

First Prom

When the girls arrived, they headed straight for the ladies' room. Hair had to be fixed. Makeup applied. Dresses pinned. This was a special day for them, and they were excited.

A few weeks earlier, one of the girls of The Covering House – I'll call her L for privacy reasons – had said that she'd never been to a prom. She's 17 and the only men who showed her attention were the men who paid money to exploit her. She'd never experienced the innocent joy and anticipation of going to a dance with a boy.

When the staff of The Covering House heard her request, they did what they always do...they sprang into action. They planned an event to give these girls an experience from which they'd been robbed in their young lives.

Yesterday afternoon was the first Covering House Prom.

There I was with four other men. We wore suits. A couple of guys wore tuxedos. We stood outside the ladies' room and waited, corsages in hand. The staff of TCH stood by with cameras ready.

To be honest, I felt awkward. "Will L think this is silly?" I wondered. I was to learn soon that it was a misplaced feeling. When the girls emerged from the ladies' room and saw us, they squealed like teenaged girls do. One or two of them put their hands to their faces and cried, their tears joining the ones in the staff's eyes. Mine too.

The girls didn't know that the guys and I would be there. They didn't know about the corsages either.

Suzy announced, "L...please step forward and meet your 'date' for the evening...Mr. Greg."

L was beautiful. Her dark hair was pulled back with some spilling down over her shoulders. She wore a burgundy-colored prom dress. Her smile encompassed her entire face. "You look lovely," I said and slid the corsage on her wrist.

"Thank you," she said, giggling through tears.

And then she hugged me. Clung to me and squeezed me tightly. She wept openly. I had only met her briefly months before, so the intensity of her emotion touched me profoundly.

When at last she released me, I stepped back and offered her my arm. She took it and we strolled into the other room that was decorated with balloons and table cloths and a swirling light over the dance floor.

When the other dads and girls joined us, we went to the dance floor for the first dance of the afternoon...the Daddy-Daughter Dance.

As we waltzed, L asked about me and what I did for a living. "So, how do you know about The Covering House," she asked.

"Well, Miss Dedee and I founded it. I'm her husband."

"Really? I love Miss Dedee."

"Me too."

She beamed as we danced.

For the rest of the prom, she called me "Dad." I melted. Partly because I know a bit of her story.

For the next three hours, everyone danced and ate and danced some more. We laughed and sang along to the music. It was simply wonderful.

When the day ended and the girls climbed into the van to head back to the house, L stepped out and gave me a hug. She thanked me.

"We will always be in your corner," I told her. "Always. Even when you leave us. If you ever need anything, you just call us, you hear?"

She smiled, her eyes brimming with water. "I will."

As Dedee and I got in the car for the drive home – sweaty and tired and filled with joy – I realized how silly it was that I had felt awkward earlier. L and the others *needed* a day like today because thieves had stolen their childhood. These precious children of God have rarely known the innocent pleasures of a carefree summer day or giggling with friends about boys or even the tingly awkwardness of a first date.

But for three hours on a Saturday afternoon in May, they got to spend time with a few adult men who wanted nothing more from them but to see them laugh and dance and just be a kid. And I was there. I saw it. I am blessed.

Greg Lhamon

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