

Now an adult, James Lewis is an award-winning bestselling author of 3 novels. He spent 20 years in the Navy, and retired from active duty and became a personal trainer and exercise physiologist in Northern California.

But growing up in the 80s as a child, there was a week where he was quite angry at his mom.

He remembers her yelling at him that he couldn't go outside as he was on restriction for a week, grounded in his story.

His blood at the time was boiling when he heard that word "restriction." For how could you ban an 11-year old boy from his BMX bike and buddies - especially during the summer!

He had disobeyed his mom. She had told him to be home at 2, but he didn't come home until 7 in the evening.

When he got home he stomped toward his bedroom, but before reaching the doorway, a hard grip around his elbow curtailed forward progress.

“Don’t walk away from me!” his mother pointed at the couch and told him to sit down.

James folded his arms across his chest, his forehead furrowed. He turned to the couch and slammed his bottom on the cushion.

“Oh okay” his mother said nodding. “Since you think you can ruin the couch I paid for, you can’t sit there. Get up” she ordered.

Now becoming more angry he thought to himself “so now we were playing musical chairs.” James rolled his eyes and stood up. His mom grabbed his wrist and they walked through the kitchen into the dining-room area. She again ordered him to sit down.

He pulled out a chair from the dining table, plopped down and fixated on the wall. He pushed his spine against the curved iron back, but ignored the slight discomfort and leaned back defiantly, folding arms and pouting his lips.

His mom took a pen and pad of paper from the kitchen drawer and told him she had an assignment for him.

“Assignment?!” was his thought. “School is over!”

She then dropped the pad and pen in front of him. “You must be a genius,” she said, grinning. “Something in that hardheaded noggin of yours convinced you it was a good idea to come home so late.”

He gazed at her, head tilted. He realized she had something up her sleeve.

“So,” she continued, “since you have such a creative mind, let’s see you prove it. I want you to write a story every night of your punishment...starting tonight.”

James twisted his face as if a raw odor had stunned him. he stared at the paper, then looked up at her. “Write about what?” he asked.

“Anything you want. You have an hour, and I’ll read it when you’re done.”

She walked into the kitchen. “I’ll warm up your dinner, so get goin’.”

Talk about ball and chain, James thought to himself. Bad enough he had to stay in the house, but now his mother wanted to torture him. No TV, no Atari, no handheld video games. Just him, the dining room table, a pen and a blank pad of paper.

James grabbed the pen. With a scowl, he transferred his anger through his thin fingers - and wrote. He didn't care about plot or structure; he wanted revenge on paper.

His hand didn't stop. He wrote himself as the main character and hero; his mother became the villain and enemy to kids of the world. Of course, James the hero defeated the evil villain with supersonic weapons.

He ate as he wrote, and he finished an hour later. When his mother read his story, she asked why he wrote about bad things happening to her.

James didn't respond, just shrugged. His eyes were fixated on the wall again, his bottom lip sticking out.

To his surprise, his mom said “I love the story and can’t wait to read another one tomorrow night.” He sucked in his bottom lip to keep from smiling. After all, dang it, he was still made.

But he felt good inside. he’d written a story - something he had never done before - and his mother praised his effort.

The next night, James banged out another story. Mom was still a villain, but this time he used his mental powers to make her an ally.

As his mom’s eyes scanned the pages, she chuckled once or twice. Again, she praised his art of storytelling. She kissed his forehead, and James felt his hard resolve against her fading.

That night, he wrote a little earlier than usual. An idea had been bouncing in his head, and James itched to create another “masterpiece.” His fingers whipped across the page and within minutes he created a story about a kid taking his own life. He’d seen a TV special on teenager suicide once, and he wished he had the power to prevent such a tragedy.

A look of sadness draped his mother's face. After she read his story, she hugged him and said she loved him. He didn't ask how she felt about the story; her glassy eyes said it all.

Sleep didn't come easy that night. Characters crystallized and swam in his head, much like in his dreams. James saw their faces, heard their voices, knew their likes and dislikes - everything.

And they wanted out.

Luckily, he had brought the pen and paper to bed with him. With so much tug-of-war in his mind, he had plenty of ideas to create more stories for his mother. He wrote a story for himself this time.

For the next few days, the stories kept coming. He looked forward to his mom's comments, but he didn't have to wait on the hour she had allotted for writing. He had plenty of time to write in his room. And with so much "cerebral chaos" as he called it, he could create any adventure he wanted. Being stuck in the house didn't limit his mind.

That same cerebral chaos stayed with him even after his mother lifted the outdoor ban. He carried on through his teenage years, and today lives with him as a man. He says the people in his head still hold him captive sometimes - until he released them. Only this time, he uses a laptop computer to set them free.

James says he never told his mother why he was late that day so long ago. He says in the downtown library, anyone could lost track of time in the wondrous world of Encyclopedia Brown, Charlie Brown and Snoopy and Choose Your Own Adventure books.

He still immerses himself in books, but creates his own novel-length ones, and now thanks to his mom has discovered who he was meant to be, an author.

As we celebrate mother's day this weekend, we have very appropriate readings this week that center around love and reveal to us truths of who God is, and how we respond to Him.

The first as we hear in the second reading from 1 John: "God is love." We see this in the Trinity with the Father as the lover; the beloved the Son; the outpouring of this love in the Holy Spirit. As such, we can think of God more as a verb than as a noun. And this is why we remind ourselves time and time again of how radical God's love is, namely, it's always there. James' mother had every right to be upset with him for coming home 5 hours late and not knowing where he was. But just as when we make mistakes our mothers do not stop loving us, the same is true with God. His love is there regardless of our choices; He will never stop being merciful or forgiving.

Second, we are reminded that God meets us where we are at. We read in the second reading that the Father sends the son into the world so that we might have life through him. To return to James, note how his mom met him where he was at. She knew he was angry and there was a consequence. But she didn't let that anger get to her. She affirmed his talent. She saw through the anger and worked with her son. Like a good mom, she didn't give up but used her love to get to his heart and help him discover new things about himself. Think of Peter when he meets Jesus and Jesus just gets into the boat. This is God doing this for our souls. As Bishop Robert Barron puts it, the Bible is not a story of our quest for God or

following some program of spiritual enlightenment but more of a story of God's quest for us. How our parents do this for us too - they see past anger and emotional or some of the immature decisions we make to all that potential that is lying beneath the surface. As humans we all fall back into sin as life goes on, and sometimes we can wallow in it or think I have to do this for God to love me. But that's not at all how God operates. Rather He loves us, and comes to meet us and we just have to let Him into our lives. As Jesus says it was not you who chose me but I who chose you - so if we are ever down on ourselves or frustrated, all we have to do is look to the Cross, look to the Eucharist and again be reminded that Jesus is right there for us and let Him take over.

Third, the response. "You are my friends if you do what I command you" says Jesus. And then He speaks of what He will do, namely no greater love is there than to lay down one's life for one's friends. God's love is there as a free gift. But we do not just say "okay God, I love you, you love me" but we respond to that love. James' mother did more than bring him into the world; she helped her son become a man and to find his gifts. James got past the anger and realized he made a mistake but also was able to find his talents through responding to his mother's challenge. So we ask ourselves

too how do we respond to this love. Our mother's show us this every day. They lay down their lives for us by holding us as infants and changing our diapers; by teaching us right from wrong; by their patience; by their sacrifice to do so much for us; by helping us find our way in life. So we need to ask ourselves too how do we love like Jesus. How do we forgive those who wrong us; how do we be patient with those who disagree with us; how do we serve our spouses and families; how do we live out our faith through being generous with our time. Such is the response of love that is always ongoing. Just as God never stops loving, neither can we.

Lastly, once we know God is love and respond to that love, we need to ask ourselves how we are doing. And here's the big clue: are you a joyful or happy person? One of the happiest people I ever met was my grandma Pat. She always had a smile on her face like Mother Teresa. Yet for years she battled bad knees yet worked at a corner drugstore; she made countless meals and treats for the family; and worked hard for her family. I also knew her to be a person of prayer who had a deep love for her God. But what I remember so much was that smile and the joy she always had to see you. When you were with her, you were all that mattered - she was just happy you were visiting. So ask yourselves, do you have joy too? Do you

smile? Do we radiate God's love? It's great to know liturgy or commandments or theology, but even the devil can quote scripture. If we love God, there needs to be a joy and a happiness in our hearts.

Like James, as a child I'd like to write things too every so often. My mom gave me a typewriter when I was young and I'd use it to create stories including a gossip newspaper that didn't make it out of the house about the ongoings of our family. I don't have that typewriter anymore and like James I traded it in for a laptop, but as I mention in my column this week, two of my favorite things that are in my house are two paintings made by my mom. One was from circa 1976, the other was from the days of the quarantine last year. I love them so much because they are gifts from the heart, but also remind me so much of my mom's sacrifice. And that's because while a lot went into them, there could have also been many more paintings from the 1980s, 90s and 2000s. Mom did doodle every so often; in fact I remember she made a great sketch for the Timberwolves logo when it was announced we were getting an NBA team in the late 80s. But the reason she wasn't painting as much was because there was the busyness of raising a couple of kids, of helping out her parents and in-laws. Her paint was grace; her canvas was our family home and wherever she

went. The same is true for dad, though like me he isn't much of a painter. And my sense is you've seen the same thing from the great people in your life, in particular our mothers who have done so much for us. James' mother helped him find himself, and as I look back on the years there is many a moment I wish I could go and speak to my younger self. But I also realize that in those moments, my mom was there with her patience and love, giving me time knowing that I'd sort things out, and giving me encouragement to discover what God was calling me to do. Like the love of God, I know the love of my mother comes without any conditions. And because of her, I know so much more about who God is, but also about what I need to do going forward in terms of responding to that love.

How blessed we are to have such a God as we do, a God who loves us more than we can ever imagine. Just as our mothers open our eyes to that reality, in an even more perfect way God does by never stopping the love that He gives us. May we rejoice that, and work daily towards becoming the saints God knows we can become, and sharing that love with the world.