Power of Words

Cody L. Strange

Utah Valley University

April 10th, 2020, I check the bathroom one last time. Blue eyes, short brown hair that barely reaches past the forehead, and a slightly pale face reflect back at me through the glistening glass of the newly polished mirror. I lift my hair ever so slightly, so it has a minor wave to it then I nod to myself in satisfaction before heading out.

I breathe in the spring air, it’s just cold enough to let you know that winter hasn’t fully released its grip on weather quite yet, but to my adrenaline full body it felt amazing. I swing the door closed behind me, the thick wood making and audible *thud* as the latch locked back into place.

I jump down the three concrete stairs, bracing my legs for the inevitable shock and turn around to wave my house goodbye. A gray two-story building with black sheetrock, and a concrete porch with white railing/posts continues to stare off into the distance and I spin around to start the five-minute trek.

I’m walking along the side of the asphalt road in my small community of twenty or so families right outside of the small town of Mount Pleasant Utah. I live in a religious community of Mormon Fundamentalists, where one must ask the parent’s permission to date their daughter. And so I’m on my way to ask the parents of one of my best friends, Laura, if I can court (date with intent to marry) their daughter.

Laura is a pretty girl who stands about half a head shorter than me. She has shoulder length black hair, though she likes to dye it a dark red. She has a round face and deep blue eyes that light up whenever she sees me. We’ve been friends for three years now and unofficially dating for around four months. Asking the parents was only really a formality at this point, the whole meeting was practically going to be telegraphed.

I reach the house and start to walk around, it’s similar to my own with its gray exterior and black Sheetrocking. The only significant difference being that the house was built on the side of a tiny hill so the basement could be accessed from the backside of the house.

I head down the rocky path to the basement, making sure to watch my step as I walk down the steep small hill. I reach the bottom without incident and walk up to the door; suddenly nervous I find myself having to mentally prepare before I walk up and knock three times. The door creaks open and I am greeted by Laura’s stepdad Brooks Thompson.

A man in his late forties, Mr. Thompson stands over 6ft tall, he has jet black hair and a black rugged beard. He looks down at me through his glasses on his nose and gives me a wide grin, he welcomes me in with a firm handshake and greets me merrily.

The basement is still under construction, so the white floor is covered in a thin layer of sawdust. Splotches of red, blue, and orange paint mark the ground in the rooms of little children that tried and failed to add even coating of paint, leaving multiple walls that will need professional attention. The smell of fresh paint lingers in the air and I’m wary of the white walls that don’t quite look completely dry, as I make my way to the kitchen where Mr. Thompson’s wife, Elaine Thompson is waiting.

Mrs. Thomson like her daughter is on the shorter side, her head barely coming up to Mr. Thompson’s chest. She has light brown hair that is tied back in a braid and a pair of glasses that cover her light green eyes. She has a smile and eyes that brighten as soon as Mr. Thompson and I come into view. Mr. Thompson goes to stand next to his wife and I stand directly across from them, he straightens his posture to his full height and his expression slightly darkens becoming much sterner. The “interview” has begun, it may have only been a formality, but I still couldn’t afford to take this lightly.

The interview mainly consisted of two different categories, questions about the present and questions about the future. The first question asked was from Mr. Thompson “why do you love Laura” a simple but infinitely important question that was soon followed up with “and how do you know you love her”. This was something that I was constantly asking for myself. I pondered the question a bit, I found my hand covering my mouth as I thought, a minor habit I have when thinking deeply, and decided on an answer. I loved Laura because she was hardworking, funny, and probably the best human being I knew. I first knew I loved her because I couldn’t stop thinking about her. When I always found her on my mind, I knew that she was the only one for me.

I continue answering questions for the better part of an hour. With every question I see both Mr. and Mrs. Thompson visibly light up and their whole demeaner becoming more and more lax. I talk about my future financial plans; I’ve been saving for the better part of a year and plan to go to UVU for computer science. Through working full time and a scholarship I wouldn’t take out a loan and should come out of school richer than I went in.

Eventually they run out of questions for me, satisfied with the answers I gave and with the way Mrs. Thompson’s eyes gleamed she was probably more excited for me to date her daughter than I was. I’m ready to call it a day and head out to give Laura the good news when Elaine asks one more question. “Is there anything you feel like we should know?” I think about this question for a bit, hand coming back to my face as I think deeply. There’s one thing they should probably know about, one black splotch on my otherwise clean record. That one sin that acted as a thorn in my side for as long as I can remember, and I say one word, “pornography.”

I see their eyes visible darken as soon as the wood leaves my mouth, and I am quick to clarify. I don’t have any issue with nudity but rather immoral images, softcore pornography to be specific. This is something that I’ve struggled for as long as I could remember and something I only recently was trying to solve. I talk about how this is something Laura is helping me with and while it wasn’t completely under control it was getting much better. Even as I explain everything to them, I know that it is to late, no matter what I say to them won’t change that look in their eyes that are saying one thing in sync, “he’s broken.”

What follows is an ever downward spiral as I try to do as much damage control as possible. But Mr. Thompson sighs and I could swear his hair looks a little grayer and a little more slouch in his posture as he tells me he will have to talk with Elaine about this and until further notice the answer is a no.

I need to take a deep breath, the smell of pain in the air feels thicker, like its constricting my neck not allowing air to properly flow through. I feel my head go slightly dizzy and empty words of reassurance isn’t properly registering as I walk to the door. I find myself having to force the door shut gently for fear of slamming it off its hinges if I’m not careful. The fresh spring air from earlier has turned into freezing icicles down my throat. I quickly text an apology to Laura as a stumble back to my home, the five-minutes seem to drag on endlessly as I feel like I’m just in a bad dream and that at any moment I’ll wake up and everything will be better.

As I lay in my bed, sheets strung around, pillow at my feet, and I’m practically falling off the bed, but I stopped caring. I run the morning over and over again in my head, and each time there was one thing I underestimated when I decided to say that one darn thing. I didn’t understand the power words had, the fear they can strike in hearts of a concerned parents. I overestimated the benefit being completely honest would give me. I learned a valuable lesson about the power of words, and the dangers the truth can hold.