

# The FORGOTTEN TEENAGERS



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**Christian Kids**

By  
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**A Reconre Publication**



Title: The Forgotten Teenagers

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Publisher: Reconre Sdn Bhd  
P.O.Box 91  
70710 Seremban  
Negeri Sembilan  
Malaysia



1st Printing 2004  
2nd Printing 2005

[www.reconre.org](http://www.reconre.org)

Design: Cornerstone Corporation Sdn Bhd  
(455936X)  
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47400 PJ, MALAYSIA  
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Printer: Akitiara Corporation Sdn Bhd  
(390199-U)  
1 & 3, Jalan TPP 1/3,  
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# The Forgotten Teenagers

The inspiration & guidelines for this article is derived from the reading of *Beyond the Cross and the Switchblade* <sup>1</sup> and the author's personal experiences of having grown up in a Christian home <sup>2</sup>.

## Introduction

Public places, such as shopping complexes, arcades, hawker centres and restaurants are swarmed by teenagers beyond what their grandparents can imagine just three decades ago. This is especially so in the cities of the Klang Valley, Penang, Johor Baru and Ipoh. Therefore, how can we forget them when we see them everywhere, even if we do not have teenagers at home? Who are the Forgotten Teenagers? Why are they forgotten? Why are we writing about them? These are some of the questions we hope to answer in this short discussion. Case histories will be presented for us to more easily identify with their struggles. Names and details have been changed to protect the identities of those who shared their stories.

## **Who Forgotten ?**

They are our very own *Christian Kids*, though some may disagree. May be the existence of forgotten Christian teenagers is a problem of the western church. Maybe we Asian churches are not like them. However, if we keep our ears and eyes open as we move around churches, or if pastors, psychologists and psychiatrists will share with you something about their teenage counselees or patients, our doubt about whether Christian kids have special needs will be cleared.

## **Why Forgotten?**

What do we mean when we say that some of our teenagers are forgotten or neglected? Let us learn from David Wilkerson, whom God used in America to pioneer a deep and wide mission among street kids since the 60's. In 1974, he wrote about a Christian teenager's words which changed his entire ministry <sup>3</sup>.

In 1973, David was speaking at a rally in Arizona when, at the end of an alter call, a teenage girl walked up the centre aisle to take the microphone on the platform. This is what she expressed:

Girl: *“Mr. Wilkerson, may I please say a word?”*

David: *“Of course.”*

Girl: *“Mr. Wilkerson, you have been talking about drug abuse, homosexuality, alcoholism, devil worship. All these big hang-ups. I thank God for the kids who have been released from bondage. But, Mr. Wilkerson, you sure did miss me. And if you missed me, I think you may have missed hundreds of others here. We don't smoke pot, let lone stick needles into our arms. We don't drink. We are not homosexuals. And we hate the devil. We do have problems, all right. Sometimes they stymie us and keep us from standing up to be counted. But our problems, Mr. Wilkerson, seem so insignificant compared to these massive hang-ups that we just don't dare bring them out. If you want to know the truth, we really feel like forgotten teenagers.”*

David saw the young lady turn to him and smiled. But he could see tears sparkling in the spotlight.

Girl: *“I'm sorry, Mr. Wilkerson, that I had to bring this up. I just thought you ought to know how a great many of us feel.”*

That night, back in his motel room, David couldn't sleep. Those were the very young people who were to act as Apostles of Prevention, peer talking to peer, teenager to teenager. Their mission was incredibly important. They would be able, one day, to put quiet pressure on their own age group *"it wasn't cool to use drugs."* *The teenage girl seemed to have hit the nail on the head!*

*When Christian teenagers want to serve God but feel that they cannot, is it due to the heavy burden of guilt in their hearts and minds, whether the guilt is true or false?*

He also shared how another girl had lied to her friends, who were on drugs, that she was on heroin when she did not even know how to use the drug. Her confessed reason was that since the kids on drugs got all the attention, it was the 'in' thing to be known to be on drugs.

Is there any lesson for us from David's experiences in his interaction with Christian teenagers? I believe so, though culturally we are different in many ways. Let me explain:

1. Teenagers brought up in even the most spiritually cold Christian homes have certain good values taught to them from early childhood. Therefore,



they seldom go for the extreme mistakes that other youths make, though some do. However, as natural teenagers in an imperfect world, they face the problems that many other teenagers face, whether they come from poor or broken homes or not.

2. However, since they are expected to behave themselves in public, for either God's sake (if parents are more spiritually discerned) or for their family name's sake (if parents are less spiritually concerned but simply being Asian). Therefore, as submissive children (which is honourable, whether it is due to Asian culture, biblical teaching or both), they try their best to behave themselves, especially in public. Where then is the problem?
3. The problem starts when they reach their teenage *pro-independence streak and sex hormones increase*; their lives begin to go yoyo for several years <sup>4</sup>. This may be as early as 11 years old or as late as 14 years old.
4. However, because they do not express their struggles directly to their parents or youth advisors, they are assumed to be all right when they are not. Some are simply too shy to look for help because:

*“We don’t feel our problems of, for example, doubt, sexual urges, fantasies, peer pressures in school, fear of our future, are important enough, compared to those kids social workers and other adults are helping.”*

5. Many have been neglected by overactive Christian parents who are too busy lay leaders helping other people’s families in church or evangelizing through cell groups. To protect the image of their parents, many Christian teenagers do not reveal their problems to anyone related to Christian activities. Further, when approached by their children, these parents simply dish out pet answers which put them off further and they just stop talking at home. This seems to be a universal problem for Christian kids. It seems to cut across racial-cultural-national-barriers. I have met such teenagers in four continents. I have made similar mistakes with my three teenagers too. Have you? Will we apologise to our children?

As I continued to read about David Wilkerson’s discovery in the path of his work among American Christian kids in the 70’s, and as I continued to ponder before the Lord, my mind wandered to Malaysian Christian teenagers that I

know. It seems that the Forgotten Teenagers' histories are similar to my teenage friends' experiences though every local church is unique in herself. I will now present some of David's research findings, together with case histories of our own teenagers in the East.

### **Case 1**

*“At an alter call in my home church, God touched my heart and I wanted to put up my hand to indicate my response to God’s call for confession of sin. I was not sure whether it was for salvation or full commitment as I was only about 9-10. But I knew, even then, that I have done many wrong things, such as kicking my sister’s pet duckling when my pet chicken had died. In church that night, I opened my eyes and looked around. I hesitated to respond publicly as I wasn’t sure how my Mum or her friends would think. Wasn’t I a Christian already? They would think I was so terrible to have sinned and that would embarrass my parents. Mum might scold me for it. I did not know what to do next except to keep those thoughts in my heart for years.”*

### **Case 2**

*“Father was a church lay leader. He was a kind and generous man who worked hard as a businessman to bring up his eight children. He loved his wife very much but*

*could not stop womanizing. It was still all right for mother until he kept other families. Then mother was totally broken. She used to complain to friends and relatives since father ignored her pleas. Finally, father was excommunicated from our church. Though the church committee was right, this decision by the church authority hurt and embarrassed mother a lot. As a believer, she felt the hurt most when she knew that other leading men in the same church, who also lived with mistresses, were not disciplined at all. They were also richer and more educated. How did I feel as a pre-pubertal kid? Who could I talk to about my pains? How could I clear my confusion as a daughter of a well known Christian businessman? What was I to think about the church leaders' favouring the more educated and richer members? As I witnessed my mother's sorrow, I swallowed mine. There was just no one I felt safe enough to talk to though there were a few superb Sunday School teachers."*

### **Who to Talk to?**

Since many Christian Kids are unable to find solace in their parents and they feel uncomfortable talking to other adults so as to prevent betrayal of secrets, they tend to talk to themselves. Of course, this type of conversation is rather silent as it happens in the world of thoughts ...

## **Common Self-Talk of Forgotten Teenagers**

*“Talk to school friends?*

*They’ll laugh at me and will not come to Jesus because Christians are supposed to be loving and form good models for others.”*

*“Talk to church friends?*

*No way ... every other kid seems OK and may not understand my dilemma.”*

*“Adults in church?*

*But Pa is a leader ... will put family to shame and get scolding too!”*

*“Teachers?*

*I’m not sure whether they will understand or else the whole school will know and think I am broken and odd ... if my parents know I have told an outsider, gone-lah!”*

*“So ... better ‘tahan’ longer and suppress my pains and cry into my pillow now and then with silent prayers to God for deliverance from problems which only my parents can solve ... but they won’t! Am I angry? Maybe ... with who? Myself? ... maybe Pa and Ma? ... and maybe God ... but, O NO! Good Christian Kids must not be angry at God because He is always right!”*

## Who are the Parents?

- Consciously/outwardly fine and conscientious church members
- Have little interest in kids and deny kids have problems
- If told that their teenagers need help, they blame others to fight off self-blame e.g. wrong friends, school system, media, church groups, traumatic event
- Compare their "naughty" kid with their other "non-problematic" children to show that they are not so bad parents after all.

### Case 3

*Mandy has a dominating Pa who blames Ma for every frustration he has. Ma eventually protects herself by ignoring him and getting involved in outside hobbies. However, she is too absorbed in her own pains to bond with her children when they reach school going age. Initially, Pa boasts of his two children but he later over punishes them for little mistakes and thus betrays his basic problem as an extreme perfectionist. In teenage years, Mandy's brother, John, plays truant and fails in his examinations even though he is highly intelligent. Later, he stops talking to adults at home. Mandy starts to fight, steal and bully others in school.*

## **Differences Between Poorer Teenagers and Richer Ones**

1. Poorer teenagers seem to accept responsibilities for their own problems more while richer ones tend to blame their peers for theirs. This seems to go beyond age, background or race.
2. While poorer teenagers feel too insignificant to bother adults and therefore say 'No' to their help of whatever sort, richer ones have funds to see experts for help through systems that their parents think may work for them e.g. attend self-development courses, tuition classes, receive therapy by psychologists or attend SU camps.

### **BUT,**

help for teenagers is not merely a matter of techniques, which the richer kids have! Therefore, are the middle-class kids really better off?

In the final analysis, each of us adults just got to do our best to help the teenagers whom we know, whether they are our children or not. Just talking about their problems and needs will not help them in our increasingly hectic nation.

Quite often, the forgotten teenagers feel like a voice in the wilderness. If no one responds to their cries for help, they will all (poor or rich) eventually view their problems as too small to mention for help. However, they still continue to feel guilty for their hidden actions, thoughts and emotional upheavals. Here is where understanding the darker side of their situation can lead to the brighter side, according to God's revelation to David Wilkerson ...

David suddenly saw through the solution to reaching out to teenagers generally, knowing that peer influence is stronger than other age influences.

### **The Question**

If Christian teenagers know Christ and some of His truth and grace, why aren't they wanting to love their peers for Him?

### **The Answer**

Many of our Christian kids are so *crippled* by their inner guilt to be able to reach out to peers. Their bondage from serving the Lord they love is this strong sense of sin in them that they cannot seem to get rid of, even after repeated attempts to



stop the terrible habits which they dislike. Many really inwardly hate themselves. But they do not confess the habits and sins that trouble them because they are too scared to do so without knowing someone they feel will understand them, accept them and befriend them long enough to stick by them as they try to get nearer to God. Building trust takes time, especially for those who have busy authoritarian parents or negligent, confused and fighting ones.

### **The Solution**

Therefore, the solution to reaching out to other youth is to start with adults, especially parents, paying serious attention to the forgotten youth. They, when forgiven, cleansed, loved and secure in parental or other adult parent figure love, will be set free to fly with the Master they have known for so long! They will be free to make mistakes, knowing that God and their parents will forgive and receive them always. Then they will have the power of grace to control themselves in times of temptations because God's enemy cannot accuse them any more as Father God knows everything about them and yet will still forgive them, cleanse them and love

them according to 1 John 1:8-10. They do not have to pretend they are OK and neither do their parents have to pretend also. A pastor, Dr. D.A.Seamands, calls this release “*Freedom from the Performance Trap*”<sup>5</sup>.

#### **Case 4**

*A 13 year old private school boy, Tom, often appeared unkempt in school. His school work fell below his level of intelligence. His father ran a business while his mother worked for someone else. He had an outgoing older brother while he was quieter and more sensitive to other’s needs. The whole family helped as worship enablers in a “good” independent church. When referred for counseling, Tom gradually shared about the family dynamics at home.*

*Father was a divorcee with two independent older sons from the previous marriage. He loved his second wife and both sons from his second marriage. However, he had a hot temper which his present wife could not accept. Eventually, Tom’s mother had an affair with her boss. Father was devastated and apologized but he could not persuade her to drop the relationship. Their pastor tried to help but to no avail except to comfort the hurting husband. Tom’s brother suppressed his wounds buy socialising out*

*of the house while Tom tried to be an obedient son to father and mother.*

*When I first met Tom, he shed no tear and no facial sign betrayed his thoughts. However, one day, Tom suddenly blurted out ...*

***“If I see my mother’s boyfriend, I want to kill him!!”***

His parents were called for their views about Tom’s poor school report. Father did not turn up. Mother merely discussed Tom’s poor school work. The school counsellor could not make the first move to disclose Tom’s sharing too early as he was too scared to let his parents know what he had divulged. Soon, Tom’s father took the boy out of school to help him in his shop before more help could be offered. One more forgotten teenager is added to the list. How do you feel? How does Jesus feel? Who should we help first? Parents or teenager?

## For Parents

### How to Help Forgotten Teenager Feel Cherished Again <sup>6</sup>

#### I.

*Spend time to gain their trust and help them identify their problems.*

We shall leave this part to each pair of parents to work out their schedule so that either Pa or Ma or both are there at home for their teenagers before they leave for work or college. Though teenagers may seem to want to be out of sight of parents, deep inside, they feel safer to have them around, as long as they don't feel too much under pressure to conform completely. For example, instead of ordering them to stop playing loud music unfamiliar to older ears, let them know that parents also need their type of music. Therefore, *"Let's take turns to play our favourite songs or music."* Actually, many teenagers take sound logical suggestions and will agree.

If a teenage boy decides to keep long hair, buy some strong rubber bands for him. This shows him that we don't mind as long as he is neat. After eight months, one such long haired son suddenly came down the stairs with well self-cropped short hair!

## Clue A

**Avoid unnecessary debates over non-essentials while being firm on essentials.**

**Thomas Jefferson:**

*“In matters of principles, stand like a rock;  
In matters of taste, flow with the current.”*

### II.

*Consider how to help them solve problems  
their way ...*

## **Common Problems among Teenagers**

### *1. Worry over personal weaknesses and sins e.g. bad habits and addictions*

- a. sexual concerns – masturbation++++  
because pre-marital intercourse is prohibited in the Bible, the teenager who has no one to guide him resorts to masturbation. It is also common for those who have been sexually abused in early childhood to fall into this habit. This may be done reflexly to comfort themselves in times of tension e.g. near examinations, especially when the sexual abuse has been pushed into the subconscious. Many boys and girls

carry a heavy load of guilt as they know no better way of releasing their tension. We are not condoning sin by this explanation but pleading for understanding so that our teenagers may find help from adults to be freed from this clinging bondage of fantasies to get a strong kick now and then. Most men just cannot talk to their sons about this problem while some mothers find it comfortable to do so with both sons and daughters.

- petting+++

- intercourse+

b. drugs - alcohol +++ especially when they appear respectable before their peers. However, “*only a drink*” may lead to drunkenness or addiction before too long. If parents do not want their children to drink, then they must abstain as well.

c. tobacco – another slow killer not only for the smoker but for bystanders as well.

Due to the guilt of having been secretly addicted to something, teenagers, therefore, hesitate to share the gospel of Christ with their friends. Why?

**At a stage where hypocrisy is sharply felt, they do not want to be hypocrites themselves.**

Therefore, they find great difficulty in openly standing up against e.g. homosexuality and drugs among peers because it will be hypocritical to do so since :

*“I have also sinned though in different ways.”*

In a way, they are more real than adults.

### **Clue B**

**Potential Mission-for-Youth-by-Youth will be wasted if the Forgotten Teenagers are not released from such false and true guilt bondages.**

**CHRISTIAN PARENTS,  
WHAT THEN SHOULD WE DO?**

## **Suggested Help for Teenagers with Bad Habits**

### **Principle 1**

**Understand that Forgotten Teenagers must be desperate before they look for help as they weigh the advantages and disadvantages of making themselves vulnerable.**

**So, lovingly and patiently watch out for them ... spend much time with them, even if it is just being silently there for them.**

### **Example**

At the right timing, ask them:

*“Do you really want to get out of addiction?”*

If No



At least he/she  
has admitted it

If Yes



God will come and  
free him/her



## Case 5

*Peter was sexually abused by his babysitter when he was a toddler. He subsequently masturbated innocently whenever he felt lonely. As a teenager who read many books, he later realized his habit was a weakness while his sexual fantasies were sinful. However, he could not free himself from it, tried as he did, with many rounds of asking God for forgiveness and strict discipline. Later, through books written by Christian writers for teenagers, he understood that the damage to his emotions came from his early childhood experiences with someone whom he trusted and admired as a mother figure. He also had a love-hate relationship with the old babysitter for a long time without realizing it till then. He has now been freed from the addictive habit through repentance, forgiveness, insight, healing grace and renewal of mind for the Holy Spirit to transform him. His new found freedom enabled him to counsel and pray for others without feeling hypocritical any more.*

## Principle 2

**Get outside help to know victory ... where 2 or 3  
pray together ... Jesus is with them.**

### Case 6

*Betty, John and Jerry are three lovely teenage siblings. They have grown up in an unpredictable Christian home atmosphere. This was due to their mother's erratic mood swings for years. Father, a man of a violent temper, did not understand his wife and often got frustrated with her changing hobbies. Therefore, he often vent his anger on her and their three obedient children.*

*After over fifteen years, mother's mood swings became worse due to the stresses of life. She then retaliated her husband's temper and started becoming violent too. Father would scold her then but wisely abstained from hitting her again.*

*The three teenagers were considerate and caring towards their mother and protected her while submitting to their dominating father. They were the indirect maintainers of peace at home. In a way, they were parenting their parents by their discernment of the situation and their parents' needs.*

*From an observer's point of view, theirs was a talented family and a good example to others in church.*

*However, at one critical stage of this family's life, the mother called for help and new Christian friends willingly surrounded them with prayers, listening ears, godly counsel and practical help e.g. referred her for medical treatment. Their ability to open themselves to those outside the family, for help, rescued them from their dilemma and God was glorified.*

### **Principle 3**

**Teach them to trust Jesus to bring freedom ... to  
talk to Jesus about their problems ...  
and expect a miracle  
i.e. teach them that they cannot get rid of sin and  
weaknesses on their own.**

### **Case 7**

*David mentioned a high school girl who had been sleeping with her boyfriend for several months. All along, she knew the relationship was wrong but she could not resist the temptation whenever they met secretly. Finally, she asked God for help. Very soon, the boy's father was transferred to another city by his company. Even though the boy promised to return, she gently and firmly rejected his future approaches and the relationship died a natural death. A miracle? Of course it is! However, the definition depends on whether you really*

*believe that God cares for you and is big enough to continue to perform miracles for you.*

## ***2. Worry about not getting along with people, especially parents***

David Wilkerson discovered that, contrary to popular belief, the forgotten teenagers do want to get along with people, especially parents, due to Jesus' 1st great commandment about loving God with all our hearts, all our souls, all our minds and all our strengths, and our neighbours as ourselves.

### **Suggested Help for Good Relationship with Parents**

Recall and Reassure them that God is on their side ... miracles still happen today!

Trust that God will bring Malachi 4:6 to pass one day. If they feel that parents are wrong, it is their duty to pray that they will know true repentance.

→ This means that teenagers must love parents 1st and don't wait for parents to make the first move. This action is not only humble (and, therefore, acceptable to God) but also Asian (and, therefore, acceptable to parents).

→ This means that they must allow parents to make mistakes as parents too are imperfect though they seem to claim to be perfect, at times.

***3. Worry about the future of the world and their feeling of helplessness regarding mankind and this earth.***

This is due to the daily tragic news about events around them and in the world.

**Suggested Help for Overcoming a deep sense of Helplessness**

Remind teenagers of Jesus' words regarding the end times.

This means that He knows and He is in charge.

Mark 13:32

Therefore, the reason that God's teenagers must not opt out of school and/or work and church missions is so that they could help hasten the Lord's coming, together with the company of believing children and adults. There is so much to do for God and so little time left!

→ This will enable teenagers to begin to see their God given personal role in His redemption plans ... how exciting and what a great privilege!

Matthew 24:42 urges us to ... Watch (e.g. world events)

Titus 2:13 calls us to ... Look (i.e. focus on what you can do)

Hebrew 9:28b reminds us to ... Expect (i.e. hope will be fulfilled by God)

**Therefore, Forgotten Teenagers,**

**Jesus' Challenge to You is ...**

**Stand Against Sin & Stand For Jesus**

Be 100% His: Revelations 3

Look ahead to Him: Philippians 4

The Lord of the harvest needs labourers John 21

**STAY AWAKE  
FOR THE CALL TO GOD'S**

**Frontline missions to FEED HIS SHEEP  
and TEND HIS LAMBS**

**John 21**

**Reflection for Teenagers**

1. Think about the discussion about the Forgotten Teenagers. Have you ever felt like one before?

When and why did you feel that way?

Do you still feel like one now?

2. Talk to Jesus about your memories. He should understand, as he was a Forgotten Teenager before ... at 12 years old!
3. Do you have something you don't like about yourself now? Is it mentioned anywhere in the text above? If not, are you able to identify it or is it just a vague feeling (e.g. a sexual addiction, a relational conflict or a fear of the future due to finance and/or sickness or a parental split up)?

4. Since you can't do much about it, will you let Jesus do a miracle in your life so that you will be freed from this affliction? If you continue to trust Him, He can engineer circumstances for the good of your family and you. Talk to Him about it. He has promised to be your Friend (John 15).
5. Are you able to help yourself using the above guidelines? If so, will you start now? If not, will you look for someone to guide you and pray with you ... peer or adult? I am sure Jesus will be pleased for you to do that.
6. When Jesus has freed you from the bondages that cling to you, what will you do with your ambition ... help others and prevent others from being forgotten?

Write your proposal/decisions in a notebook ... tell God all about it.



## *A Sample Prayer*

*Dear God, who is my eternal Father through Jesus,  
my Friend,*

*I humbly come to you for help. I hope you will not  
react to me as some adults do when I talk to them.*

*Honestly, sometimes I dare not come to You  
because I am afraid of You. Preachers and youth  
advisors give me the impression that I must be holy  
before You will hear my prayers. Since I am not  
holy because of my secret hang-ups, I see no point  
in troubling You.*

*Now I cannot stand the pressures in my mind any  
more ... please, may I ask, do a miracle in my life as  
I have tried many times and ways to stop my bad  
habit but I have failed again and again. I thought  
that if I confess my sins before You, I will be  
instantly relieved of my addiction when I get up. I  
do feel less guilty, and light for a few days...but I  
will not be OK for too long before I am back to my  
old self. O Lord Jesus, if you are what You say You  
are in the Bible, please help me, I pray with all my  
heart ...*

*Do with me what You want, just show me Yourself  
that I may fling into Your arms like a little trusting  
child again ... fresh and free to start all over my  
life as Your humble prodigal child who wants to be  
Yours and Yours alone..In Jesus' Name I pray ...*

*From Your daughter/son,  
( .... insert your name .... )*

If you really mean what you pray  
... Just Wait for Him to reveal Himself to  
you ...

May the peace of our Lord Jesus Christ  
keep you, His love surround you and  
His presence be with you now and  
always.

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About the Author

Dr. Lee Bee Teik (MBBS, Monash University) practised medicine till she turned fulltime homemaker.

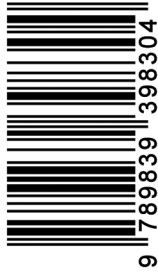
She is married to Dr. Hwa Yung and they have three adult children.

Having heard God's call for her to write in 1992, Bee Teik has penned books on prayer, pastoral counseling and her experiences as a Malaysian Christian woman.

This series of 18 titles, classified under the overall theme, On Being Human, is drawn from the positive feedback from her seminars.

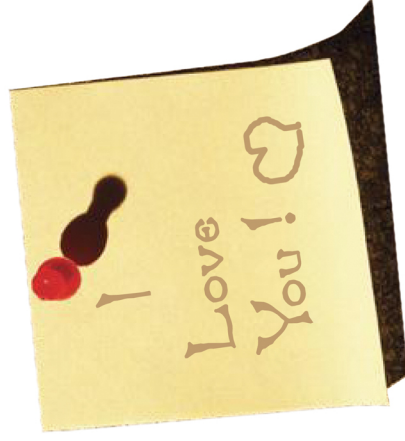
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ISBN 978-983-9398-30-4



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