

In *The Lord of the Rings*, JRR Tolkien writes a scene where Gandalf comes to King Théoden who appears like the living dead, and he speaks these words to him: “Théoden, Son of Théngel. Too long have you sat in the shadows.” As I write this, my heart stirs me to say to you: refuse to sit in the shadows of worm tongue, the enemy, who would make the telling of your story a dark and wearisome tale, shake off the heavy cloak and arise into your powerful story to be the powerful person God has called you to be. Be powerful in every season of your life. Live out His story for you and every day will be filled with Life.

“And my praises will fill the heavens forever, fulfilling my vow to make every day a love gift to you!” (Psalms 61:8, Passion Translation).

LAURA COLLURA



Laura was born in Milano, Italy in the same year that man landed on the moon. Her family emigrated to South Africa in the mid-seventies. She loves reading, cooking and seeing the bigger picture.

Laura Collura trained as a primary school teacher for children with special educational needs. In 1994 she moved to Cape Town and immediately started attending His People, a small campus-based church that met in a UCT lecture hall. She quickly found her niche in the ministry, working with the few teenagers who were attending. Twelve years later, Laura was still involved in youth ministry, by now on a full-time basis. In 2005 she was appointed Principal of the Thembalitssha School of Hope. A year later, she became adoptive mother to two children, Simone (17) and Mbali Abigail (17 months). She still serves as Project Manager for the Thembalitssha Foundation and is now mother of three; her youngest adopted daughter, Rebecca, is only 3 years old.

Laura has a passion for writing, editing and bringing out the best in young writers. She can be contacted at: collura.laura@gmail.com

A single purpose

The year I turned 39 I suddenly realised I had forgotten to get married. It was not for lack of desire, willingness or respect for the institution of marriage. Perhaps I had pencilled it in my diary and rubbed out the entry day-in and day-out until, like a pastel Post-It flapping in the corner of a dusty office wall, it became a forgotten task, side-lined by more interesting, urgent and pressing matters. It was a thought that had somehow been rejected for no good reason; a good idea that had never found its time.

The days turned into years so quickly. I arrived in Cape Town as a 27-year-old-teacher and self-commissioned missionary, with a vision in my heart to add value to young people everywhere. A small church project with just five bored teenagers became a movement of a thousand, at its peak. A small school for vulnerable and forgotten children and youth grew and developed and became the most satisfying, challenging and sacrificial work of my adult life.

By the time I turned 39, I had loved many beautiful children as if they were my own. On the weekends, my home had already belonged to a horde of teens who came and went like the love children of a hippie commune. My heart was full. But my arms were empty. And, to my amazement, I found myself quite single.

In June of that year a young student of mine found her base in my home. The idea was to share my small ground floor apartment with her during the week, to provide the stability and safety she needed to focus on her schooling. The arrangement was temporary but, by the following year, it became clear that my home had become her home.

At around the same time, my place of work neighbored a clinic providing palliative care for children living with HIV. I visited regularly and found myself enamoured with a little girl, all of nine months, with an infectious smile and chubby cheeks. One day she turned to look at me and I asked for her name. From that moment on I could think of little else. I dreamed of giving her a home. By January of the following year she came home to stay. And then we were three.

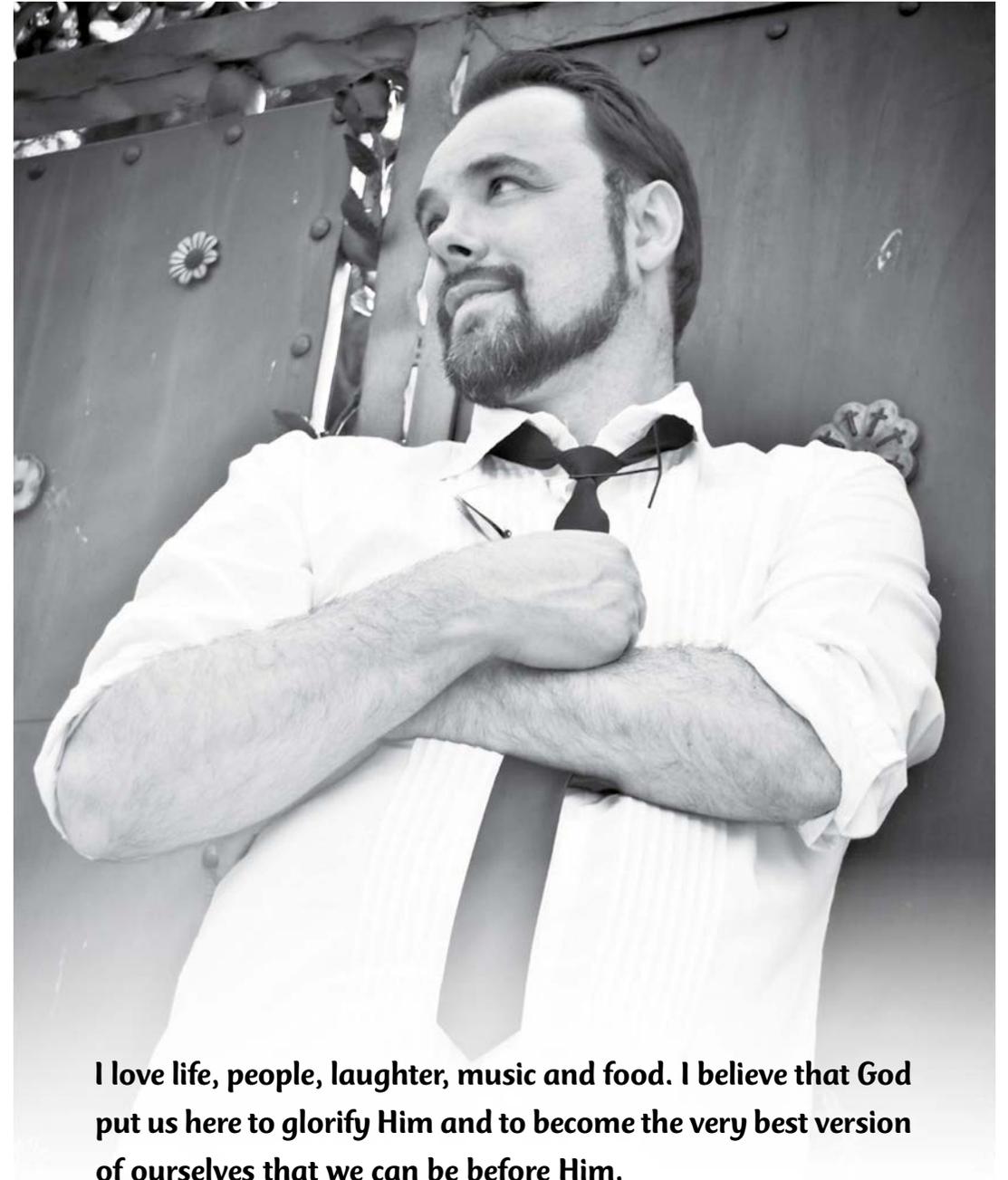
I was 47 when I adopted my third child. Feisty and strong-willed, like her sisters, she filled my home with joy. At some point it occurred to me that it would have been easier with a companion. For one thing, being the lone breadwinner of a family is difficult. Then there is the indignity of being unmarried, especially in the church community. Somehow, not being part of a couple poses a problem for most ministry leadership positions. I have suffered the comments of well-meaning people who challenge the idea of adopting children outside of marriage. Actually, it had never occurred to me that this might actually be a reason not to become a mother through adoption. Finally, there's my middle child who dreams romantic dreams in which I am the bride and some tall, handsome stranger is the groom. In her dreams we all live happily ever after in a big house with a garden and a dog. And, finally, she has a dad.

I am just as puzzled as the next person by the unconventional path my life has taken. I can't tell you why I did not find lasting, romantic love in my 20s, or why I will celebrate my 50th birthday with a three-year-old bouncing on my lap; nor can I explain why I have introduced a dozen people to the love of their lives and never found a match for myself. But I can tell you that I do not regret not marrying the two men I said yes to (before changing my answer to no) and that I do not pine for "the one who got away". I feel immensely privileged to have lived the life I have lived, so far, and right now it feels like I have just started to really live. I have given and received so much love in my life. It has really been a remarkable journey for which I am grateful.

Love has an eternal, enduring character that is the very essence of hope. It never fails. And, at this time, it serves God's purposes for me to be single. If nothing ever changes I can honestly say that I felt loved by God and cherished by my family. I rarely feel lonely because loneliness is really emptiness and my heart are almost always full.

A mischievous wind may still blow. Perhaps that forgotten scrap of paper with a note scribbled on it, reminding me that it is never too late for romance, will find me. I hope that I won't have my hands full with so much business that I miss the signs. After all, I would not want to disappoint a little girl with a dream.

GREGORY PEEK



I love life, people, laughter, music and food. I believe that God put us here to glorify Him and to become the very best version of ourselves that we can be before Him.

Shamed by singleness

Being an older single male in church leadership in South Africa is, to say the least, unusual! Almost exclusively church leaders of a certain age are male, married and fathers. The message – whether intended or tacit – for older men, is that if you aren't these things there might just be something wrong with you.

Somewhere along the line I internalised that message for myself, and without being aware, made it a place of shame. Now shame is a tricky and seditious thing. At once we hate and love it. We hate it because we know that it makes us less than, and we love it because we know that is a “good enough reason” not to have to try to be more. At least, this was true for me.

I was completely unaware of the singleness shame I was carrying. But as God will always do, He brought about an intervention in my life that in a moment exposed how deep and paralysing this shame had become in my life.

On a particular Friday night, the Holy Spirit grabbed a hold of my heart and began showing me the depth of my shame. It became clear to me, that as an older single male I had begun to create an internal narrative for myself, which always ended in the truth that I wasn't equal to those who had done what men should do – find a wife and make a family.

It became clear to me that somewhere along the line I had made an alliance with this narrative. I began to see how fully I had bought into believing that it was true. The next step in the process was for me to own and recognise what the consequence of my agreement with this belief had been to my life. Most significantly for me, it meant that I never put myself forward in the things that God had fashioned me to do. It meant that I backed down from any opportunity for growth and that I avoided any challenge that might once and for all prove to me and God and others that I just wasn't good enough.

I had to realise that I had used my shame as an excuse not to have to make the effort that purpose, and destiny requires from all of us. I had to own that I liked having a “valid” excuse not to have to try.

As I stood before the Lord holding the shreds of my shame I asked Him how He saw me. In a moment He spoke to me these words: “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). In that instant I understood that God does not see us as culture and society typically demarcate us. He does not see us as married or single, He simply sees us as spirit of His Spirit, as a soul submitted before Him longing to live out the unique call on their life. What the world thinks of as valuable has absolutely no influence on God's economy. His ideas of what is valuable, and worthy is far beyond anything we will ever fully understand this side of heaven.

The next step for me was to make an intentional decision to receive this truth into myself, to disagree with my own inner narrative, to repent of my idolatry, to find the courage God had allocated me, to get involved fully with my life and my call and my destiny and to let God wash away the shame. For the last three years, I have constantly been tempted to step back from something because “I am single and, you know, they might think that's weird!” I have been constantly tempted to take the easier, less awkward road, but then I remember how awful shame felt and I look it in the eye and I say “No way!”. It's never easy but it is always good!