

CHARISMA CLASSICS: Hotheads In the Household (November 1985)

I never heard my father and mother argue. I know they often disagreed, but they considered it bad breeding to argue in front of their children. It was an unreal world for a kid to grow up in.

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There was one time... I was about 10 years old. I woke up in the middle of the night and heard my mother screaming. My older brother, Walter, Jr., had come in late from a Saturday night date. My mother met him downstairs, and there was some kind of horrible confrontation.

My mother was hysterical. Then I heard Walter shouting something, also unintelligible. The door slammed, shaking the entire house. By that time I was out of bed. From my upstairs window I saw my brother stomping across the dark yard toward nowhere, shouting back at the house. My mother, back upstairs, was still hysterical.

I was terrified and crawled back into bed, wishing it had never happened; through the closed bedroom door I could hear my father's calming voice: "Now, now, he'll be back."

The next morning we all gathered as usual at the breakfast table before leaving for Sunday school. Each child, including Walter Jr., was present. Mother was bringing in the Cream of Wheat in the big brown serving bowl with the blue stripe

around the top. My father, sitting at the head of the table in coat and tie, had us bow for the blessing. No mention was made of the eruption of the night before. In our family, children were never exposed to their parents' flaws.

My children, unfortunately, were not raised in this kind of artificiality. When Jackie and I argued it seemed to be in front of everyone. That was not the way I would have chosen. I prefer to think of myself as an aristocrat rather than a common brawler. But for some reason nothing in our house was private. When it came to our frequent, and sometimes explosive, disagreements, well, everyone knew everything.

My father (and my mother, except for that outburst with Walter Jr.) regarded unbridled emotion of any kind as bad form. It was suggestive of a lack of Christian restraint. My wife, on the other hand, is one who believed in total exposure. No waiting until the children were asleep. No smiling nicely until we were behind closed doors. Whenever I, by some unacceptable behavior, pushed her over her narrow threshold into the pit of frustration, she simply exploded.

Earlier in our marriage I was horrified by these outbursts. I wanted my children to think I was perfect. Husbands and wives who shouted at each other in front of their offspring were, in my opinion, products of low breeding. Whenever I found myself in one of these domestic disagreements—and knew the children were listening—that old terror returned. It was the same feeling I had the night I heard my mother screaming at my brother.

But Jackie did not bring these same fears into our marriage. She had not been raised in a home where domestic disagreements were hidden, where children were lied to by well-meaning parents who attempted to shield them from reality. She was raised in a four-room house occupied by seven people from three generations. Family squabbles involved everyone. She did not fear reality. She knew love would conquer in the end.

Don't misunderstand. I'm not saying it's good for parents to fight in front of their children. Some restraint is good. Any behavior which undermines the foundations of the Christian home is simply unacceptable.

Across the years, thanks to our growing relationship with God, our household has become more peaceful. We simply don't fight as we used to. Love, joy, peace, gentleness... these have replaced sharp words and argumentative spirits. We've learned to listen.

Our arguments did have one redeeming feature: once the storm had passed, we knew God required that we make an explanation to our children. It was not unusual to wind up asking the children to pray for us. Thus, our children have not harbored false expectations about their parents or about marriage.

The five children, now grown and married, often get together at our house for a meal. When they do, the conversation invariably drifts to, "Hey, remember that time Mom..." and "Yeah, and what about the time Dad..." This will be followed by hilarious laughter as they explain to their spouses our flaws and faults.

It's embarrassing. But when I hear their laughter and see my wife wink at me, I, too, smile—and give thanks.

Jamie Buckingham wrote 153 columns for Charisma over 13 years, first known as "Dry Bones" but later as it's most recognized "Last Word." His singular voice was animated by a heart for Jesus baptized in the power of the Holy Spirit in 1967 at a Full Gospel Businessmen's convention. Buckingham provided a steadying force during the scandals of the 1980s, penning the seminal article on the PTL scandal, "God Is Shaking His Church" in May 1986.