of love that will never end. This is the first and the last, all-in-one story in the flaming, forgiving fireplace, the blazing heart-hearth of God.

