

CHARACTER  BUILDERS
True Love

This book is a gift for:

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From:

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For:

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Justyna D. Waclawik

True Love

Parental Guidelines by Magda Grabowska

Illustrations by Jakub Kuźma

*From the depths of my heart
I want to give the Most High God
my sincerest thanks for everything
what He did in Christ for me and my loved ones.
His love, which we can fully experience in Christ,
surpasses everything this world can offer.
To You, o LORD, be all honor and glory!*

Justyna



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*I*t happened a long, long time ago in Southern China, in a bamboo forest, where a family of Great Pandas lived. To this very day, all the animals of the world tell this story in the evenings.



*I*t was a rainy evening. Little Panda was sitting deep inside the bamboo forest and weeping silently. She did not know which way to go in order to get home. She had not listened to her parents and had separated from the group. Following her own path, she had lost the way.

“Mommy, Daddy, where are you?” Little Panda sobbed gently. She remembered her parents had warned her not to walk away too far in the forest, as she was too little to find the way back home by herself.



The sun had finally set and it was getting colder. Suddenly, Little Panda heard a scary rustling of leaves. “Mommy, Daddy, is that you?” she whispered, hope in her voice. But there was no reply. “Is anybody there?” she asked again, feeling very insecure. All of a sudden, Little Panda heard a terrifying loud roar. She shuddered, terror-stricken, and began trembling with fear. “What are you doing here?” a voice sounded somewhere deep in the forest. It was Snow Leopard. Now, you must know that leopards and pandas are not friends. The elder pandas had always warned Little Panda against dangerous leopards.



*P*lease, don't do me any harm!" she cried, and added in a soft voice: "I got lost and cannot find the way back home." There was silence and suddenly Leopard came out of hiding. "Well, all right then, get up and follow me," he grunted. "But why?" Panda asked, still terrified. "Don't be afraid. If I wanted to devour you, I would have already done it," Leopard replied. "The forest is very dangerous during the night. You will be safe with me," the frightening beast growled.



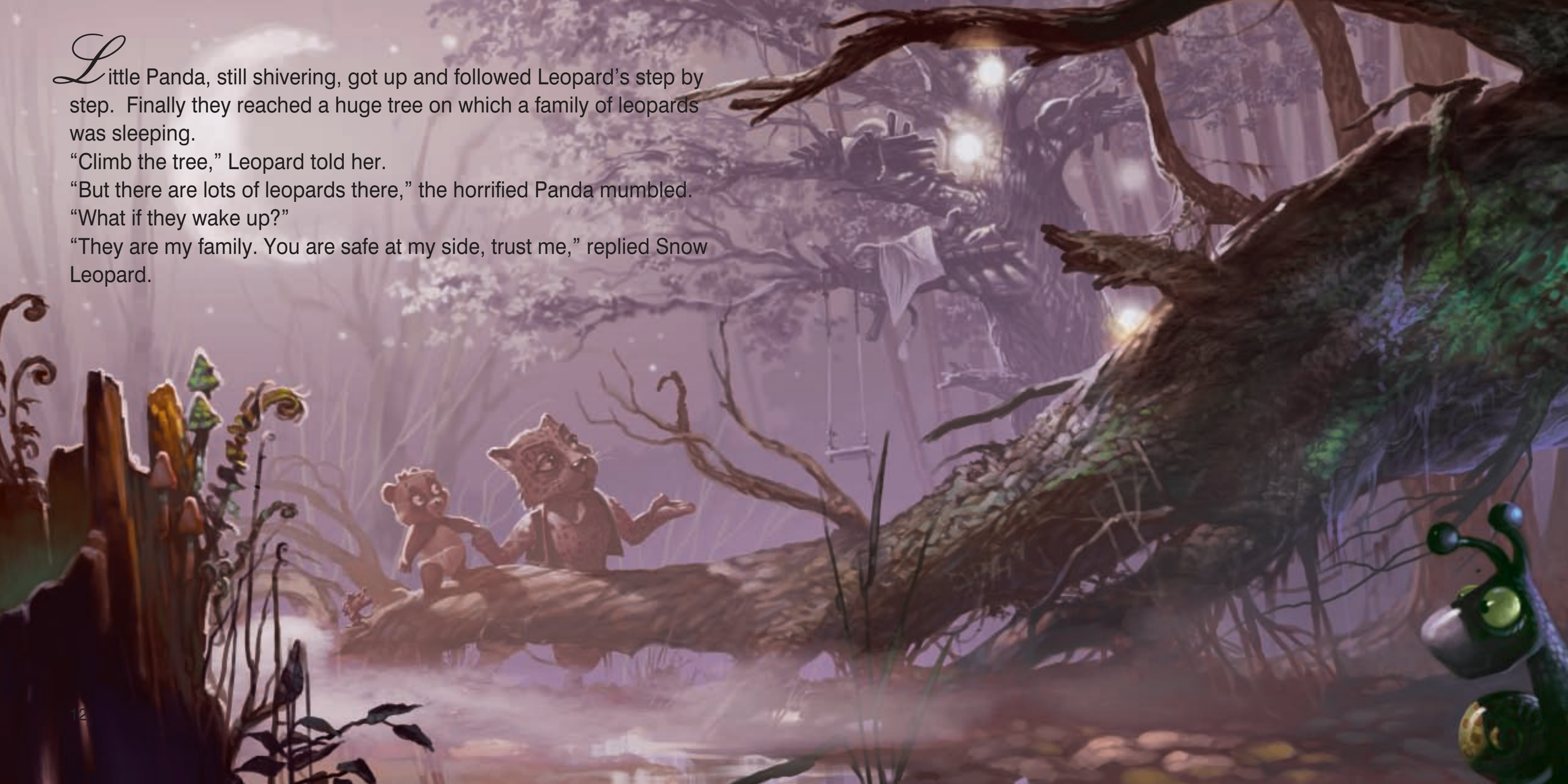
*L*ittle Panda, still shivering, got up and followed Leopard's step by step. Finally they reached a huge tree on which a family of leopards was sleeping.

"Climb the tree," Leopard told her.

"But there are lots of leopards there," the horrified Panda mumbled.

"What if they wake up?"

"They are my family. You are safe at my side, trust me," replied Snow Leopard.



*L*ittle Panda did not have much choice, so she climbed the tree and fell asleep right away, quite exhausted. Snow Leopard was watching over her, so that nothing bad would happen to her during the night.



*N*ext morning Little Panda was awakened by loud roars:
“Why, this is a panda! A great breakfast!”
“Pandas are not our friends!”
“We don’t help pandas, we eat them!”
“Kiri is right, why are you helping her?”
“Haven’t you ever been helped by someone? Don’t you remember how Great Black Bear saved my life just a few days ago, although I did not deserve his help at all? I was just trying to snatch his little son, the small bear, and got in horrible trouble. But Black Bear forgave me and he helped me get out of the trap. This is true that pandas are not considered our friends, but now she is in trouble and in a great need of help! She is so little and so lost in this forest, where any moment something evil could happen to her! Although you would gladly eat her, remember what Old Lion, the king of animals, taught us a long time ago! He told us to always help those who need our help, even if they are not our friends,” said Snow Leopard.
Then he turned to Little Panda and said, “Come down from the tree, it’s time to go!”
The leopards started poking fun at their brother.
“You chicken!”
“Don’t be such a panda helper!”
“Helper-yelper, panda yelper!”



*W*hen Snow Leopard and Little Panda had walked away far enough from the leopards' lair, she asked:
"Why are you doing this?"

"Haven't you heard? A few days ago Great Black Bear took pity on me and showed me true love. The true love is not dependent on emotions, but on our inner decision to do good to others. Now I have taken pity on you and I've decided to show you the same love I experienced from him," Leopard said.

"What do you mean?" asked Little Panda.

"Listen carefully. A long, long time ago Old Lion, the wise king of animals, said we, animals, should learn to help one another. This is why I want to help you and do good to you, even though you are not a friend of mine and I don't even know you and even though in my personal opinion you don't deserve it at all. You were silly enough to walk away from your family and you should be punished for that. Frankly, I should eat you. Still in my heart, I've made a DECISION to show you the love which Old Lion was talking about and which I myself have experienced from Great Black Bear. It has nothing to do with emotions. My emotions tell me you are a tasty morsel and you would make a nice breakfast. But in spite of those emotions, I've made a DECISION to do good to you."



*T*hank you!" Little Panda said, trembling all over, gratefulness in her big eyes. "Thank you, thank you!"
"Now we have to find your family," Leopard said.
The new day was exceptionally beautiful. The sun was piercing through the bamboo forest, lightening up all the dark corners. Everything looked so different than in the darkness of the night. Little Panda and Snow Leopard were walking side by side, joyful and happy inside.
"I think it must be there!" exclaimed Little Panda all of a sudden, pointing to a rock at the edge of the forest.
"Let us go then," Snow Leopard smiled.



*M*eanwhile Little Panda's parents fell into despair. They had no idea of their little one's whereabouts and feared that something bad could happen to her. Suddenly, far in the distance, Mommy Panda spotted Leopard and her little daughter, walking side by side. "Darling, look, it's our Little Panda," she exclaimed, turning to her husband, tears in her eyes. "With a leopard?" Daddy Panda cried, doubt and fear in his voice. "Our Little Pandy is in a grave danger!"



And then something very strange happened. Leopard stopped and Little Panda broke into a run, sprinting to her parents. “Mommy, Daddy!” she shouted running up to them and falling in their arms. “Mommy, Daddy! It’s so good to be back home!” “Honey, we worried so much! Are you safe and sound?” “Yes, Mommy! This Snow Leopard showed me true love and help! It is only thanks to him that I have survived!”



*L*eopard, I can't thank you enough! It would never occur to me to expect help from you," Daddy Panda said. "I hope we will be friends from now on. I realize it might not sound very impressive, but we are always going to be thankful to you and you can always count on our help, any time you need it."
"Yes, you can always count on us," Mommy Panda affirmed.



*F*rom that day on the Panda family and Snow Leopard were best friends. In time the rest of Leopard family, seeing a great change in Snow Leopard's behavior, realized the meaning of true love and began to act in a similar way toward other animals. The life in bamboo forest changed beyond recognition.



PARENTAL GUIDELINES

During our marriage conferences and meetings with parents we often ask the participants: “What sort of children would you like to raise? What would you want your children to be like when they grown up?” Time and again, among the virtues listed we hear an answer: “We want our child to be able to love.” Still what does it mean? What do we mean by the ability to love? Today’s world identifies love and cherishing with feelings, impulses, excitement. The result of such an understanding of the word love quickly becomes deplorable. Its effects are broken marriages, wounded hearts, mauled psyche; all because of “love” that has ended.

The true lesson on the meaning of the word LOVE can be found in the Bible. The Bible applies the word love neither to desire (Greek *epithymia*, Latin *sexus*, this word is closely connected with uncontrollable physical lust), nor to romantic infatuation combined with erotic fascination (Greek *eros*, Latin *amor*), neither to bonds of friendship (Greek *filia*, Latin *amicita*) nor even to the relations within a family (Greek *storge*). In order to describe the attitude of God, doing good to those who do not deserve this good in any way whatsoever, the Bible applies the word *agape*. In contrast to *epithymia*, *eros*, *filia* or *storge*, words saturated with emotion, *agape* describes an attitude, even a decision, which is detached from feelings. In his Letter to the Romans, Paul the Apostle describes it thus: “But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners” (Romans 5:8 NLT).

From God’s point of view, it was not an impulse. It was a fully conscious decision to save those who turned from His ways, went away from Him and rebelled against Him in their sins. All people deserve only God’s wrath because of their sins, since God is Holy and has nothing in common with sin. As Paul the Apostle put it, “You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil—the commander of the powers in the unseen world. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. By our very nature we were subject to God’s anger, just like everyone else” (Ephesians 2:2-3 NLT).

Still God decided to show us love, making a DECISION to do good to us! It was His own initiative “while we were still sinners”. He Himself came bodily to this world to pay the immense price for our sins. Thus God’s love is an act, an attitude of doing good, and not following impulses, inclinations, likes or dislikes. ATTITUDE OF GOD’S LOVE defines the true love. Let us not be seduced by the world! LOVE is a decision of will, not a feeling! Its idea is to do good to someone regardless of

our feelings and sometimes in spite of our dislike, or even against our malevolence to do harm to someone because of his indifference, for the sake of our convenience, pleasure or thirst for revenge... Once our children understand ATTITUDE OF GOD’S LOVE and learn to imitate it, their lives are not going to get easier, but they will certainly improve. Their relations with peers at kindergarten, school or work will be better, and so will be their marriages and the families they start. The most important thing, however, is that in their lives, they will give glory to Him who has created them. This is the kind of love that spills around, multiplies and changes the world. But for the children to learn that love, they must notice it first in us, their parents. They have to see it working in our marriage and family relations, in the way we treat people around us. So let us use the story of Little Panda as a great basis for a collective afterthought and let us reflect how we can draw from unfathomable riches of God’s kindness and love which the Most High shows to us in Christ.

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR YOU AND YOUR CHILDREN

1. Why did Little Panda lost her way? How does it feel to be lost?

Proverbs 10:17 (NLT): People who accept discipline are on the pathway to life, but those who ignore correction will go astray.

Hebrews 2:1 (NLT): So we must listen very carefully to the truth we have heard, or we may drift away from it.

Proverbs 1:8 (NLT): My child, listen when your father corrects you. Don't neglect your mother's instruction.

Proverbs 13:13 (NLT): People who despise advice are asking for trouble; those who respect a command will succeed.

2. Why did Snow Leopard help Panda?

3. What did Leopard learn from Black Bear?

4. What does it mean "to be guided by emotions"? In what situations are you guided by emotions?

Proverbs 25:28 (NLT): A person without self-control is like a city with broken-down walls.

Proverbs 12:16 (NLT): A fool is quick-tempered, but a wise person stays calm when insulted.

5. What is the idea of an inner decision to do good to someone all about?

John 13:34-35 (NLT): So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.

Matthew 7:12a (NLT): Do to others whatever you would like them to do to you.

6. What would Leopard do if he followed his emotions and natural instincts?

7. In what way did Leopard show Panda the essence of an ATTITUDE OF GOD'S LOVE?

8. What did Panda's parents feel when their little daughter was missing?

9. What emotions did Panda's parents feel on seeing her at the side of Snow Leopard?

10. In what way did Leopard's attitude influence the life of animals in the bamboo forest?

11. Who can you show love to? When and how are you going to do it? What form will your ATTITUDE OF GOD'S LOVE take?