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Editor's note: The following Letter of Hope was forwarded to us by Peter Challen a couple of weeks ago. This letter was written by his brother Tom whom some of you may know through visiting their winery near Ithaca, New York.

Perception

Hello,

On a cold, minus twenty-five degree end of January day, we were travelling east toward Ottawa on the Trans Canada Highway. I was sitting in the front passenger seat, our son-in-law was driving, and his four-year old son, who would turn five in a few days, sat behind me in a children's car seat facing forward.

The purpose of our trip was to find cross-country skis for the four-year old at the outdoor sports stores in the city. The crowds that had lined the overpasses of the highway the previous day were gone. The only sign of activity from the previous day were a couple of disabled vehicles along the side of the road. On that day we were travelling the same route on a similar mission, however at that time we were looking for skis for the seven-year old daughter. She too would be having a birthday within a couple of days. It was going to be a birthday week. During her trip the seven-year old was very inquisitive about the flag-waving people and the many large trucks and farm tractors lining the overpasses. Her father explained the situation in an age appropriate manner trying not to over emphasize various facts. Being a war veteran he showed considerable restraint in choosing his words carefully.

The day had been successful finding ski equipment for her, but not on this second trip for the four-year old, so we headed home early.

On the way back we stopped at a drug store for a few essentials. The four-year old was handed a snack-pack from his father before he went into the store. I stayed with the youngster as he snacked on carrot pieces, apple slices, and banana quarters covered with peanut butter. I avoided conversation so as not to interrupt his eating.

While we waited I noticed activity between individuals about four car lanes over to our right. A pickup truck faced the same direction as us, and a car faced the opposite direction. A well-dressed petite woman transferred a children's car seat from the truck to the back seat of the car. A man carried a young child to the car seat. He returned to retrieve two knapsacks from the truck. He was a large man. His baggy sweat pants were partially tucked into unlaced work boots. His coat was unzipped despite the cold weather. A young boy of about seven or eight years old, with a coat also undone, returned to the truck, grabbed a knitted toque from the floor of the truck and scurried back to the car.

I surmised the relationship between the adults and children, and was curious about how the adults would part company. They hugged. As the car and pickup truck drove off in opposite directions a young four-year old voice from behind me said, "They don't live together." I asked, "Who doesn't?" He answered, "The car and the truck, they don't live together," he continued, "she and they (the children) live in one house and he (the man) lives in another house." I asked, "I wonder why that is?" He replied, "I don't know, but they live in different houses." I questioned him further, "Why then did they hug?" He exclaimed, "(Because) they are a family," and then he repeated himself more emphatically, "they are (still) a family."

Such is the perception of a compassionate four-year old, soon to be five.

Sincerely, Tom Challen

*"Our relationship with God and each other strengthens us, and helps make the world a better place.
We welcome and include **everyone** into congregational life."*

